



## Cursive Handwriting Reform and its Aftermath in Turkey: Which Handwriting Style Do Primary School (4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grades) Students Use?

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### Abstract

This study aims to determine which handwriting style students, for whom learning cursive handwriting was compulsory and the solely taught style, use. The study was designed and conducted in the frame of the survey model. The study group comprises 859 students in 4th-8th grades of the public school system in Ankara, Turkey. The participating students were requested to accomplish four different writing tasks (copying, dictation, story writing and informative text writing), and the differentiation in the students' writing style for every task was determined. Likewise, one question is asked in order to understand the students' handwriting style preferences. The results revealed that a majority of the students for whom cursive handwriting was compulsory and the solely taught style use manuscript handwriting instead of cursive handwriting as the level of the class advances. In addition, as the writing tasks become more difficult, students' rates of using manuscript handwriting rise. It is determined that students' own preferences, family members, and their teachers are influential in their manuscript handwriting.

### Keywords

Cursive handwriting  
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### Introduction

A radical reform of handwriting education in Turkey was accomplished with the Turkish Curricula, which entered into force in 2005. Cursive handwriting was a compulsory component of the literacy program and was intended to be used by students at every level of education (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2005). However, discussions about this approach continued during the years the program was in practice. However, discussions particularly on cursive handwriting are not specific to Turkey and extend to the international community as well. These discussions gained momentum with the change of education programs in countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Canada. However, there is first a need for reconciliation on some terms used in this area in order to understand the discussions in other parts of the world and to better analyze the process in Turkey. Especially in Turkish literature, the term *handwriting* is sometimes used synonymously with cursive handwriting. Nevertheless, handwriting is an umbrella term encompassing styles such as *cursive handwriting* and *manuscript handwriting*. Studies on strengths and weaknesses of handwriting, articles that are written for or against handwriting ought to be assessed in this respect. Handwriting should not be thought only as cursive handwriting and inferences should not be made according to this point of view.

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Writing reform that occurred in Turkey in 2005 is referred to as *cursive first* throughout the world. In this practice, students first received preparatory education on cursive letters. Later, cursive first literacy education was carried out with cursive letters. This practice concerning cursive handwriting education was applied throughout Turkey between 2005-2017 in accordance with the curriculum in Turkey at that time. The practice was abandoned by the MoNE with the amendment of the Turkish Curricula since the 2017-2018 academic year (MoNE, 2018). The focus of this study, then, is to delineate in which writing style the students wrote during the years when the program was in force because the intention of the program was to teach cursive handwriting and to encourage students to adopt the habit of using this handwriting style, the success of which this study endeavors to examine.

First, the practices concerning handwriting throughout the world must be examined in order to better understand what was experienced after the handwriting reform in Turkey and later focus on writing studies in general. It is important to examine practices on handwriting education in France, USA and Canada in order to shed more light on discussions in Turkey, as practices and literature in these countries are determinant in shaping the cursive handwriting reform conducted in Turkey in 2005.

In France, cursive handwriting is taught in the first grade, along with the onset of the formal education. However, students are prepared for cursive handwriting even as early as nursery school. They learn basic lines and letters, and can write cursive letters and words composed of those letters. Cursive handwriting education officially begins in the first grade of primary school. Both basic manuscript letters and cursive letters are shown simultaneously, though only the writing of cursive letters is taught (French Primary School Curricula [FPSS], 2008). In the USA, manuscript handwriting is taught in preschool and the first grade of primary school, while cursive handwriting education begins in the second or third grade (Hanover Research, 2012; Bara & Morin, 2013; Morin, Lavoie, & Montesinos, 2012). When the programs dedicated to language education in primary school in Canada (for example, Ontario) are examined, it is seen that the official preference is in favor of cursive handwriting at the beginning of the child's formal education. According to LeBlanc (2010), in the research conducted in some provinces (Alberta, North Western Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland) of Canada, this fact is obvious (as cited in Morin et al., 2012). However, in Quebec, the education of both writing styles is advised, but there appears to be no explanation for when students transit to cursive handwriting from manuscript handwriting (Morin et al., 2012). As seen, the handwriting education reform that took place in Turkey in 2005 coincides with the practice in France. However, it cannot be said that serious preparatory education for cursive handwriting education takes place in preschool in Turkey, which is the case in France.

