

Examining the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test in Terms of Main Idea Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the achievements of 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum regarding main idea teaching in terms of PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test. In this regard, the overlap of the achievements in 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum in Turkey and the proficiency levels in PISA 2018 Reading Test were examined in the context of main idea teaching. The study used the qualitative research approach. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data gathered from the documents. Considering the aims of this study, first, the reading skills proficiency levels presented in detail in PISA 2018 were discussed considering main idea skills. It was concluded that the skill of “identifying the main idea” was used directly at all levels of reading skills consisting of levels 1c, 1b, 1a, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in PISA 2018, and main idea skills were employed in understanding the text. In addition, Turkey’s performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test was discussed considering the study’s other sub-goals. Accordingly, it was concluded that students who participated in the PISA 2018 test were mostly successful at lower levels (levels 1, 2 and 3). The number of students at low levels was high, while the number of students with these skills decreased significantly at higher levels. The inclusion of main idea teaching in 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum was examined considering the final purpose of the study. In this context, several achievements were observed for the development of learning skills such as guessing the subject, determining the subject, determining the auxiliary ideas, determining the main idea, summarizing the subject and determining the title. However, the achievements of main idea in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum did not follow the order required in the reading comprehension process. In addition, the achievements of auxiliary ideas, which form the basis for determining the main idea of a text, were only available at the 7th and 8th grade levels, and any skills related to auxiliary ideas were not included at other grade levels. In this context, the main idea teaching should be handled in a detailed and systematic way in the context of theoretical structure and application processes, and the relevant curricula should be arranged accordingly.

Key words: PISA Reading Skills, Main Idea Teaching, Turkish Language Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Main Idea and Teaching

Historically, teaching students how to identify, understand, discuss, and connect important ideas in texts has received a great deal of attention in the literature on reading skills. In the 1980s, several studies reported successful approaches to the main idea teaching. Contemporary main idea teaching focuses on the reader’s use of various reading strategies to distinguish between important and less important ideas, as they summarize the meanings of texts during and after reading (Jitendra et al., 2001). Some reading authorities consider the basic of all comprehension skills as the ability to determine the main idea. Harris and Sipay (1971, p. 307) stated that without this ability, “the reader cannot see the forest

while examining the trees and gets lost in a pile of details”, and Dechant (1970) stated that all other skills are secondary to the main idea skills (cited in Dishner & Readence, 1977, p. 292).

The concept of main idea and teaching processes to understand the main idea of a text are considered important by several educators in terms of the development of basic language skills and especially comprehension skills. In addition, the quality of the education given in the context of understanding the main idea and whether the process is beneficial or not have been discussed by some education researchers from past to present. The reason for this situation is usually referred to the confusion about the concept of main idea and how to understand the main idea. It is considered as another problem that students’ studies of texts with familiar

types and content are insufficient to contribute to understanding the main ideas of texts of different types and content. Because the contexts in which main idea skills are taught are often different from those in which students should naturally practice these skills (Hare et al., 1989). In particular, a lack of using today's usable texts (such as advertising texts, news reports, e-mails, blogs) sufficiently and properly in language teaching materials causes a mismatch between the available information and the target tasks and reveals the situations where the existing main idea skills are insufficient.

Although it is considered a central skill, there is no consensus on the definition of the main idea skill, neither in practice nor in the literature. However, the main idea is accepted by many researchers as "the essence of a text, its summary, and the basic idea distilled from its generality". According to Onan (2019), the main idea is the idea that the author is trying to prove, that he wants to make the reader accept. It is the author's purpose for writing the text. Kuşdemir and Katrancı (2016) define the main idea as the basic idea that a reading text, a speech text or a film wants to convey to the receiver. According to the researchers, the main idea is the gist that a competent reader can extract from the text. Johnston and Afflerbach (1985) also consider the main idea as a single summary statement with topic and comments. While the researchers consider the main idea as a summary statement, they emphasize that the main idea is generally only a part of the summarization process, which can include a paragraph or a larger unit. On the other hand, Carriedo and Alonso-Tapia (1996) describe "revealing the main idea of a text" as a process of creating a generalized statement covering certain information and then obtaining a summary content by removing unnecessary information from this specific statement. Kaya (2020) defined the main idea as "the thought that summarizes the meaning to be conveyed in a way that includes a concrete judgment".

An ability to successfully identify the main idea of a text is considered a prerequisite for many other reading/study skills. For example, a reader cannot infer the author's intent unless they understand the message the author tries to convey. In this case, the reader is not able to cope with higher levels of understanding until they have mastered what the author narrates. Thus, the efforts to chart, outline, summarize, and several other reading/study skills become meaningless actions without prior knowledge of the main idea skills (Dishner & Readence, 1977).

Many children have trouble finding the main idea of even fairly simple texts. This is unfortunate because comprehension necessarily includes the ability to identify the main points of a communication. This skill is also essential for effective study: one should be able to extract key points from a text in order to rehearse or use other study strategies (Williams, 1986). The ability to understand important information in the text distinguishes good readers from poor ones. There are empirical studies suggesting that the ability to understand the main idea not only distinguishes good readers from poor ones, but is also directly related to more general comprehension criteria. While reading, readers are exposed to large amounts of information, often not all of which can

be remembered. Readers are expected to be able to distinguish important ideas from less important ones so that they can use their memory to effectively retain key information in a text. Therefore, it is generally considered that the ability to identify and remember the main ideas in narratives or the central story elements in narratives is closely related to reading comprehension (Baumann, 1984). As readers progress through a text and transform sentences into propositions, they also engage in the processes of deleting, generalizing, and integrating these propositions. These macro processes provide a macro structure in the text that can be defined as propositions representing information that will adequately summarize the text. Such macro processes are basic cognitive processes. Therefore, they are not limited to understanding the language of spoken or written text in general. These cognitive processes form the basis of all categorization and classification skills. Thus, the ability to understand the main idea of a text is based on basic cognitive classification skills (Williams, 1984). In this regard, the fact that the main idea has a "subjective" structure with "judgment" makes it necessary for the reader to use metacognitive skills (Kaya, 2020). Akyol (2010), on the other hand, states that the main idea can be reached by using higher-order thinking processes (analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Kaya (2020) has visualized the relationship between cognitive skills and identifying the main idea as in Figure 1.

