

Appendix 1

The History and Development of Turkish Education

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In Turkey, recognition by the state of education as a public duty was first put on the agenda during the Ottoman period after the Royal Tanzimat Decree of 1839. For the first time in the Ottoman Empire in the General Education Regulation of 1869 (*Maarif-I Umumiye Nizamnamesi*), it was announced that primary education would be compulsory and free for all citizens. Although this was never realised historically, it was an remarkable attempt by the state to accept the responsibility of educating its citizens.

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, a significant step was taken with the acceptance of the Law on Unification of Education in 1924. With this law, the modernising cadre of the new Republic abolished the hitherto existing duality in the educational institutions of the Ottoman period between secular and religious education. And the national 'secular' education system, fashioned on the Western European model, especially the French system, was established. An outstanding example is the reputable Galatasaray Lisesi (Galatasaray Lyceé) which originated in 1868 with a treaty between France and the Ottoman Empire. This school served as a model for secondary schools after the establishment of the Republic.

By far the most striking characteristic of the educational system of the Republican period is its strict centralisation. By means of the Law on Unification of Education, all scientific and educational institutions were brought under the Ministry of National Education, all kinds of religious educational and training institutions ceased to function, and foreign schools, as well as those of the minorities, were brought under state control.

The establishment of a new nation-state in 1923 out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire produced profound social, economic, political and cultural changes. Although the modernisation process had begun in the 19th century, the creation of the nation-state was the crucial step in realising the transformation of Turkish society on Western European lines. In fact, a series of reforms was adopted wholeheartedly by the urban, Westernised, educated segments of

society. The foundation of the ‘secular’ modern educational system was a vital part of this development.

Education was attributed a critical function in the modernisation and Westernisation efforts of the nation-building process. It was strongly believed to be a positive agent for the transformation of the traditional, Islamic community into a ‘modern society’, and a respectful member of Western civilisation and culture. Actually, this is the case in many of the newly established nation-states (Fischer 1979). It is hoped that education can be an agent for causing social and cultural reforms and values to take root. This function of education was essential in terms of the development of Turkey’s new citizenship identity.

The years between 1923 and 1946 are called the mono-party period in Turkey. The Republican People’s Party, founded by Kemal Atatürk, governed the country as the sole political power until 1946. Educational policies of the mono-party era were based on the conceptualisation of education and training as facilitating the adoption of new social, political and cultural values and supporting the establishment of the institutional structure in the formation of the newly created nation-state. The political and cultural socialisation function of education was the leading theme. The Ministry of Education issued a circular on 19 December 1923 declaring: ‘Schools are obliged to indoctrinate loyalty to the Republican principles’ (Akyüz 1993: 286). Programmes aiming to establish a modern, urban social and cultural lifestyle with a Western approach were prepared for the schools. Course books were written within the framework of this understanding. Furthermore, informal educational and socialisation attempts were made on behalf of the adult population towards the realisation of such political socialisation. Most important among them were the Public Houses set up in the cities and the Public Rooms in the countryside. Established as the major public adult educational institutions, they served as a social and political legitimisation of the newly established secular nation-state, as well as providing adult educational services such as literary classes. Thus, they were important institutions geared to the nation-building process.

At the same time, it is a stark fact that education is vital for an economically poor country with limited physical, human and financial resources. It is necessary for individuals to be trained as capable professionals for every industrial and service job. Also it is crucial that agricultural and industrial production be increased. In the training programmes directed at Turkey’s villagers, emphasis was placed on making them more productive. Mobile Village Women’s Classes (*Gezici Köy Kadınları Kursları*) and Village Men’s Training Classes (*Köy Erkek Sanat Kursları*) introduced in 1938 and 1939 by the Ministry of Education were amongst such efforts.

In the newly founded nation-state, education was regulated, controlled and financed by the government. As a consequence, the Turkish schools at the beginning of the Republic were overwhelmingly public institutions, with only a few private ones. This did not mean that the Turkish state and the governing Republican People’s Party were opposed to private education. For example, in his opening speech of the Grand National Assembly in 1925, Atatürk asked wealthy people to establish private educational institutions.

This situation has been changing since the 1980s with the implementation of neo-liberal policies in the economy and society. Provision of education is accepted as the responsibility of the state, but it was far from being a service of equal benefit to all. Until August 1997, primary education was compulsory for only five years. In other words, the duty of the state to provide equal education to every individual citizen lasted only five years until August 1997. And even that amount of schooling was not enjoyed by a considerable number of children. Educational discrimination based on class, region, sex and ethnic groups has prevented many segments of society from benefiting even a primary education. The rate of literacy was 11 per cent in 1927, 20.4 per cent in 1935, and 69 per cent in 1981. It is a grim reality that even today 100 per cent access to primary-level education is not realised. Compulsory education was increased from 5 to 8 years in 1997. Since then it is left to the parents whether or not to continue with the education of their children.