In the USA, discussions concerning handwriting education gained momentum with the coming into force of education programs such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 (Myers, 2013). CCSS annulled cursive handwriting education as being compulsory. CCSS stresses students' competent use of language for organizing their opinions in their writing rather than writing styles (CCSS, 2010). A serious perception in the USA public opinion is that handwriting, in general, and cursive handwriting, specifically, have been neglected by the new curricula. Some non-governmental organizations (for example, American Families Union), pioneering writing researchers of the world (for example, Virginia Berninger) and some writing industry representatives (for example, Zaner-Bloser) conducted studies to create awareness concerning the necessity of cursive education through various symposiums and education summits. As a result of these studies, nearly all of the state senates in the USA made senate resolutions concerning the necessity of cursive handwriting in schools. For example, senate resolutions were made concerning the teaching of cursive handwriting in the third grade of primary school in April 2016 in the states of Ohio, Arizona, Louisiana and Washington (Zaner-Bloser, 2016). The common characteristic of these initiatives is the teaching of manuscript handwriting in the initial years of primary school, and then from the second and third grades to foresee the teaching of cursive handwriting.

The Ontario Language Education Program (Canada) indicates that students can use manuscript handwriting until the second grade, and from the third grade they can use various cursive handwriting formats along with manuscript handwriting (Ontario Ministry of Education [OMoE], 2006). This principle, which is reiterated in the Ontario Language Program, is similar also in other provinces. For instance, in the manuscript and cursive handwriting guide prepared by the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, it is necessary to teach manuscript handwriting in the first and second grades, beginning in nursery school. It is reiterated that cursive handwriting education should start in the third grade and continue through to the sixth grade and the importance of dedicating enough time to cursive handwriting at each level is stressed (Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Holman Centre, 2012). Generally speaking, in Canada, there is first the practice of basic writing education and later an emphasis on cursive handwriting (Morin et al., 2012). In the USA and Canada, handwriting education policies are quite similar. In both countries, from preschool during the first literacy education process manuscript handwriting is preferred, while from second or third grade learning cursive handwriting is preferred.

In Turkey, the determinant of handwriting education practices is education programs prepared by the MoNE. Criterion established by education programs are valid and compulsory for the whole country. Only teaching the cursive handwriting style and making it compulsory was initiated in the Turkish Curricula, which entered into force in 2005. According to the program (2005, MoNE), students were to use cursive handwriting at every level of education and were to not learn any other handwriting style formally. In the program, various arguments that cursive handwriting might be convenient for children in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor are cited (pp. 227–228). However, this subject is debated relentlessly in the public sphere. In 2015, in the campaign conducted via social media tools, nearly 60,000 participants expressed a preference for annulling cursive handwriting education (Annul Handwriting at Primary Schools, 2015). Likewise, 86% of responders to a questionnaire conducted via social media by one of Turkey's biggest teacher unions expressed an opinion to annul the current practice for cursive handwriting education (Türk Eğitim Sen, 2015). In fact, suggestions arising from these discussions are compatible with developments throughout the world. A majority of the Turkish public rejects to the idea of cursive handwriting being mandatory and the only taught style. The preference is for cursive handwriting to be taught as a separate subject from second and third class. The MoNE conducted a questionnaire to determine teachers' views concerning cursive handwriting education in order to contribute to the relevant discussions. The MoNE did not share the results of the questionnaire with the public; nevertheless, it indicated that cursive handwriting practice in schools will continue. Besides, the principle of teaching cursive handwriting as the sole style was conserved in the updated Turkish Curricula (MoNE, 2015).

After program developments and updates were conducted by the MoNE (MoNE, 2017; MoNE, 2018), it was announced that teaching cursive handwriting as compulsory skill and as the only handwriting style would be annulled beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. The MoNE reiterated that the questionnaire, which was conducted to reveal the views of teachers, students and parents concerning cursive handwriting, was influential in the decision. According to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of teachers, students and parents are not content with cursive handwriting (<http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr>, May 23, 2017). The public's opinion, which was not adopted previously during the development of the 2005 curricula, is this time taken into consideration by the Ministry. Currently, according to the Turkish Curricula (MoNE, 2018), the handwriting style taught from the first grade is left to the preference of the teacher. According to the program, teachers can begin literacy education with either manuscript letters or cursive letters. As can be deduced from these changes, the cursive handwriting reform that began in 2005 has since been terminated, and a new literacy education policy has taken its place.