Many of the task-based activities in the classroom can be considered as main idea tasks. It is often the preferred activity for students to perform a variety of tasks, such as writing summaries or titles, or choosing from a series of sentences that indicate the topic. The main idea is often defined using a sentence, but the textual factors that determine whether a particular sentence represents an appropriate main idea for a particular text are often ignored (such as how much information the text contains, what type it is, and how it is structured) (Williams, 1986). In several workbooks, the main idea teaching focuses on testing and practicing with paragraphs followed by lists of questions. Teachers ask questions during or after reading, focusing on finding the right answer through discussion. They pay little attention to thinking and metacognitive processes related to reaching answers

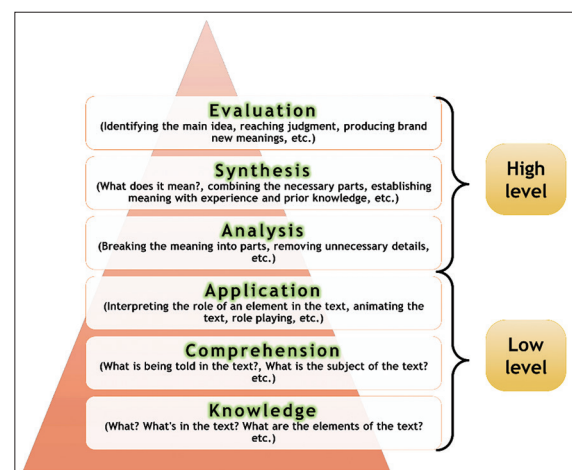


Figure 1. Cognitive Skills and Identifying the Main Idea (Kaya, 2020)

(Jacobowitz, 1990). The main idea teaching should always be based on the purpose of reading. Different readers may identify different ideas when interpreting the text. Although students must be taught to look for main ideas as defined in standardized tests, there is rarely a single absolute main idea for any text. Identifying the most important idea or distinguishing it from the less important ones requires readers to generate new information through their previous knowledge. Readers must identify what they may forget and make judgments about what they should remember and integrate into their schemes. At this point, they need more comprehensive activities compared to stereotypical ones while developing their main idea skills. As a model in the main idea teaching process, the teacher should first employ a strategy during reading in which students can decide which ideas are more important and which are less important. Just like “an elephant that has to bear its significant weight on strong legs,” the teacher should enable students to grasp that the main idea is the foundation for sustaining the supporting details. Students should learn how to prioritize knowledge as a core skill in reading comprehension as well as in information literacy. They should be able to use main ideas to develop their schemas and support their ability to store and recall information (Moreillon, 2007, p. 97-98).

Although there is a general consensus about the importance of understanding the main idea and the difficulties experienced by students in main idea tasks, there are deficiencies at all academic levels regarding teaching the main idea in a systematic way (Sjostrom & Hare, 1984). Understanding the main idea is critical to being a competent reader, therefore teacher-mediated instructions can effectively support understanding the main idea. However, this type of comprehension strategy teaching is not offered in many classrooms (Jitendra et al., 2001). For many years, reading education experts have continued to question the main idea by directing their attention to readers’ confidence and prior knowledge, the number of examples in the text, the placement of topic sentences in the text, and the strategy teaching. Considering the extreme importance of reading comprehension in learning and the central role of main idea in reading comprehension, it is natural to predict that studies of main idea understanding will continue until national reading levels improve. In short, there is a lot to learn and understand about the main idea for reading researchers, educators and readers (Wang, 2009). Considering the importance of main idea teaching in reading comprehension and, accordingly, in the development of language skills, it is essential to include both contents and achievements for main idea skills in language curricula.

There are various international tests, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), to assess students’ reading skills. A special emphasis is placed on “main idea skills” in the cognitive processes and reading levels of PISA, which is perhaps the most popular of these tests. Before mentioning the relationship between PISA Reading Skills Test and main idea skills, it would be useful to give brief information about PISA.

What is PISA?

As in all areas of education, language education provides some data of the related processes. Measuring and evaluating these data with proper tools allows reviewing, restructuring or changing the process. Depending on language education processes, reading skills are developed by schooling. As a result of the programs followed in formal education institutions, students are expected to reach the determined language skill levels. In addition to the assessment programs that countries prepare and implement in line with their own education policies, there are international studies that evaluate students in terms of certain skills. PISA, one of these studies, is an assessment program that aims to measure the students’ daily life use of knowledge and skills they acquire at school. PISA is carried out in every three years by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to evaluate 15-year-old students’ knowledge and skills.

PISA was implemented for the first time in 2000 and tests students’ reading skills, mathematical literacy and science literacy. The PISA-2000 determined reading skills as a predominant field and also evaluated students’ mathematical and science literacy skills. This approach continued in three-year cycles, with an emphasis on one skill area each year. Apart from these subject areas, the PISA also collects data about students’ motivations, opinions of themselves, learning styles, school environments and families. The PISA survey was conducted using 43 countries and economies in 2000, 41 in 2003, 57 in 2006, 65 in 2009 and 2012, and 72 in 2015. All schools with 15-year-old students enrolled in formal education in these countries constituted the population of the study. Schools and students to participate in the PISA survey are determined by the OECD using a random method. A total of 79 countries and economies participated in the PISA 2018 survey, which predominantly emphasized reading skills (Ministry of National Education, 2019).

The Relationship between PISA 2018 Reading Skills Cognitive Processes and Main Idea Skills

The PISA 2018 framework identifies four processes for readers to activate when interacting with a piece of text. Three of these processes have been variously defined in previous PISA frameworks. These are: “reaching information”, “understanding”, “evaluation and reflection”. The fourth process is called “fluent reading” and forms the basis of other cognitive processes. Several tasks to evaluate reading fluency independently from other processes is included in PISA 2018 as a new practice in the PISA Reading Skills Test. The PISA defines “fluent reading” as the ease and efficiency of reading texts for understanding. More specifically, fluent reading includes the ability to read words and texts accurately, automatically and with expression, and then parse, express and process them to grasp the overall meaning. Fluent reading is positively associated with reading comprehension. Students who can read a text easily and efficiently can be successful in using cognitive skills in higher comprehension tasks. The cognitive process of “accessing information”, which was

defined as “reaching and remembering information” in the previous evaluation, is expressed as searching by readers for a particular piece of information without thinking about the rest of the text. The PISA suggests that readers should be able to evaluate the relevance, accuracy and reliability of passages in order to find information as quickly and efficiently as possible. They should be able to adjust their reading speed by skimming irrelevant parts until they come to the paragraphs that need to be read more carefully. They should be able to use structures such as headings to identify irrelevant parts of the text. In this process, it is emphasized that finding information requires different skills during reading on-screen than those used in reading on papers. In digital reading, readers should be able to process new text formats such as search engine results and websites with multiple tabs and various navigation features. The cognitive process of “understanding” is included in previous frameworks as “integration and interpretation”. This skill is often referred to as “reading comprehension” and involves constructing a mental representation of the content of a piece of text or a set of texts. In other words, readers have to grasp the meaning conveyed in the passage. The top-level process identified by the PISA 2018 reading skills framework is “evaluation and reflection”, in which readers must go beyond understanding the actual or implied meaning of a piece of text or a set of texts to assess the quality and validity of its content and format. The cognitive processes and descriptors included in the PISA 2018 reading skills assessment framework are presented in Table 1 (OECD, 2019a, p. 35-36).