Most of the secondary and higher educational institutions are also established, financed and controlled by the state, but this level of education is not compulsory. Such a situation is highly meaningful in terms of its consequences, because, when the educational statistics are examined, the most dramatic point of elimination from the educational system is found to occur during the transition from primary to secondary education. To quote some statistics, in 1945-6, only 12 per cent of those graduating from primary school started secondary school, and access to this level of education for the age group was 4.4 per cent. Many years later, during the 1971-2 school year, the rate of transition from primary to secondary education was 42.7 per cent (Oğuzkan 1981: 56). In addition, there is a great difference between the rates for boys and girls. In 1971-2 it was 29.5 per cent for girls and 51.3 per cent for boys. In the same year, the rate of schooling for the secondary-level age group was 35 per cent; 19.3 per cent for girls, and 50.1 per cent for boys (Gök 2002: 95). In the 1984-5 school year, 56.4 per cent of those completing primary education had access to the first level of secondary education. This rate increased to 68.7 per cent in the 1994-5 school year, while the rate of schooling for the whole of secondary education was 46.5 per cent (DİE 1994, 1995).

As already mentioned above, education was regarded as one of the basic agents for the nationalisation and modernisation efforts after the foundation of the Republic, and the main framework of the current educational system was established within the first ten years. Various institutional and conceptual modifications, sometimes called 'reforms', were implemented by the power groups dominating the educational system at the time, in conformity with the immediate needs of the period. Until the 1950s there was a limited number of private schools, most of them were exclusive to the various minorities and special foreign schools guaranteed by the Lausanne Treaty. However, starting from the 1950s, the number of private schools increased gradually. Also new types of secondary schools called Educational Colleges (*Maarif Kolejleri*) were established in the same period. The fact that schools can be classified as 'private state secondary schools' meant a significant change in the provision of public education, and they served as the harbinger of the Anatolian Secondary Schools (*Anadolu Liseleri*), which will be dealt with briefly later.

One of the important legal regulations regarding the operation of private schools is the Law on Institutions of Private Education enacted in 1965 and implemented with the enforcement of Special Educational Institutions. It covers private schools of every level run by Turkish or minority groups, as well as private courses, classes and other private educational institutions. There is close supervision and control by the state through the Ministry of Education. The most important feature of the private schools is, of course, that they are not free – although according to Article 2 of this Law, these institutions cannot be established for the purpose of making a profit. On the other hand, although it is stated that ‘the purpose of making a profit can only be for the implementation of necessary investment and to provide services, based on the principles of enhancing the quality and further development of Turkish National Education’, the reality is that there are private schools at various levels of quality, which are mainly established for making a profit. For example the tuition fees for most of the private universities are criticised as being outrageously high (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber>).

The gender gap in education

The unequal distribution of education between men and women is one of the most striking characteristics of the educational system in Turkey. In 2002, the rate of illiteracy for women within the general rural population was 30.4 per cent, whereas for men it was 10.1 per cent, and in the urban area 18.7 per cent for women but 4.5 per cent for men (KADER, 2003). The lower rate of participation in the educational system by women is only part of the gender discrimination. The gendered curriculum and socialisation process in schools tend to reproduce and reinforce the existing patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes. A number of studies have dealt with this aspect of discrimination in Turkish schools (Gök 1995, Tan 2000). A striking example is the tendency in schoolbooks to designate the more prestigious social roles and occupations as appropriate for men and depict women in domestic and caring roles. It is often emphasised that ‘a woman’s greatest obligation is motherhood’ (Gök 2003: 117).

In textbooks on *Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, women are treated separately, in sections entitled ‘The Place of Turkish Women in Society’ or ‘The Place of Turkish Women in Business Life’, in which they are asked to feel grateful to the Republican regime and Atatürk for the granting of such rights. In nine of these textbook studies with respect to the social roles allocated to men and women, it was found that, while women were shown in a position of authority in only 19 of the illustrations, men were shown in a position of authority in 90 pictures (Bilgen et al. 2002).

Neo-liberal policies, privatisation, and income gaps

Income, social class, ethnic background, age and disabilities are important factors, in addition to persistent gender discrimination, in determining one’s access to schooling as well as the quality of the education one can get in Turkey. Moreover, rural communities, and the eastern and southern provinces

in particular, receive fewer services and lag behind in terms of both enrolment and quality of education. Although the provision of free education at all levels has been recognised as the responsibility of the state, the children of upper-class and high-income families have been more likely to benefit. The neo-liberal economic policies adopted after the brutal military *coup d'état* in 1980, however, and the subsequent civilian governments, resulted in wider income gaps and lower social services. The issues related to educational inequality are strongly embedded within issues of income distribution, social class and social stratification. The impact on education of the inequality in the distribution of wealth has resulted in the creation of a dual system in which the private schools cater for the rich and provide high-quality education, and the overcrowded public schools with diminishing resources serve the lower- and middle-income groups (Sönmez 2002).