Following the curricula and public debates, the process can also be analyzed from the perspectives of scientific studies. Özenç and Özenç (2016) examined 22 articles and 13 master theses written on cursive handwriting in Turkey. The majority of studies conducted on cursive handwriting

in Turkey have been found that they had aimed to determine teachers' and students' views on cursive handwriting. The success of teachers and students in cursive handwriting, problems encountered and their attitudes towards this style of handwriting were later discussed in these studies. A common outcome of these studies is the fact that manuscript handwriting rates are increasing while the grade level rises, cursive handwriting rates are decreasing. In addition to this common outcome, students present the following views: that they find cursive handwriting difficult, that they are tired while writing in that fashion, and that their writing is illegible (Yıldız, Ataş, Yekeler, & Aktaş, 2016; Aydın, 2016; Duran & Bitir, 2015; Durmuşçelebi & Avcı, 2014; Arıcı, 2012; Baydık & Bahar Kudret, 2012). This shows that students leave the handwriting style that they learned first in time and they began using other styles.

When the studies assessing teachers' views (Sıcak, Arslan, & Ayan, 2016; Yılmaz & Çakır, 2015; Coşkun & Coşkun, 2014; Susar Kırmızı, & Kasap, 2013; Baydık & Bahar Kudret, 2012; Kadioğlu, 2012; Arslan & Iğın, 2010; Yıldırım & Ateş, 2010; Yıldız, Yıldırım, & Ateş, 2009) are assessed generally, it is deduced that teachers find education with manuscript letters easier in preparation for literacy level and teaching of writing; they think that manuscript writing better reveals a student's ability to write well; they believe that education conducted using manuscript letters is an easier and faster way to pass the level of reading fluently in comparison with education conducted with cursive handwriting; and their attitude towards cursive handwriting is negative. At the same time, some teachers also believe that reading speed improves faster and with greater ease in education with manuscript letters, that this writing style (manuscript handwriting) increases students' eagerness to write (Baydık & Bahar Kudret, 2012), and that cursive handwriting is more difficult for students (Kadioğlu, 2012).

In studies (Aydın, 2016; Yıldız et al., 2016; Durmuşçelebi & Avcı, 2014; Erdoğan, 2012; Uysal, 2013; Şahin, 2012; Yıldırım & Ateş, 2010) in which students' ability in cursive handwriting is examined generally, many outcomes show that students cannot write legibly, the legibility of students' writing did not develop positively, students could not write the letters correctly, students had difficulty writing in cursive. Further, some results showed that students wrote faster and with greater ease in manuscript handwriting, which they learned without any formal education, unlike cursive handwriting.

On the other hand, from a review of the literature, one may find that studies dealing with Turkish students' preferences concerning writing skills from a holistic perspective are insufficient. While some studies focus solely on one grade, other endeavor to reveal preferences only based on writing task. Another restriction of the literature is the limited number of students in the working group. This research is therefore designed to fill gaps in the literature that stem from these shortcomings and to describe the cursive handwriting reform in detail from the perspective of the student. The goal of the research is to establish which handwriting style the students (4-8<sup>th</sup> grade), for whom cursive handwriting was compulsory and the only taught style, use while completing different tasks (copying, dictation, story and informative text writing). With this purpose in mind, answers to the below questions are sought:

1. Do the handwriting styles of the primary school students (4-8<sup>th</sup> grades), for whom cursive handwriting was compulsory and the only taught style, show any difference according to grade level and writing tasks?
2. Do the handwriting styles of the primary school students (4-8<sup>th</sup> grades), for whom cursive handwriting was compulsory and the only taught style, show any significant difference according to their gender and writing tasks assigned?
3. What are factors that drive the primary school students (4-8<sup>th</sup> grades), for whom cursive handwriting was compulsory and the only taught style, to use manuscript handwriting instead of cursive handwriting?

## Method

### *Model of the Study*

This is a descriptive study designed using a survey model with a view to presenting a situation as it exists.

### *Working Group*

The study's working group is drawn from 9 public primary schools located in settlements with low, mid and high levels of development from the Sincan, Etimesgut, Yenimahalle and Mamak districts of Ankara, Turkey. 168 of the students were at 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 177 of them at 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 172 of them at 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 174 of them at 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 168 of them at 8<sup>th</sup> grade of which total is 859. 444 of these students are female, 415 of them are male.

### *Data Collection Tools*

In the scope of the study, students completed four different handwriting tasks from easy to difficult; copying (writing what is seen), dictation (writing what is read/said), story writing, and informative text writing.

*Copying and Dictation Texts:* Texts concerning the writing tasks were given to the students were taken from books approved by the MoNE. Texts were selected from books matched at the level of each class and were nearly 50 words. The texts were examined by experts and teachers working in the field of Turkish education in terms of their appropriateness to word, sentence, wording and students' level. Texts were finalized after necessary corrections were made in accordance with the views of the experts and teachers.