As it is expressed in the cognitive strategy of “*scanning and finding information*” in the text, a general understanding of the text is needed in addition to finding the necessary expression or information in this text. Considering the relationship between this situation and main idea skills, the concept of basic meaning comes to the fore. Because determining the main idea of a text is generally considered as the reader’s achievement of basic meaning from the text. This process requires more than just reading or guessing the first and last sentences. Synthesizing common ideas from all the details presented by the author refers to a higher level skill than remembering details. In this process, an analysis and close reading requires the reader to pay attention to how the main idea is formed. As a prerequisite for understanding the text, the reader should be competent in determining the main idea (Lord, 2015).

Understanding a text requires having basic reading skills. Anything that provides clues about what the author(s) tries to convey should be previewed before reading the texts. In this respect, students should consider the author, title, sub-headings, introduction, conclusion and all kinds of visual data of a text before reading it. This preview provides them with a framework for identifying or structuring the main idea. After reading the text/texts, the readers reflect on the main idea and develop their own ideas according to the point(s) that the author(s) wants to emphasize in the text (Hennings, 1991). In the PISA reading skills test, students who need to demonstrate the ability to *search and select relevant texts* should work with more than one piece of text. A preview of the

important titles, author, textual environment, source information and links that are important in this process is directly related to the main idea identification skills.

The ability to *express the literal meaning* in PISA reading skills cognitive process descriptors requires students to be able to interpret given sentences or paragraphs. The interpretation of a text is based on a careful evaluation of the main idea it presents. At this point, the ability to identify ideas in the pieces of an informative text is considered critical for reading comprehension (Sjostrom & Hare, 1984), revealing the relationship between main idea skills and ability to express literal meaning in a text.

Discovering the main ideas of the texts in which the main idea is not clearly expressed is considered as a very difficult cognitive process. In this process, readers need to associate what is mentioned in the text with what they know about the subject, make connections between important details in the text, make inferences beyond the obvious details, and ultimately accept or reject the propositions they produce from the text (Hennings, 1991). Absorbing the main idea of a text is a supporting point for the reader to summarize the text, explain events and ideas, describe the general structure, and consolidate information between texts. The reader who wants to fulfill a certain task should come up with an integrated idea that summarizes important details from a paragraph, piece of text, or the whole text. In this regard, they should be able to determine the common aspects of the sentences in a piece of text, that is, the category and classification that connects the sentences (Lord, 2015). All these cognitive processes form the basis of making inferences on the meaning of a text read, associating information with each other, and identifying different perspectives and contrasts. In this respect, the ability to form the main idea supports the skill of *integrating and generating inferences* expressed in PISA.

Competent readers create some questions in their minds while reading a text, and they constantly interact with the main idea in this process. Following a certain point in the text means keeping the main idea in mind and trying to answer these questions while reading. During reading, the reader reflects through several questions such as “What does the author really try to say?” “What clues in this text point to the author’s purposes?” “Is the main point I envisaged compatible with the idea the author emphasizes?” “Does what I read compel me to change the basic point to be reached?” “Does the author change or expand ideas as the content of the text evolves?” and this process transforms them from a buyer to a producer (Hennings, 1991, p. 348). In short, a reader who can evaluate the text does not only look at the text, but also uses various sources of information in the process of forming the main idea. These sources include the reader’s purpose and background information, as well as the author’s purpose and the layout of the text (Jacobowitz, 1990). This process of determining/structuring the main idea clearly reveals the relationship between the main idea skills and the cognitive process of *assessing quality and credibility*, which requires the reader to be able to determine by whom, when and for what purpose the text was written.

Table 1. PISA 2018 cognitive processes and descriptors of reading skills

| Processes | Descriptor |
|---------------------------|--|
| Locating information | <p><i>Scanning and locating</i>, where readers need to scan only a single piece of text to retrieve a few words, phrases or numerical values. There is little need to comprehend the overall text as the target information appears essentially verbatim in the text.</p> <p><i>Searching for and selecting relevant text</i>, where readers need to deal with several pieces of text. This is particularly relevant in digital reading, where the total amount of text available far exceeds the amount that readers can or need to process. In order to locate the desired information, readers need first to identify the appropriate piece of text, which adds to the complexity of this process. Text organizers, such as headers, source information (e.g. author, medium and date of publication) and links (e.g. search engine result pages) are particularly important for this process.</p> |
| Understanding | <p><i>Representing literal meaning</i>, where readers must paraphrase sentences or short passages so that they match the target information desired by the task.</p> <p><i>Integrating and generating inferences</i>, where readers must work with longer passages to establish their overall meaning. They may have to connect information across various passages or texts, and infer how they are connected to each other (e.g. spatially, temporally or causally) and potentially also to the statement in the question. Readers may also have to resolve conflicts between different texts. Constructing an integrated text representation is associated with tasks such as identifying the main idea of a piece of text or a set of texts, summarizing a long passage or giving a title to a piece of text or set of texts. Inter-textual inferences tend to require a high level of proficiency, perhaps because they involve distinct and demanding cognitive processes. This process can be engaged when reading multiple pieces of text or when reading just one, typically longer, piece of text.</p> |
| Evaluating and Reflecting | <p><i>Assessing quality and credibility</i>, where readers judge whether the content is valid, accurate and/or unbiased. This may also involve identifying the source of the information and thereby identifying the author's intentions and judging whether the author is competent and well-informed. Assessing quality and credibility, in other words, requires the reader to combine the content of what is said in the text with peripheral cues, such as who wrote it, when, for what purpose and so forth.</p> <p><i>Reflecting on content and form</i>, where readers evaluate the quality and the style of the text. They need to assess whether the content and form adequately express the author's purpose and point of view. In order to do so, they may need to draw from their real-world knowledge and experience in order to be able to compare different perspectives.</p> <p><i>Corroborating and handling conflict</i>, where readers need to compare information across texts, recognize contradictions between pieces of text and then decide how best to manage such contradictions. They can do so by evaluating the credibility of the sources, and the logic and soundness of their claims. This cognitive process is commonly used when examining multiple-source texts.</p> |

Complete reading refers to a reading that is performed by carefully following the content of a text step by step and using various reading strategies (Çifci, 2013). Complete reading aims to reach detailed information, combine thoughts, take examples from the text read, and make comments (Özbay, 2007, p. 15). Readers with complete reading begin reading by aiming at a certain point. First, they examine the text and determine the subject. They use the information they have gathered to predict what the author will mention about the topic (what the main point is). They use the main idea they predicted to interpret the details and change their predictions as they read. Finally, they think about the subject in relation to what they know and believe, conduct a personal search for meaning and finish reading both by understanding what the author wants to say and by evaluating the point of view created by the author according to his/her purpose (Hennings, 1991). In this process, the main idea has a key role in understanding, interpreting and evaluating the text. In this respect, the cognitive skill of *reflecting on content and form* expressed in PISA can be used with the help of main idea skills.