The post-1980 era displays a major shift in the way the state has approached education (cf. Hartman's Appendix 2, this volume). The structural adjustment policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and adopted by the Turkish government on 24 January 1980 were geared towards reducing government spending and encouraging privatisation of the economy and public services. The neo-liberal philosophy of the international financial institutions was internalised by government officials in Turkey. The welfare state was declared *passé* and the Kemalist notion which treated education as a tool of development, modernisation and secularisation that ought to be supported and controlled by the state, was progressively undermined. For example, General Kenan Evren, the leader of the 1980 military *coup d'état*, questioned the merit of free education. In 1986, he asked: 'Is it social justice if a man with twelve children can send all twelve of his children to state schools for free?' (Gök 2002: 97).

As a result of the adoption of a neoliberal mentality, financial resources allocated to education from state funds diminished steadily. The decline in public funds pushed the schools in poor neighbourhoods to ask for money from parents, who were unable to meet such demands. Arguably, the decline in public spending on education is a major assault on poor citizens' right to education. Expenditures on salaries make up most of the national education budget in Turkey. Yet the salaries of teachers, as is the case with all public employees, are extremely low and far from providing a decent living. What erodes the appeal of teaching as a profession is the fact that a public school teacher with 24 years of experience earns only \$500 a month. Increasingly, the well-trained and successful teachers in the public schools have been transferring to private schools, which pay salaries three to five times higher.

The reduction in educational expenditure has been accompanied by a rapid rise in population, from 13,648,270 in 1927 to 20,947,788 in 1950, 44,736,357 in 1980 and 71,207,396 in 2000 (*Kütahya Ticaret ve Sanayii Odası*, 5 November 2003). With half the population under the age of 25, the result is overcrowded public schools. The decline in the educational quality of the public schools led conscientious and well-to-do parents to seek alternatives in the creation of a private educational sector that has led to further deterioration of the public schools. Currently, the average class size in private schools is 20-25, whereas

in public schools it is 60-70. In crowded shantytown neighbourhoods, one can observe 80-90, even 100 students in a class. Annual tuition fees for the private schools range from \$3,000 to \$13,000, depending on the reputation of the school (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber>).

Private schools, furthermore, receive subsidies in a variety of ways including credits, exemption from income and corporate taxes, and direct provision of public funds. In consequence, the privatisation of education grew rapidly after 1980. While there were only 57 primary schools and 36 secondary schools in 1932, their number increased to 164 and 76 respectively in 1965, and jumped to 642 and 487 by 2001. In 2005 there were 728 private schools at the primary level and 650 private schools at the secondary level. In terms of number of students, while there were 25,727 primary school students and 12,867 secondary school students in 1965, the numbers were 171,623 and 73,136 respectively by 2001. In 2005 there were 180,090 students in private primary schools and 76,670 in private secondary level schools (MEB 2006).

One significant indicator of crisis in the educational system in Turkey is the establishment of the quasi-private schools by the state itself. It is profoundly meaningful to examine these schools in order to detect the ways even public schools serve to create major inequalities and discrimination. Basically two kinds of school are distinguished here. One is the popularly named 'super' secondary schools which are designed to teach in foreign languages, i.e. English, French and German, and where the quality of education is much better than in the regular secondary schools. The other is the Anatolian Secondary Schools, which again provide 'better' education than do the regular secondary schools. The super secondary schools and Anatolian Secondary schools, which are free and have English, and in smaller numbers also French and German, as the medium of instruction, have created a two-tier system within public education. There is extreme competition to get into these schools, as in the case of private schools. Within this hierarchy, private schools are at the top, with Anatolian and super secondary schools next, and at the bottom are the regular public secondary schools, where most of the students go and which are left with declining financial, material and teaching resources.

In addition to the primary and secondary schools, the private sector has penetrated into the university system and has also created an entire 'college-preparation industry'. Since the establishment of the Republic, universities and other higher educational institutions have been a part of the public educational system. In the mid-1960s a number of higher educational institutions were founded privately, but the Constitutional Court later banned them. In the post-1980 era of neo-liberalism, the notion of the private university was reintroduced under the name of 'foundation universities'. Since the term 'private' is reminiscent of the issue of profit-making, and also because there was strong public opposition to the commercialisation of education, when they were founded as a 'radical' break from the hitherto public higher educational system, the term 'foundation' sounded innocent. Ironically, the first private university, Bilkent University, was established by the same person who was in charge of the YÖK (Higher Educational Council), which has been a target of criticism for its centralised and authoritarian structure and negative impact on

academic freedom. Since 1986, the number of foundation universities has increased steadily, reaching 3 in 1995, 17 in 1997, 23 in 2003, and 28 in 2006 (YÖK 2006).