*Writing Story Text:* In the task of writing story text, the approach used by Graham, Berninger, and Weintraub (1998) is preferred. According to this approach, students are asked to determine a hero for the story that they are going to write. It is indicated that the determined hero is going to be a student and she/he is supposed to have a *good* or *bad* day at school. Students are given a few minutes to determine the hero of their stories and the day (good or bad) the hero had at school. The task of writing the story begins after the preparation process.

*Writing Informative Text:* Just as in the task of writing story text, in the informative text writing task the approach used by Graham et al. (1998) is preferred. According to this approach, students are asked to determine a person, place, tool or anything else they like. Later, they are asked to write a text, starting with the sentence "I like ..... because.....", giving information about something they like, and introducing it for five minutes. In the research, after the explanations are made concerning the content of the task, the students are given a few minutes. The task of informative text writing began after the preparation process.

### *Data Collection Process*

Data were collected when cursive handwriting was taught as the sole style in the education programs (MoNE, 2005; MoNE 2015). The data were collected by the researcher during one class hour (40 minutes) in each class. The researcher introduced himself to the students when he entered the class and explained the task. Information given at this stage was limited, and there was no mention of writing styles. Students were told that the exercise was not an exam, what they wrote would not be shared with anyone (teacher, administrative, parents etc.), and their identifications would not be uncovered. The tasks were level-specific and could be completed very easily. Students were told that their attention to the task was very important, and as such they were motivated to do their best. While the writing tasks were being completed, questions such as "Which writing style do we use?", "Do we use cursive or manuscript writing?", to name a few, were posed by the students. The researcher explained that they were free to use any writing style they chose. Students' personal differences were taken into consideration during the tasks. For instance, the time necessary for students who write slowly to complete the task was adjusted accordingly. For the dictation task, a convenient reading approach compatible with students' writing speed and a tone of voice they could hear easily were chosen.

Necessary convenience was provided for the students who do not want to participate in the task or say they do not want to continue at a certain stage of the task.

### Data Analysis

Data from 912 students were collected in the scope of the study. During the first stage of the data analysis, data gathering forms were examined. 53 forms in which deficiency was detected in the writing tasks were excluded from the dataset. Statistical transactions were executed over data from 859 students. Later, the statistical analyses necessary to respond to the research questions were conducted using SPSS 15 software. Percent (%) and frequency (f) values along with chi-square test were used in the data analysis.

## Results

**Table 1.** Distribution of Writing Styles According to Students' Class Level and Writing Tasks

Class (n)	Writing Task	Cursive Handwriting		Manuscript Handwriting		Combined Handwriting	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
4 (168)	Copying	148	88.1	20	11.9	0	0
	Dictation	146	86.9	21	12.5	1	0.6
	Story	142	84.5	21	12.5	5	3.0
	Informative	141	83.9	24	14.3	3	1.8
	Average	144	85.9	22	12.8	2	1.3
5 (177)	Copying	107	60.5	68	38.4	2	1.1
	Dictation	105	59.3	67	37.9	5	2.8
	Story	105	59.3	65	36.7	7	4.0
	Informative	101	57.1	72	40.7	4	2.3
	Average	105	59.0	68	38.4	4	2.6
6 (172)	Copying	95	55.2	75	43.6	2	1.2
	Dictation	88	51.2	80	46.5	4	2.3
	Story	84	48.8	83	48.3	5	2.9
	Informative	81	47.1	85	49.4	6	3.5
	Average	87	50.6	81	46.9	4	2.6
7 (174)	Copying	44	25.3	127	73.0	3	1.7
	Dictation	41	23.6	131	75.3	2	1.1
	Story	36	20.7	133	76.4	5	2.9
	Informative	33	19.0	137	78.7	4	2.3
	Average	39	22.1	132	75.9	3	2.5
8 (168)	Copying	20	11.9	147	87.5	1	0.6
	Dictation	22	13.1	145	86.3	1	0.6
	Story	18	10.7	146	86.9	4	2.4
	Informative	16	9.5	148	88.1	4	2.4
	Average	19	11.5	146	87.2	3	1.5

Table 1 shows the approximate rates of distribution concerning writing styles in the copying task. Based on the table, 88% of the fourth-grade students, 60% of the fifth-grade students, 55% of the sixth-grade students, 25% of the seventh-grade students, and 12% of the eighth-grade students that participated in the research used cursive handwriting. An approximate rate of students who used manuscript handwriting in the copying task is 12% in the fourth grade, 38% in the fifth grade, 44% in the sixth grade, 73% in the seventh grade, and 88% in the eighth grade. In addition to these two styles, the rates of the students using cursive and manuscript handwriting at the same time are around 1%. It is established that only in the fourth grade did no student use a combined writing style; in other class

levels there are very few students, even if at a very low number, that use this style. Results of the chi-square test [ $\chi^2(8) = 249,110, p < .01$ ] show that handwriting style differentiation at copying tasks is significant in terms of class level. When this situation is interpreted in terms of copying tasks, it can be said that cursive handwriting decreases, manuscript handwriting increases, so long as the grade level increases.

