

OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM AND FUTURE PROJECTION¹

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Introduction

Education is one of the most extensive and versatile activity areas of society. We are all in touch with education throughout our life. Today, schools are the most important part of the education process and school comes to mind when education is mentioned. However, education is more extensive and this concept includes both formal and informal parts of the education. Education is the job of the society to invest in the future. “What kind of education do we want? What type of human we need to educate for 21st century? What should be the nature of this person?” Answers of these questions are also the answer of the question “What kind of a Turkey do we want to live in?”

What kind of human?

A human and society insight is located in the philosophy which every education system is based on and the objectives are being developed related to this philosophy.

In our schools an education approach that will reveal the potential of the individual and will give that individual the necessary competencies to live, should be taken as a base rather than an education system based on transmission of produced information. To be able to train people that we predicted, our education system should carry out the following objectives in the light of our understanding of society: To raise the people who can understand the life as a whole, who can bring a meaning to life, who can integrate their individual purposes to the common purposes of the society and who has the competency to take an active role in the construction of a society that is more humane, more fair and more virtuous; fed by the historical tradition and experiences, who can live by internalizing balanced national and universal values and who can take responsibility.

What kind of school?

Today, education is not seen as a fact limited with the structures called school. Center of education is moving out of school and is being spread into every area of life. One of the main functions of education is to provide self-recognition and awareness of individual and keep individual productive all the time. Therefore, substitution of a

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guidance system is mandatory that will allow individual's freedom to make choices and realize himself/herself. To be able to build this structure, a system should be established based on options and alternatives where individuals can make choices and where therefore they will be able to know their selves. A system should be established intended to increasing the options while going upper classes after taking common lessons in the first classes of secondary school. Next students should be directed to the areas in accordance with their abilities based on their measurement and evaluation files prepared through versatile assessments.

Instead of giving students specialty, knowledge and skills for a particular profession at an early age by reinterpreting the concept of vocational education, they should be gained competence to be able to perform a variety of professions. Vocational education understanding which is taking, trained (acquired basic life skills, open to specialize in multiple areas) but haven't made a choice yet human understanding, as a base should be considered; so individuals should be prepared for their career life in a way that they are already equipped enough to perform different professions and can be specialized and employed in different areas. Based on this understanding, it must be designed by reviewing the existing vocational and technical education, career compatible and compliance with the new developments, flexible and available to give all kinds of opportunities for horizontal and vertical transitions. Starting from secondary school opportunities must be created for students to learn about the professions and experience them. For this, co-operations with professional organizations such as chambers of commerce and chambers of industry should be done. Demands on the professional competence or professional development of experts performing a specific job must be met primarily. Opportunities for any kind of transition in the universities should be provided for individuals who want to switch to different areas after they provide the necessary competencies. In this transitions, having competence in the relevant field should be taken in consideration.

The main function of education is developing each individual while preserving their own authentic features, and to gain them human values without self-alienation and alienating them from their own countries and free them from any kind of pressure that is aiming dominating over. The process of globalization and the European Union also affects our training as they have impacts in all areas. The subject has political, social, cultural, economic and educational dimensions. Values that shape globalization and European Union are of western origin and they are not new issues in this process. There

has always been international and cross-cultural interaction. It is natural strong side affects the weak side in this process. Since it is not possible to control this process, the way of developing strong awareness on individual and social level and playing an active role in this process should be preferred. In this process, intercultural dialogue, respect for diversity and sensitivity are expected to develop, none of the countries in the process is expected to give up its national culture and identity. On the way of Globalization and European Union, Turkey should pay attention to opportunities side of the issue and while showing effort to be in the process actively it should reconsider developing qualified personnel policies, more attention should be paid, compared with the past, on value and art education which will strengthen the national identity. From the point of Turkey, training people who can create a new civilization perception and discourse should form the philosophical basis of the education system as a distant target.

Pre-School Education

After the planned development period in Turkey, it is aimed to expand pre-school education; however schooling rate in the developed countries could not be reached. A large portion of pre-school education services in Turkey are offered by public. On the other hand, pre-school education is an expensive education for families. Because of that, taking advantage of pre-school education for poor families remains more limited compared to wealthy ones. This is an important cause of inequality of opportunity in terms of pre-school education. Contributions of business world, voluntary organizations and local governments are not enough in pre-school education, therefore kindergartens, nurseries and crèches opened by private entrepreneurs should be generalized. An obligation to open kindergartens, nurseries and crèches should be imposed for public and private workplaces which have certain number of employees. Parent trainings next to pre-school education should be generalized.

Pre-school education program that was reviewed in 2006, was featured as an activity and student oriented program and had a quite flexible structure in terms of purpose and content. A value based program should be developed in pre-school education, and a great care must be given to learning, capturing, internalizing values strengthening common national culture which provides interconnection for community and keep them together.