Most informative texts are created using certain key points underlying the text. It does not seem possible for the

reader to grasp these points without understanding the main idea of the text. Since many aspects of comprehension are based on main idea skills, it is not possible for the reader to make appropriate inferences or make evaluations about the text without understanding the clearly expressed propositions. It is not realistic to expect readers who read more than one text to be able to compare the perspectives of the authors and the ideas they put forward without understanding the main points emphasized by each author (Williams, 1984). Natural texts generally tend to dominate a particular content area, including comparisons/contrasts, causes/effects and sequential textual structures. For example, comparison/contrast texts often contain a mixture of two pieces of text. The reader should establish not only the main idea of each piece of text, but also the relationship between these two pieces. For cause/effect texts, the reader should pay attention to the logically connected chain of events and infer or recognize the main idea from these events. As a result, the ideas presented in such texts may be more difficult to integrate or generalize (Hare et al., 1989). *Detecting and handling conflicts*, one of the cognitive processes of PISA reading skills, is frequently used to examine multi-source texts. The realization of this cognitive process seems to be directly related to the use of

skills such as comparing, detecting conflicts, integrating and generalizing, which are set out from multiple texts in line with the main idea skills.

Problem Status

Understanding the main idea of a text is considered the essence of reading comprehension, as stated before. It is the most frequently mentioned comprehension task in the field of reading skills in language teaching programs and in the resources and books on reading education/teaching. Studies suggest that the ability to construct main idea (when not explicitly stated in the text) is a skill that develops relatively late in most readers and is even lacking in many readers. Accordingly, few readers demonstrate “expertise” in constructing the main idea, and there is limited information about how competent readers gain this expertise (Johnston & Afflerbach, 1985).

Jolly (1974) examined the source of problems regarding the main idea teaching and suggested the following views: 1) The prerequisite skills for the effective development of main idea skills are not included in the resources used in reading education and are not considered in the course environment. When they are included in resources and lectures, they are rarely taught in any particular order. 2) The skills of determining or structuring the main idea are neglected in the field of reading education, and are mostly preferred in composition studies as a summarization strategy. 3) Textbook exercises, which claim to realize the main idea teaching, test these skills of students instead of developing their skills gradually (cited in Dishner & Readence, 1977, p. 293). At this point, similar situations are encountered when the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and the textbooks prepared based on this curriculum are examined. The following expressions are mostly encountered in activities for understanding the text in Turkish textbooks: “What is the main idea of the text?”, “Write the main idea of the text.”, “Write the subject of the text.”, “Summarize the text.”, “What is the idea to be emphasized in the text?” or “Which is one of the supporting ideas of the text?”. These activities are designed to test main idea skills rather than develop them.

Turkey has been participating in PISA surveys since 2003. The PISA 2003 reading skills average score of students who participated in the survey from Turkey was 441, and their average score increased to 475 in PISA 2012, decreased to 428 in PISA 2015, and then increased to 466 in PISA 2018. According to the evaluation results of PISA reading skills, the average scores of countries and economies vary between 340 and 555. Turkey’s average score on reading skills (466) is higher than the mean score of all countries and economies (453). Thanks to this performance, Turkey ranks 40th among 79 countries and 31st among 37 OECD countries in terms of reading skills (Ministry of National Education, 2019). Although this rise is considered a success for Turkey, its reading skills average score have not reached the desired level.

Considering the relationship between PISA 2018 reading cognitive processes and “main idea skills”, main idea skills have a significant weight in PISA reading skills levels. In this context, the lack of sufficient content related to main

idea teaching in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum is considered a problem for Turkish language education. Accordingly, the fact that the activities in Turkish textbooks do not contribute enough to developing main idea skills is considered one of the reasons why the students cannot reach the expected level in the PISA Reading Skills Test. The fact that the achievements aimed at developing main idea skills in the Turkish Language Curriculum overlap with PISA reading skills will help Turkey to be more successful in the PISA Reading Skills Test. From this point of view, it is important to examine the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test in the context of main idea skills, which is considered important for contributing to the field of reading education.

Considering the studies of main idea skills in Turkey, they have mostly examined the skills and competencies for finding the main idea (Başaran, 2006; Coşkun & Çetin, 2016; Çetinkaya et al., 2013; Eser, 2017; Kanık-Uysal & Gültekin-Pala, 2022) and the effectiveness of various strategies, methods and text types on main idea finding skills (Doğan, 2015; Erdem & Kırmık, 2017; Özkara & Şahin, 2013). In addition, some studies have examined the relationship between main idea finding skills (Güneş, 2022; Ülper, 2011), reading comprehension and reading anxiety (Kuşdemir & Katrancı, 2016), the effectiveness of teaching main idea identifying skills (İlter, 2018), the ability to form main idea in writing processes (Kaghado, 2018); the effects of main idea, auxiliary ideas and subject concepts on reading processes (Baki, 2022), and have analyzed systematically the studies on main idea teaching in Turkey (Kaya & Ulutaş, 2022). It is considered an important development to conduct both practical and theoretical studies on main idea skills and teaching. However, there is no study about the achievements regarding main idea skills in the Turkish Language Curriculum. In addition, there are no studies on the relationship between PISA Reading Skills Test and main idea skills. From this point of view, the lack of such studies is a shortcoming for the relevant field, because the main idea skills are related to PISA reading skills and are considered one of the basic conditions of being successful in PISA.

Aim

This study aimed to examine the achievements of 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum regarding main idea teaching in terms of PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test and sought for answers to the following questions in this regard:

1. Which skills are included in PISA 2018 Reading Skills Proficiency Levels in relation to main idea skills?
2. How is Turkey’s performance in PISA 2018 Reading Skills by proficiency levels?
3. How do the achievements of main idea skills in 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum overlap with the proficiency levels in PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test?

METHOD

This section presents research model and method, data sources, data collection process, data analysis process, and credibility, verifiability, transferability and reliability studies.

Research Model

This study used the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research methods are used to reveal a specific situation, describe and analyze its natural environment in depth and make a detailed evaluation by obtaining data (Merriam, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Document analysis examines and interprets data to make sense of it, create an understanding about the subject and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Document analysis is a systematic method used to examine and evaluate all printed or digital/electronic documents (Kıral, 2020). This study examined the overlapping of the achievements of main idea skills in 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and the proficiency levels in PISA 2018 Reading Test, considering the context of main idea teaching. In this regard, qualitative research method based on document analysis was deemed appropriate.

Data Sources and Data Collection Process

The data sources of this study were the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and the PISA 2018 Reading Test. Since both documents are publicly and freely available on the Internet, these documents were obtained from the web pages of the relevant institutions.