When the approximate rates of distribution concerning writing styles in the dictation task are examined, it is seen that 87% of the fourth-grade students, 60% of the fifth-grade students, 51% of the sixth-grade students, 24% of the seventh-grade students, and 13% of the eighth-grade students that participated in the research used cursive handwriting. An approximate rate of students who used manuscript handwriting in the dictation task is 12% in the fourth grade, 38% in the fifth grade, 47% in the sixth grade, 75% in the seventh grade, and 86% in the eighth grade. In addition to these two styles, it is seen that the rates of the students using cursive and manuscript handwriting at the same time are between 1% and 3%. Results of the chi-square test [ $\chi^2(8) = 249,079, p < .01$ ] show that handwriting style differentiation in dictation tasks is significant in terms of class level. Just as in the copying task, it can be said that in dictation task, cursive handwriting decreases, manuscript handwriting increases, so long as the grade level increases.

When the approximate rates of distribution concerning writing styles in the writing story text task are examined, it is seen that 85% of the fourth-grade students, 59% of the fifth-grade students, 59% of the sixth-grade students, 21% of the seventh-grade students, and 11% of the eighth-grade students that participated in the research used cursive handwriting. An approximate rate of students who used manuscript handwriting in the writing story task is 12% in the fourth grade, 37% in the fifth grade, 48% in the sixth grade, 76% in the seventh grade, and 87% in the eighth grade. In addition to these two styles, it is seen that the rates of the students using cursive and manuscript handwriting at the same time are between 2% and 4%. Results of the chi-square test [ $\chi^2(8) = 252,785, p < .01$ ] show that handwriting style differentiation in the writing story text tasks is significant in terms of class level. In parallel with the result gathered in copying and dictation texts, it can be said that in the dictation task, cursive handwriting decreases, manuscript handwriting increases, so long as the grade level increases.

When the approximate rates of distribution concerning writing styles in the writing informative text task are examined, it is seen that 84% of the fourth-grade students, 57% of the fifth-grade students, 47% of the sixth-grade students, 19% of the seventh-grade students, and 10% of the eighth-grade students that participated in the research used cursive handwriting. An approximate rate of students who used manuscript handwriting in the writing story task is 14% in the fourth grade, 41% in the fifth grade, 49% in the sixth grade, 79% in the seventh grade, and 88% in the eighth grade. In addition to these two styles, it is seen that the rates of the students using cursive and manuscript handwriting at the same time are between 2% and 4%. Results of the chi-square test [ $\chi^2(8) = 252,420, p < .01$ ] show that handwriting style differentiation in writing story text tasks is significant in terms of class level. In parallel with the result gathered in copying, dictation and story texts, it can be said that in dictation task, cursive handwriting decreases, manuscript handwriting increases, so long as the grade level increases.

When the approximate rates of distribution concerning writing styles in all tasks are examined, it is seen that 86% of the fourth-grade students, 59% of the fifth-grade students, 51% of the sixth-grade students, 22% of the seventh-grade students, and 11% of the eighth-grade students that participated in the research used cursive handwriting. An approximate rate of students who used manuscript handwriting in the writing story task is 13% in the fourth grade, 38% in the fifth grade, 47% in the sixth grade, 76% in the seventh grade, and 87% in the eighth grade. It is seen that the rates of the students using combined handwriting are between 1% and 3%. This situation shows that so long as advanced from fourth to eighth grade, the rate of students using manuscript handwriting instead of cursive handwriting increases. In addition to this, when Table 1 is examined in terms of handwriting styles preferred in the writing tasks, it is seen that there is a tendency that the rate of cursive handwriting decrease in accordance with the changes in the writing tasks (copying, dictation, story and information). As long as the writing task gets harder, the number of those who use manuscript handwriting increases.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Writing Styles According to Gender and Writing Tasks of the Students

Writing Style	Gender	Copying		Dictation		Story		Info
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f
Cursive	Female	192	43.2	182	41.0	172	38.7	168
	Male	222	53.5	220	53.0	213	51.3	204
Manuscript	Female	250	56.3	256	57.7	261	58.8	269
	Male	187	45.1	188	45.3	187	45.1	197
Combined	Female	2	0.5	6	1.4	11	2.5	7
	Male	6	1.4	7	1.7	15	3.6	14