Another profoundly discriminatory process is that of preparation for the highly competitive entrance examinations for private secondary and Anatolian secondary schools and all the universities. Middle-class and well-to-do families spend fortunes on sending their children to private courses (*özel dershaneler*) and hiring private tutors to coach them for these examinations. The placement rate at universities demonstrates the level of the competition. In 2000, out of the 1,414,872 students who took the university entrance examination, only 45.9 per cent were able to achieve the required score of 185 that made them eligible for consideration for a four-year undergraduate programme at a university (www.osym.gov.tr). In 2005, out of the 1,671,726 students who took the exam, the figure was 987,963 (59.31 per cent). Moreover, this score does not guarantee acceptance, since the space available in universities is less than the number of eligible applicants. The students who manage to get into the most prestigious and selective universities are likely to have gone through a preparation period of two to three years at Private Preparatory Institutions (*özel dershaneler*), which have become absolutely indispensable for success. Meanwhile, public high schools are reduced to institutions that do not provide much education but that enrol students so that they can be recruited by a private courses programme. Purely commercial in nature, these private programmes mark the commercialisation of education. In 2005, the number of these private institutions was 2,984; in 2006, it was 3,650 (TED 2006: 6).

Regional gaps

Various factors contribute to the quantitative and qualitative regional gaps in the attainment of the right to education. While the enrolment ratio for primary education in the country as a whole is 97.6 per cent, that for the south-eastern region is 82.4 per cent. The rates for secondary schools are 36.6 and 18.4 per cent respectively. Similarly, the respective rates for Vocational/Technical Schools are 22.8 and 6.8 per cent. For women, the situation is more extreme. The discrepancies in terms of numbers are evident in the success rates in placement exams. Higher scores on both the Selection and Placement Examination for Secondary-Level Schools (OKS) and the entrance examinations for universities (ÖSS) tend to be obtained by students from the western and wealthier provinces. In the 2006 examinations, the lowest scores and lowest placement rates were for students from the least developed cities located in the south-eastern and eastern region: Şırnak, Bitlis, and Hakkari. Ağrı Bitlis, Mardin, Kars, Iğdır, Bingöl and Muş, respectively.

The issues of freedom and choice

The 1982 Constitution stipulates that ‘no one should be deprived of the right to education.’ The right to education is defined as a social right, and education is to be provided to serve the aims of Atatürk’s principles and reforms. The

national education policy of the state has always been quite restrictive regarding demands for any variety in methods and means of teaching and the content of curricula. The constitutional provision making it obligatory to provide 'Religious, Cultural and Morals' courses in primary and secondary schools faces a challenge from the Alevi community. Another religion-related debate has been about the state ban on headscarves in schools, which imposes a restriction on the educational rights of female students. The Constitutional Court found the wearing of headscarves incompatible with the principles of secularism (Constitutional Court, E. 1989/1, K. 1989/12, 7 March 1989). The cases of two students were taken to the European Court of Human Rights, but the Commission of the Court found them inadmissible.

Kurdish is the mother tongue of many citizens, but the law imposed a ban on the use of Kurdish in public places. Such a ban made education in Kurdish or the study of Kurdish as a second language impossible, and those who demanded their language rights have been subjected to prosecution and repression. This situation has been changing, however, since teaching Kurdish was legalised by the state in 2002. Kurdish is still not taught in educational institutions, but private courses are permitted to teach it.

In the 2005-2006 school year, there were approximately 16 million students in the Turkish educational system, 600,000 teachers and 50,000 schools including non-formal education (MEB 2006). At present, by far the most critical issue facing public education and the right to education in Turkey is the lack of commitment by the state and the ruling classes. The allocation of funds from the national budget has been declining, despite the growing number of students and the need for new and better school premises, equipment and teaching tools. According to Eurostat 2004 statistics, the allocation of funds per student in 2001 was far below that of European Union Members States and candidate countries. At the primary level, the figure for Italy was nearly ten times that of Turkey. However, a recent Turkish survey showing the 2003 figures reveals an even lower figure: \$53 per student (Ministry of Education, 2003, Eđitim-Sen 2003). This is critical in view of the large number of new students entering the educational system each year. In Turkey 80 per cent of the funds allocated to education is spent on the salaries of teachers and other personnel. Due to the lack of funds, many school administrators ask students to bring money for heating, cleaning and repair of school premises, and purchasing of equipment, which creates tension and conflict between schools and families (Gök et al. 2002).

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