The documents were examined separately by the researchers in the context of main idea teaching. The possible achievements regarding the main idea teaching in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum were determined by the joint decision of the researchers. Then, the relevant achievements were matched separately by the researchers according to the proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test. The researchers reached a consensus by comparing their studies. Then, both the data on the achievements and their matches of PISA proficiency levels were submitted to two academicians who are experts in the field of Turkish Education. The experts conducted their studies independently of each other, and relevant adjustments were made by the researchers according to their feedback.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by descriptive analysis method. In descriptive analysis, data are interpreted according to pre-determined conceptual frameworks or themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, descriptive analysis was deemed appropriate since the achievements associated with main idea teaching in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum were classified according to the proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test. Therefore, the proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test provided a theoretical framework for our descriptive analysis. In the analysis, the field experts were consulted to determine the possible achievements regarding the main idea teaching, to classify these achievements into the proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test, and to interpret the results. The field experts independently analyzed the data and provided their feedback, and then the data analysis process was finalized by the researchers considering their feedback.

Credibility, Transferability and Ethics

In this study, the researchers have taken some precautions to ensure credibility, transferability and ethical control, which are summarized in Table 2.

First of all, the relevant documents were accessed on the official websites and explained according to the purpose of the study. The proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test were examined. Then, the researchers independently determined the ones that could be associated with the main idea teaching among the achievements in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum. Afterwards, the researchers came together and reached a consensus on the relevant achievements. Then, they matched the relevant achievements with the proficiency levels in the PISA 2018 Reading Test. Both procedures were presented to two academicians who were experts in the field of Turkish Education, and their feedbacks were received. In the data analysis process, the achievements matched with the PISA proficiency levels were given directly in the study. In addition, the research process was explained in detail.

For ethical considerations, secondary sources were ignored by accessing the relevant documents through the official websites of the institutions. Since these documents were open access and publicly available, there was no need to get permission from any institution.

RESULTS

Results Regarding the Relationship between PISA 2018 Reading Proficiency Levels and Main Idea Skills

The relationship between the cognitive skills for the Reading Skills Proficiency Levels in PISA 2018 and the main idea skills were revealed considering the purposes of the study. In this context, both the PISA 2018 proficiency levels and the reading skills reflecting these levels were presented in Table 3 (OECD, 2019a, pp. 87-88).

As seen in Table 3, several skills such as “being able to comprehend sentences or short passages, to evaluate the literal meanings of simple sentences, to interpret the literal meaning by making connections between information, to scan and interpret information, to comprehend the literal meaning of sentences and short paragraphs and to make connections between the information in the text or between this information and their own information” at the levels 1c, 1b and 1a are related to the PISA cognitive skills of *accessing and retrieving information within a piece of text*, *searching for and selecting relevant text*, and *acquiring a representation of the literal meaning of a text*. These skills

Table 2. Credibility and transferability studies of the research

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Credibility and Verifiability | Describing data collection tool and process Describing data sources Getting expert opinion Explaining the data analysis process |
| Reliability and Transferability | Presenting results in their natural form Checking consistency between data Control of data by experts |

Table 3. PISA 2018 reading proficiency levels

| Level | Characteristics of Tasks (shortened) |
|-------|--|
| 6 | Readers at Level 6 can comprehend lengthy and abstract texts in which the information of interest is deeply embedded and only indirectly related to the task. They can compare, contrast and integrate information representing multiple and potentially conflicting perspectives, using multiple criteria and generating inferences across distant pieces of information to determine how the information may be used. They can compare and contrast information across texts, identifying and resolving inter-textual discrepancies and conflicts through inferences about the sources of information. |
| 5 | Readers at Level 5 can comprehend lengthy texts, inferring which information in the text is relevant even though the information of interest may be easily overlooked. They can perform causal or other forms of reasoning based on a deep understanding of extended pieces of text. They can also answer indirect questions by inferring the relationship between the question and one or several pieces of information distributed within or across multiple texts and sources. Reflective tasks require the production or critical evaluation of hypotheses, drawing on specific information. Readers can establish distinctions between content and purpose, and between fact and opinion as applied to complex or abstract statements. They can assess neutrality and bias based on explicit or implicit cues pertaining to both the content and/or source of the information. |
| 4 | At Level 4, readers can comprehend extended passages in single or multiple-text settings. They interpret the meaning of nuances of language in a section of text by taking into account the text as a whole. In other interpretative tasks, students demonstrate understanding and application of ad hoc categories. They can compare perspectives and draw inferences based on multiple sources. Readers can search, locate and integrate several pieces of embedded information in the presence of plausible distractors. They can generate inferences based on the task statement in order to assess the relevance of target information. They can reflect on the strategies that authors use to convey their points, based on salient features of texts (e.g., titles and illustrations). They can compare and contrast claims explicitly made in several texts and assess the reliability of a source based on salient criteria. |
| 3 | Readers at Level 3 can represent the literal meaning of single or multiple texts in the absence of explicit content or organizational clues. Readers can integrate content and generate both basic and more advanced inferences. They can also integrate several parts of a piece of text in order to identify the main idea, understand a relationship or construe the meaning of a word or phrase when the required information is featured on a single page. They can search for information based on indirect prompts, and locate target information that is not in a prominent position and/or is in the presence of distractors. In some cases, readers at this level recognize the relationship between several pieces of information based on multiple criteria. Level 3 readers can reflect on a piece of text or a small set of texts, and compare and contrast several authors' viewpoints based on explicit information. |
| 2 | Readers at Level 2 can identify the main idea in a piece of text of moderate length. They can understand relationships or construe meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent by producing basic inferences, and/or when the text (s) include some distracting information. They can select and access a page in a set based on explicit though sometimes complex prompts, and locate one or more pieces of information based on multiple, partly implicit criteria. Readers at Level 2 can, when explicitly cued, reflect on the overall purpose, or on the purpose of specific details, in texts of moderate length. They can reflect on simple visual or typographical features. They can compare claims and evaluate the reasons supporting them based on short, explicit statements. Tasks at Level 2 may involve comparisons or contrasts based on a single feature in the text. Typical reflective tasks at this level require readers to make a comparison or several connections between the text and outside knowledge by drawing on personal experience and attitudes. |
| 1a | Readers at Level 1a can understand the literal meaning of sentences or short passages. Readers at this level can also recognize the main theme or the author's purpose in a piece of text about a familiar topic, and make a simple connection between several adjacent pieces of information, or between the given information and their own prior knowledge. They can select a relevant page from a small set based on simple prompts, and locate one or more independent pieces of information within short texts. Level 1a readers can reflect on the overall purpose and on the relative importance of information (e.g. the main idea vs. non-essential detail) in simple texts containing explicit cues. |
| 1b | Readers at Level 1b can evaluate the literal meaning of simple sentences. They can also interpret the literal meaning of texts by making simple connections between adjacent pieces of information in the question and/or the text. Readers at this level can scan for and locate a single piece of prominently placed, explicitly stated information in a single sentence, a short text or a simple list. |
| 1c | Readers at Level 1c can understand and affirm the meaning of short, syntactically simple sentences on a literal level, and read for a clear and simple purpose within a limited amount of time. Tasks at this level involve simple vocabulary and syntactic structures. |

are demonstrated based on the scanning, interpretation and reflection of the text or text pieces. At this point, the strategies used to determine the main idea of a text coincide with the processes that took place. In addition, the expression of "they can understand the main idea and the author's purpose of texts written on familiar topics" at the 1c level directly refers to the main idea skills. In this respect, using the main idea skills to realize 1c, 1b and 1a skills in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills is considered a basic strategy.