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that rate of cursive writing of females in copying is 43.2%; in dictation, 41.0%; in story, 38.7%; and in information, 37.8%. The rate of cursive handwriting usage of males in copying is 53.5%; in dictation, 53%; in story, 51.3%; and in information, 49.2%. Chi-square test results show that writing style change in copying [ $\chi^2(2) = 12,291, p < .01$ ], dictation [ $\chi^2(2) = 13,119, p < .01$ ], informative text writing [ $\chi^2(2) = 15,981, p < .01$ ] and writing story text [ $\chi^2(2) = 16,244, p < .01$ ] tasks is significant according to gender. When the table is examined, it is seen that the males' rate of cursive writing usage is higher than the females.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Factors According to Class Levels that Direct Students to Manuscript Handwriting

Factors	4		5		6		7		8		Total *
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
Self	98	66.2	94	54.3	93	57.4	110	63.2	104	63.4	499
Friend	17	11.5	22	12.7	20	12.3	18	10.3	26	15.9	103
Family	59	39.9	74	42.8	67	41.4	55	31.6	36	22.0	291
Class T.	14	9.5	48	27.9	24	14.8	34	19.5	27	16.5	147
Branch T.	26	17.7	69	39.9	30	18.5	50	28.7	38	23.2	213
Other	11	7.4	11	6.4	11	6.8	7	4.0	9	5.5	49

\*During this question, the students are informed that they can mark three of the options presented to them. For this reason, frequency and percentage values are more than the number of participants.

When Table 3 is examined, factors directing students to use manuscript handwriting are, respectively, myself (60.8%), family members (35%), subject matter teachers (26%), class teachers (17.9%), friends (12.5%), and other (6%). The opportunity to mark more than one option is given to the students when the question is posed. When the table is assessed from this perspective, it is understood that the majority of the students want to use manuscript handwriting by themselves. Family members (mother, father, elder daughter, elder brother etc.) and teachers are the second most influential.

### Conclusion and Discussion

Results of the research show that cursive handwriting reform could not reach its target in terms of getting students to adopt the habit of using cursive handwriting. According to the research results, the usage of cursive handwriting rate is 86.5% in the fourth grade, 59% in the fifth grade, 51.7% in the sixth grade, 22% in the seventh grade, and 11% in the eighth grade. According to the Turkish Curricula (MoNE, 2005; MoNE, 2015), it is understood that in all education levels, 90% of the students, who are supposed to be using cursive handwriting, gave up this writing style. This result is similar with the results reached in other studies (e.g., Yıldız et al., 2016; Duran & Bitir, 2015; Durmuşçelebi & Avcı, 2014; Arıcı, 2012; Baydık & Bahar Kudret, 2012), which were conducted concerning the subject, after the writing reform in Turkey. It is also seen in these studies, aside from cursive handwriting, that from the fourth grade, students start using manuscript handwriting.

Tendencies to change the writing style that the students learned first are not peculiar to Turkey. Students from different countries of the world also prefer writing with other styles instead of the writing

style that they learned first. This notion is established in the research conducted by Bara and Morin (2013), who found that 86% of the French students in their study who learned cursive handwriting as the sole style use cursive handwriting in the fourth grade, and 59% of them in the fifth grade. The rest of the students use the combined (manuscript and cursive together) writing style. On the other hand, students from Quebec (Canada), who first learned manuscript handwriting and then cursive handwriting, use 55% manuscript handwriting, 10% cursive handwriting, 35% combined in the fourth grade; while they use 62% manuscript handwriting, 7% cursive handwriting and 31% combined in the fifth grade. The most salient similarity among the results is the fact that rate of the fourth- and fifth-grade French students who use manuscript handwriting instead of cursive handwriting, which they learned first, and the rate of the Turkish students in this research coincide totally. Even though they are two different countries, two different education systems, two different pedagogic cultures, in both countries where cursive handwriting is taught as the sole style, the rates of the students who use the style that they learned first in fourth and fifth grades are the same. This situation shows that nearly 15% of the students, who learned cursive handwriting as the sole style, in the fourth grade, nearly 40% of them in the fifth grade write with a different style.

The above-mentioned result should be analyzed in terms of the character of the reform that is carried out in Turkey. In 2005, with the Turkish Curricula, it is stressed that it is compulsory for the students to begin their literacy education with cursive handwriting and to use this writing style at all levels of the education (MoNE, 2005). Aside from this, the binding clause for teaching cursive handwriting as the sole style in Turkish Curricula which was updated in 2015 (MoNE, 2015). This situation indicates the fact that the most important trait of the reform is that it foresees to teach the cursive handwriting as a compulsory and the sole style in writing education. However, this principle does not match the writing education programs in developed countries such as the USA and Canada (CCSS, 2010; OmoE, 2006). An understanding prevails in the mentioned programs that manuscript handwriting is taught first, and cursive handwriting is taught in the second and third grades. Therefore, the situation to be discussed concerning the cursive handwriting reform in Turkey is whether it is pedagogically correct to teach only one writing style to the students and to make it compulsory. Practices around the world, pedagogical principles, and the results of this research show that this is incorrect.

Another subject to be discussed in terms of the reform is the public's viewpoint of the matter. The public has an invested interest in the policies and reforms concerning writing education both around the world and in Turkey. Public opinion on this matter is composed of stakeholders such as research institutions, non-governmental organizations, summits concerning writing education, newspapers, and social media platforms through which tens of thousands of parents arrange petitions. Education authorities should not remain indifferent to the requests of the public opinion on such a subject. Further, an education reform of which the widespread factions of a society is not convinced cannot succeed. In this respect, either the education authorities should convince their stakeholders about their available policies or they should develop formulas to reconcile their requests with their policy. In fact, public opinion was influential in revoking the decision to teach cursive handwriting as compulsory a compulsory and sole style and then in the decision to teach both styles in Turkey.

Another dimension to be dealt with concerning the reform's character is the totality. Namely, planning the necessary educational processes for writing reform to reach its goals as a whole is needed. If cursive handwriting is to be taught from the beginning of primary school and its continuation is requested, it is necessary to plan the details as to how this will be carried out. For instance, the frame of preparatory education for cursive handwriting in preschool programs must be developed. Effective preparatory education aimed at cursive handwriting effects first class students' writing skills positively (Duran & Akyol, 2010). Preschool programs in Turkey are inadequate in terms of objectives and content to prepare children for cursive handwriting. This situation causes students to be unprepared for cursive handwriting at primary school. The fact that all of the participating students wrote in manuscript letters in one study (Yıldız et al., 2015) in which the preschool writing preferences of the Turkish students are

examined reveals this clearly. In addition, primary and secondary school objectives regarding handwriting education, education strategies, time to be allocated to education, measurement and evaluation techniques are neglected. Since the writing program does not deal with all teaching processes from preschool to the end of elementary school, the realization of an effective writing education and the attainment of the goals of the reform could not be made possible.

In Turkey, although manuscript handwriting is not taught officially to the students, most of them know and use it frequently. Students prefer using the writing style that is easier to them, less tiring, and more legible. There are research results (Yıldız et al., 2016; Arslan and Ilgın, 2010) concerning the fact that students write with manuscript handwriting more easily and comfortably. Outcomes of the research can be dealt with from a different perspective. Frankly, students participating in the research learned and use a writing style that had not been taught to them, one that is absent from the curriculum. As learning does not only take place formally but also informally as a result of the situations students encounter and their interactions, they informally learn manuscript handwriting from many sources, notably books, magazines and other press materials, and technological devices such as tablet, phone, computer, television (Yıldız et al., 2016). In addition to these, students start encountering new subjects and teachers from the fourth grade onwards, and their writing studies and the frequency of written tasks increase. This situation constitutes space for autonomy in order to begin their personal styles and preferences from the fourth grade. Change of preference concerning writing styles must be interpreted as part of the natural development of the student.

Teachers are the primary actors for achieving the goals of an educational reform. If an educational reform struggles, the aspects that concern teachers must be analyzed well. In this research, following the personal factors that influenced students to prefer manuscript handwriting, it is teachers who play a role. For example, teachers write with manuscript letters on the board, and in this sense, they are a negative model for the students (Aydın, 2016; Arıcı, 2012; Arslan and Ilgın, 2010; Yıldız et al., 2009). In addition to this, teachers' attitude towards cursive handwriting is not positive, as themselves use cursive handwriting in professional situations and manuscript writing for their personal writing tasks (Sıcak et al., 2016; Coşkun & Coşkun, 2014; Arslan & Ilgın, 2010). The ability to write an effective handwriting was brought in to the teachers neither on bachelor level nor before bachelor level for long years in Turkey (Uysal, 2013). As a result, the majority of teachers do not use cursive handwriting if it is not necessary and they cannot carry out an effective cursive writing lesson. Likewise, the level of the class in which change of preference of Turkish students is experienced is the fourth grade (Yıldız et al., 2016). This grade level is the era in which students in Turkey encounter subject matter teachers. This situation shows that subject matter teachers are not as adamant as class teachers in encouraging the student to use cursive handwriting and supervise this process. Also, in this research, subject matter teachers were determined as more influential than class teachers in encouraging students to use manuscript handwriting.