The skills of "being able to understand and make sense of the relationships in a particular part of the text when the

information is implicit, to find the page related to the subject in the text, to reflect on the general purpose and specific details of medium-length texts, and to compare claims and identify the ideas that support them" at the 2nd level of PISA Reading Skills are also directly related to the main idea skills. Here, there is a relationship between the main idea skills and the main idea configuration, which is used when the main idea cannot be easily deduced from the information in the text. In the main idea construction process, the stages of examining the text in depth, inferring the meaning, forming propositions and creating a basic idea by comparing

or combining them include cognitive skills expressed at the relevant PISA level.

Considering cognitive processes, the reading skills of “being able to infer the general meaning of the text from the tacit information and make inferences from the information in the text, to bring together information from different parts of the text, to understand the relationships between information, to reflect on one or more texts, and to compare the perspectives of different authors” at the 3rd level of PISA Reading Skills reflect the processes of *acquiring a representation of the literal meaning of a text, searching for and selecting relevant text, and integrating and generating inferences*. A reader who has absorbed the main idea of a text employs high-level cognitive skills in the reading process and reaches inferences based on the in-depth thinking process. At this level, it is natural to expect the reader to be able to extract the point of view in the text or texts and to compare different points of view, if any. This shows that beyond determining the main idea of the text, considering the main idea as the basis of the text and the strategies followed in the process of constructing this basis are at the center of the skills expected to be realized at PISA 3rd level.

At the 4th level of PISA Reading Skills, the first skills that students should exhibit are “understanding long paragraphs in texts” and “interpreting the nuances of language in a section of text by taking into account the text as a whole”. Here, the connection between the supporting ideas and the main ideas of the texts becomes important. A text usually has several supporting ideas, but there is only one main idea that governs the entire text and is supported by the supporting ideas in the text. The main idea is created through a hierarchically structured text. Therefore, knowledge of the textual structure helps the reader to identify the main idea. Using and analyzing the textual structure to construct the main idea is a highly recommended reading strategy to make it easier for the reader to separate “the wheat from the chaff” (Wang, 2009, p. 36). The main idea structuring process carried out through this strategy includes the interpretation of all paragraphs in the text separately, taking into account their linguistic differences, and the interpretation of the text as a whole. The reading skills of “being able to compare different points of view and draw conclusions, to search for information, to access and integrate information, to make inferences for assessing suitability, to identify the expressions used by the authors to convey their ideas” at the 4th level of PISA Reading Skills refer to the high-level cognitive skills that are also used in the main idea construction process. These skills are compatible with the strategies used in the process of structuring the main idea of the texts with implicit information.

One of the areas of study that provides very valuable information about main idea structuring is the study of summarization strategies. The data obtained from the studies in this field reveal the strategies used by the reader to understand the text. In this context, according to the text comprehension model, a good reader transforms the text into an actually comprehended resource through a series of micro and macro processes. Afflerbach (1990) identified four strategies used

in constructing main idea statements: “draft and revision, topic/comment, initial hypothesis, listing” (1990, p. 33-34). According to the draft and revision strategy used in forming the main idea, if the reader decides that the main idea is not satisfactory, they accept it as a first draft and start to review it. In the topic/comment strategy, the reader can only identify the topic after reading the text and then continues to characterize it with a comment. The initial hypothesis strategy is used when the reader can generate a reasonably accurate initial hypothesis of the main idea based on the title, initial sentence, or a summary of the text. By using this strategy, the reader continues to read the text, monitoring the validity of the hypothesis and modifying it as appropriate. The reader also uses the listing strategy by searching for important or related words, concepts or ideas in the text or in their memory to construct the main idea (Johnston & Afflerbach, 1985). According to the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test, a student at level 5 “can grasp the tacit information in long texts, delve into and understand comprehensive texts using a variety of reasoning methods, answer questions by establishing a relationship between the information in the text or sources and the questions, establish hypotheses based on certain information or make evaluations about existing hypotheses, and evaluate the objectivity of source or content of the information based on various clues.” At this point, the reader employs the cognitive strategies used in the main idea construction process. The macro and micro processes carried out depending on the text comprehension model overlap with the skills expected to be exhibited at this level, forming the basis for the student’s understanding and evaluation of the text.

At the 6th level of the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test, students are expected “to be able to understand long and abstract texts where information is implicit, to compare and integrate the overlapping and non-overlapping aspects of the information in the texts, to think deeply about the text and its source and to identify the inconsistencies between the texts”. Main idea skills are the basis of making appropriate inferences from the text, working effectively and reading critically (Jitendra et al., 1998). Complex comprehension activities such as generating key ideas, distinguishing those key ideas from less relevant details and summarizing key ideas are dynamic processes that require readers to think, monitor, and organize as they read. Main idea formation refers to a type of reading in which the reader explores the text based on the ideas in the text and gives constructive responses (Jitendra et al., 2001). In this context, it is possible to suggest that the main idea skills, which require a critical approach to a text, reflect on the text, distinguish, compare and evaluate, overlap with the skills at the highest level in terms of reading skills in PISA.

Results Regarding Turkey’s Performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test

Turkey’s performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test was emphasized considering the purposes of the study. In this context, Turkey’s performance data by proficiency levels is presented in the Table 4 (MoE, 2019a, p. 42).

As seen in Table 4, the ratio of students in PISA Reading Skills Level 1 (1c, 1b, 1a) was 26.1, suggesting that approximately 1/4 of the Turkish students who took the test were able to display the skills of scanning and finding the information in the texts in PISA, searching and selecting the relevant texts, and expressing the real meaning. In addition, more than half of the students (57.1%) were at the 2nd and 3rd levels. When the PISA questions (PISA 2018 Released Field Trial and Main Survey New Reading Items) shared with the public by the OECD (2019b) were examined, these questions measured the students' skills of "thinking about content and form, combining information in more than one text and making inferences, evaluating quality and reliability" at the 2nd level and their skills of "expressing the literal meaning and thinking about the content and form" at the 3rd level. Accordingly, Turkish students who took PISA test were considered sufficient to demonstrate these skills in relatively easy texts.

According to Table 4, Turkey experienced a decrease in reading proficiency starting from the 3rd level. This decline was evident at level 4. At this level, students were asked questions to demonstrate their skills of "scanning and finding information in the text" and "detecting and handling conflicts". At this point, it is noteworthy that the ability to detect and handle conflicts, which are not seen at lower levels, is a new skill for students. In addition, the questions were created from multiple texts instead of a single text (OECD, 2019b). In this case, it is considered that students do not have enough skills to comprehend the ideas of different text parts used in the main idea construction process and to construct a general main idea by combining these ideas.

The rate of students who show proficiency at the 5th and 6th levels of the PISA Reading Skills Test was quite low. There were only 0.2% students at the 6th level. There were almost no Turkish students who exhibited their PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test level 6 skills. The total ratio of these two levels for Turkey was 3.3%. There are several parameters that make the reading skills expected to be exhibited at the 5th and 6th levels more difficult than the lower levels. At this point, examining the Table 5 (OECD, 2019a, p. 35), which includes the cognitive process and text source distributions, will contribute to understanding the text-question relationship at higher levels of PISA.

According to Table 5, 35% of the tasks in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test were conducted through multi-source texts. These text resources, which are frequently used at levels 5 and 6 by including PISA level 4, make the questions at these levels more difficult. In this case, handling the relevant questions requires employing high-level cognitive skills. According to the table, the task of "integrating and generating inferences" in both text sources provides lower-level skills through single-source texts, while it indicates higher-level skills in questions with multi-source texts. In addition, the cognitive processes of "assessing quality and credibility and Reflecting on content and form", which refer to the high-level tasks, indicate the questions created through single-source texts and were included in PISA 2018 at a rate of 20%. The cognitive process of "detecting and handling conflict" had a 10% rate in PISA 2018. These tasks, which had a total weight of 30% in PISA 2018, cover the cognitive processes of "evaluating and reflecting" and occupy a wide place in the PISA General Competency Test (Annex C: Released test units) (OECD, 2020). In this context, it is revealed that cognitive processes can be easier or more difficult according to the text source. This explains the small number of Turkish students taking part in the 5th and 6th levels of the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test. The ability to use the cognitive strategies for main idea construction is an important parameter for students to be able to achieve the tasks at PISA higher levels.

Results Regarding the Overlapping of the Achievements Related to the Main Idea in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum with the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test Proficiency Levels

The reading achievements related to the main idea/main emotion in the Turkish Language Curriculum were emphasized considering the aims of the study. Table 6 presents the relevant achievements and grade levels.

As seen in Table 6, the main idea skills needed to make sense of a text are included in the Turkish Language Curriculum. Considering the reading achievements, there is no information about the text type or structure in relation to the main idea teaching. The act of determining the main idea of a text comes to the fore. This action differs by texts

Table 4. Turkey's Performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test by proficiency levels

| Below Level 1c | Level 1c | Level 1b | Level 1a | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6 |
|----------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 0.0 | 0.7 | 6.3 | 19.1 | 30.2 | 26.9 | 13.5 | 3.1 | 0.2 |

Table 5. Approximate distribution of tasks, by process and text source

| | 2018 Framework | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| | Single-source text 65% | Multiple-source text 35% |
| Locating information 25% | Scanning and locating 15% | Searching for and selecting relevant text 10% |
| Understanding 45% | Representing literal meaning 15% | Integrating and generating inferences 15% |
| | Integrating and generating inferences 15% | |
| Evaluating and reflecting 30% | Assessing quality and credibility, and Reflecting on content and form 20% | Corroborating and handling conflict 10% |

Table 6. Reading achievements related to the main idea/main emotion in the Turkish language curriculum

| Achievement | Grade Level |
|---|---------------------|
| Guesses the subject of the text to be read based on the images. | 2, 3 |
| Guesses the subject of the text to be read based on the images and the title. | 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Determines the subject of the text read. | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Determines appropriate title/headings for the content of the text read. | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Determines the main idea/main emotion of the text. | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Summarize the text read. | 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Identifies auxiliary ideas in the text. | 7, 8 |

where the text source is singular or multiple, informative or narrative, the information is explicit or implicit, so main idea skills have an aspect from simple to complex. In this context, Dishner and Readence (1977) list the process of defining the main idea of a text as follows:

1. Identifying the keywords or subject of a sentence.
2. Identifying the keywords or topic of a paragraph.
3. Identifying the topic sentence of a paragraph.
4. Recognizing the clearly stated idea of a paragraph.
5. Remembering a clearly expressed main idea.
6. Getting the implicit idea of a paragraph.
7. Recognizing the relationships between ideas in the relevant paragraphs of longer auditions.
8. Making inferences about the main ideas of a general thesis statement or longer selections (1977, p. 293-294).

In the reading skills in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum, there are achievements of guessing the subject of the text, determining the title, determining the auxiliary ideas and the main idea, and summarizing these ideas, but there are no instructions on how to operate this process. Considering the “1c, 1b and 1a” levels of PISA 2018 Reading Skills, students are expected to be able to comprehend the meanings of sentences, text parts and paragraphs in simple and familiar texts. Students are also required to make connections between pieces of text, to blend the given information with their own knowledge, and to think deeply about the main idea of the text. To exhibit these skills, it is necessary to follow a process from sentence to paragraph, from paragraph to auxiliary ideas and from auxiliary ideas to the main idea. However, the order of the achievements related to this process in the Turkish Language Curriculum differs by grade levels. Although the achievement of “determines appropriate title/headings for the content of the text read” requires absorbing the main idea after the reading, it comes before the achievement of “determining the main idea/main emotion of the text”. In addition, while the importance of “auxiliary ideas” in displaying competencies such as comprehension and interpretation of the text, understanding the main idea and the purpose of the author at the “1c, 1b, 1a” levels of PISA 2018 Reading Skills is obvious, the achievement of “identifying auxiliary ideas in the text” in

the Turkish Language Curriculum only takes place for the 7th and 8th grade levels. This is considered as a deficiency for the Turkish Language Curriculum.

The skills of “identifying the main idea of medium-length texts”, “finding the relevant page within a few pages of text”, “reflecting on the general purpose and specific details of medium-length texts with clearly presented information” and “identifying the thoughts that support the claims” in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills 2 level are directly associated with the achievements of “determining the subject of the text he reads” and “determining the main idea/main emotion of the text” in the Turkish Language Curriculum. At this point, the skills to be exhibited by students are not high-level skills for the PISA Reading Skills level 2 and the “determining” actions in the Turkish Language Curriculum are sufficient to demonstrate these skills.

The skills of “expressing implicit meaning, gathering information in pieces of text or paragraphs, reflecting on one or more texts, and comparing the perspectives of different authors” appear at the PISA 2018 Reading Skills 3rd level. The achievements of “determining the subject, auxiliary ideas and main idea of the text” in the Turkish Language Curriculum should be used to demonstrate these skills. In this context, the PISA level 3 skills are related to the main idea achievements of the Turkish Language Curriculum. However, as stated before, the absence of instructions for the number, structure, type and length of the texts in the learning outcomes is far from revealing how to develop these skills.