When the writing tasks were categorized from easy to difficult in the study, the categories can be as copying, dictation, story and informative text writing. When the research results are dealt with from this perspective, students' usage rates of manuscript handwriting increase so long as the writing task gets more difficult. This situation shows that students prefer manuscript handwriting more in text production writing tasks. In the Turkish Curricula (MoNE, 2005) and literature (e.g., Güneş, 2006), some scholars are of that school that cursive handwriting contributes to the production of better text by developing thinking processes. Quite contrary to these views, in this study students preferred manuscript handwriting in tasks (story and informative text writing) in which they had to use intellectual processes more intensively. Scientific studies concerning the fact that cursive handwriting provides more contribution to intellectual and text production capacity than manuscript are insufficient. In order to mention about an effect of the cursive and manuscript handwriting to thinking and production, there is a need for more research in this matter.

When the results of the research are assessed in terms of gender, a rather interesting outcome emerges. The number of male students using cursive handwriting is higher than female students. This

outcome contrasts with the outcomes of some studies conducted concerning the use of cursive handwriting (for instance Akkaya & Kara, 2012), which found that females prefer cursive handwriting more than males. This situation can be explained from two different perspectives. First, teachers do not see cursive handwriting in a very positive light, as they find texts written with this style insufficient in legibility. The fact that teachers find manuscript handwriting more legible and that they encourage students to use this writing might be more effective with female students than males, as females are influenced by adult feedback more and their external motivations are higher than males (Yıldız, 2013). These situations might cause manuscript handwriting, which teachers prefer and argue looks better on the page, to be preferred by females more.

### Limitations

The most significant limitation of this research is the changes taken place in education programs in Turkey on the design, data collection and reporting stages of this study. The education program in force at the time of data collection, the period in which the research report was written and other programs in force had different content. This situation might challenge the reader. Hence, in order to facilitate the reader's work, it is to the point to clarify the situation as such: The article was designed and carried out at the cross-sections of time when cursive handwriting was taught as the sole style and its learning was mandatory, and when this obligation was revoked and the cursive and manuscript handwriting styles were left to the preference of the teacher were reported. Readers should assess the present research with this in mind.

### Suggestions

It is not convenient to obstruct the learning of one handwriting style by making another style compulsory in Turkish Curricula. However, leaving the style to be taught according to the teacher's preference, as was the case in the updated education programs (MoNE, 2017; MoNE, 2018), and later leaving in suspense how the handwriting education is to be configured is not the solution to this problem. The program should have content which will guide the teacher in choosing the writing style with which she/he will begin the literacy education. The outcomes of this research confirmed that even students who learned cursive handwriting as a compulsory skill use manuscript handwriting. Even though we do not have scientific research data, it is estimated that in the practice process, which entered in force for the 2017-2018 academic year, and which leaves the choice of writing style to the teacher, nearly all of the teachers nation-wide taught manuscript handwriting. Now, the main problem is the uncertainty as to in which content, which method and techniques the other style (in this case, cursive handwriting) will be taught from the third grade. The program should be strengthened with reference to available practices in the world and experiences of Turkey in handwriting education. Explanatory documents that will guide the teachers according to which class level the cursive handwriting is to be taught, how much time is to be allocated, and how it will be evaluated. Studies on changing and developing the program are common; nevertheless, this process is going to be useful to the extent that the succeeding program will diminish the problems of the previous program. The program's goals cannot be reached when handwriting education does not have detailed, concrete, and convincing language. Academic and social discussions concerning handwriting education in Turkey focus on handwriting style, which should be shifted to developing students' written expression abilities and eliminating the deficiencies of the current program. Likewise, the goal of handwriting education is to encourage students to effectively express their emotions, thoughts, imagination and impressions in written form.

The primary actor in ensuring effective handwriting education is the teacher. All teachers, especially classroom and Turkish teachers should receive an effective pre-service writing training. Teacher education programs should be fortified in terms of writing education. Preservice teachers should be knowledgeable and prepared, especially in terms of cursive handwriting and teaching skills. Likewise, inservice teachers' skills and capacities of teaching handwriting should be increased with effective in-service training activities based on practice. In addition, further studies should be conducted

with a view to describing the last situation that can be summarized as the transition to manuscript handwriting, from the perspective of teacher, student and parents. However, it is thought that there is certainly a need for studies based on examining education programs, reform movements and policies concerning writing education particularly in developed countries of the world.

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