The skills of reading and interpreting the text as a whole, comparing different viewpoints and drawing conclusions, accessing and combining information, and assessing the relevance of information and making inferences refer to the core of the skills that students should exhibit at PISA Reading Skills Level 4. The relationship of these skills with main idea skills has been mentioned before. In this context, displaying skills at this level requires the skill of “summarizing” rather than the “guessing and determining” actions that are weighted in the Turkish Language Curriculum. This skill is expressed as “summarizing the text read” in the Turkish Language Curriculum and requires the use of various strategies. High-level cognitive skills such as interpretation, evaluation, deduction and inference at the PISA level 4 represent the advanced stages of main idea construction. From this point of view, the achievement of “summarizing the text read” can provide many skills at the 4th level of PISA Reading Skills, but summarization strategies should be included in the Turkish Language Curriculum to have this achievement.

Comprehension of long, comprehensive, abstract, multi-source texts and using the information in these texts with various methods come to the fore at the 5th and 6th levels of PISA Reading Skills. The ability to establish hypotheses and make evaluations about them comes to the fore at the 5th level and it is expected to identify, compare and find solutions to conflicts between texts at the 6th level. Displaying all these high-level cognitive skills are considered to be associated with structuring the main idea rather than determining it. In this context, the achievements “guessing the subject,

identifying the auxiliary ideas, determining the main idea” in the Turkish Language Curriculum have a limited effect on displaying the skills at the higher levels of PISA Reading Skills. In addition, the achievements to absorb the main idea such as “determining appropriate title/headings for the content of the text read” are beneficial for the realization of PISA 5th and 6th level reading skills. However, as the subjects such as text type, text source, text structure and meaning density in the text, which should be considered in determining the main idea, are ignored in the Turkish Language Curriculum; it is considered that related achievements will have a limited effect on student achievement. This is confirmed by the fact that there are very few students from Turkey in the 5th and 6th levels of the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study comparatively examined the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum and the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test in the context of main idea teaching. Considering the aims of the study, first, the reading skills proficiency levels presented in detail in PISA 2018 were discussed in terms of main idea skills. In PISA 2018, reading skills consist of levels 1c, 1b, 1a, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Based on the results, it was concluded that the skill of “identifying the main idea” was used directly at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd levels of PISA reading skills, and the main idea skills were used in understanding the text. At this point, it should be emphasized that the ability to structure the main idea while reading a text is important for many reasons. A main idea statement produced by the reader indicates that they actively construct the meaning during reading. The process of discovering the main idea involves a variety of strategies, including identifying and summarizing the key ideas. The ability to select or construct the main idea also affects recalling later and can increase students’ production skills (Truscott, 1997). In this context, expressions such as understanding the text, thinking deeply about the text, criticizing, comparing, interpreting, and making inferences at the 4th, 5th and 6th levels of reading skills, which need high-level cognitive processes, are considered to be compatible with the strategies used in the “main idea construction” processes.

Considering the results regarding Turkey’s performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test, the students who participated in the test were mostly successful at lower levels (levels 1, 2 and 3). The main idea skills take place from the lowest to highest levels in PISA Reading Skills Proficiency Levels. In addition, the number of students at low levels was high, but the number of students with these skills decreased significantly at high levels. This is mainly because of the inadequacy of methods in the main idea teaching processes. In support of this, Baki (2022) has found that pre-service teachers do not teach determining the main idea in a planned and systematic way. In this context, while students do not have problems in understanding the texts in which the main idea is clear, they fail in cases where the main idea is implicit or when the main idea needs to be structured based on a large number of texts. Parallel to this result, Başaran (2006) asked pre-service teachers to find the main idea of a

text in the 4th grade primary school textbook, but more than half of them could not find the main idea or expressed it correctly. Likewise, Çelik and Bulut (2010), Pilten (2007), Eser (2017) and Baki (2022) concluded that the main idea skills of teacher candidates were not sufficient. The fact that 35% of the tasks in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test were carried out through multi-source texts and that the processes of “integrating and generating inferences, assessing quality and credibility, reflecting on content and form, detecting and handling conflict” among the cognitive processes needed in the study had a total weight of 60% in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test explains this result.

Regarding the main idea teaching in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum, there are achievements for developing several skills such as guessing the subject, determining the subject, determining the auxiliary ideas, determining the main idea, summarizing the subject and determining the title. In the curriculum, there is no explanation about the types of texts in which these achievements will take place. However, many dimensions have been determined to classify texts within the framework of PISA 2018 reading skills assessment. The texts were handled as the presentation and limitation of the text, and the dimensions as the source, interaction type, shape of the text and type of the text. Accordingly, six types of text were defined as description, story, explanation, discussion, instruction and interaction. The readers who have certain proficiency for reading skills need to relate the information in the texts in order to understand what they read and to solve the given problem. The spread of digital media elements shows that many new types of text have emerged (MoE, 2019b). Since each type of text is shaped according to the purpose, it has its own shape and content structure and various elements. Therefore, the distinctions between text types customize main idea skills according to text types (Kaya, 2020). The relationship between individual sentences in a descriptive text is qualitatively different from that of those in a narrative text (Wang, 2009). A narrative text involves the interpretation of the events or the theme of the story. An explanatory text emphasizes generalization, rules, or thesis. In addition, there are several common elements of description, cause-effect and problem solving in explanatory texts. What matters is different in each species; therefore, the main idea of each genre has its own specific definition (Williams, 1988). In this context, the main idea achievements in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum did not contain information about the text type, causing students not to exhibit the behaviors in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test.

The main idea achievements in the 2019 Turkish Language Curriculum did not follow the order that should be followed in the reading comprehension process. In addition, the achievements related to auxiliary ideas that form the basis for determining the main idea of a text were only available at the 7th and 8th grade levels, and any skills related to auxiliary ideas were not included in other levels. Although the main idea concept is central to understanding and producing the meaning, it is considered a problem that the achievements in the Turkish Language Curriculum were

not organized in a planned and systematic way within the scope of main idea teaching, and that skills such as guessing the subject, determining the subject, identifying the auxiliary ideas, summarizing the subject and determining the title were considered separate from the main idea. In addition, it is also useful to consider that the 2005 Primary Education 1-5th Grades Turkish Language Curriculum, which was the first example of the current curriculum prepared according to the constructivist approach, was more comprehensive in terms of main idea skills (Ministry of National Education, 2009). Because the 2005 curriculum included the achievements of “recognizing the information missing and irrelevant to the topic during reading” and “questioning whether the examples are suitable for the subject”, which are not included in the current curriculum and are directly related to the main idea determining strategies. In addition, it is considered that the instructions and examples of activities included in the 2005 Primary Education 1-5th Grades Turkish Language Curriculum and 2006 Primary Education 6-8th Grades Turkish Language Curriculum were more comprehensive in terms of the main idea teaching (Ministry of National Education, 2006). It is also considered that the path followed in the old programs is more correct than those in the current program.

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