Primary and Secondary School Education

Turkey couldn't reach 100% schooling in elementary education although it is

mandatory. Schooling of women, disabled people and homeless children should be targeted to be closer to 100%.

The general trend in European countries for elementary school graduation is based on that the student will not be failing, but for exceptional cases, retention on grade which is decided through parent-teacher cooperation could be allowed. Turkey has also brought grade retention in elementary education to a very limited level by adopting a similar trend. General complaint is that the concept adopted in student graduation is causing graduation without learning anything. What is essential here is determination of which basic qualifications are essential for students' graduation. In Turkey taking academic achievement as a measure of success and destruction of the failure in the student's academic self-concept cause a number of problems arise in the future educational experiences. Therefore, by determining the basic qualification that will be introduced in elementary education and making these qualifications life oriented, these qualifications should be taken as a measure of graduate. The measure that should be taken for the students who couldn't reach these qualifications must be agreed on together with school administration, teachers and parents.

One of the important indicators about the quality of training venues is the number of students for per classroom and section. Considering Turkey's overall average, it seems that it has considerably improved and there is an average of 25-30 students in per section. However, in major cities, especially in Istanbul there are still crowded classes and dual education is still being continued. Uneven distribution of class sizes, lack of equipments and tools and inequalities which are arising because of differences in teacher qualifications must be eliminated. Class populations, especially in disadvantaged regions should be reduced to less than 30 students.

In school buildings signs of traditional education are observed in terms of architecture. This situation poses an obstacle in system renovation and studies towards implementation of new educational approach. More ergonomic designs of original architecture should be established where new educational approaches will applied. Layouts of classrooms should be configured with the shape that allows students continue their life as a child.

Each school should be given the opportunity to create a unique identity. Instead of having same institutions, a structure which has differences but that can produce common skills and values through these differences must be created.

In secondary education, the main aim is to gain students a general knowledge, so that

all secondary school students should be educated while they are internalizing the national culture and in order to take advantage of these cultural resources it should be expanded to teach them Eastern languages besides Western languages as optional lessons. A structure must be installed where each student can learn at least one foreign language very well. In secondary education weight should be given to teaching national arts and national music; and national and aesthetics sense of students should be strengthened.

Instead of leaving students outside of the school gates because of the lack of capacity, the number of schools should be increased to be able to respond any level of the student demand.

Transition System between Education Levels and Entry to Higher Education

Transition between education levels and examination system are very important in terms of justice and equality principle. Instead of dominant exams which are made by a single session for the transfer between levels and also based on measuring mental skills, other evaluation ways which can assess all skills and competencies of individual from every angle and determined and announced in advance should be found through objective and standardized measurement tools and techniques (composition writing, process evaluation, portfolio etc.). By diversifying the choice methods and criteria that will used for transition between level, in this context by considering parent and student interviews, teacher reports, peer reviews, student files, lessons which the student is most successful at, art, social and sporting successes, it should be designed and implemented in a versatile, inclusive and holistic basis. Instead of measurement and assessment systems that are based on eliminating, there should be diagnostic, developing and recognizing and training-oriented evaluation systems. By removing exams that are only used for ranking, the ones which are capable of showing “what level of curriculum taught is learned” should be used.

By considering changeability of the interests and needs, transfers between schools and levels should be made in a flexible structure. University student placement system should be designed according to faculty preferences instead of department preferences. In this context, functional departments required by the age in universities should be strengthened, their quota should be increased, other dysfunctional departments and programs which are waste of sources should be closed. Expected competencies related to each faculty should be determined and announced in advance. Placement to the departments should be made later under the guidance of faculty members by using

objective measurement tools. At the end of a joint program which is used during the first years of the education, a structure that provides students horizontal and vertical transitions opportunities should be formed.

In vocational high schools instead of gaining all skills required by a specific profession, it should be aimed to gain students technical equipments and qualifications in preparation for the profession; vocational training should be carried out later in vocational schools of the universities and in the business life. Vocational training should be structured in a way that to be carried out with financial support and cooperation of local chambers of commerce and industry. Establishments of trade and industry that will be providing financial support to each vocational high school should be identified and opinions of these establishments should be determinative in the programs that will be opened in these high schools. Briefly, employers should contribute in vocational training, all vocational schools should be supported by relevant provincial chambers of commerce and industry, it should be preferred to move these schools into organized industrial zones.

Higher Education

There are a number of problems in higher education in Turkey in terms of institutional, administrative, academic structure, programs, and teaching staff etc. Corporate and academic structure of the universities is in need of restructuring. In the existing structure, key policy identifying and decision-making body is Higher Education Institution (YOK). The University Act 2547 which regulates today's university structure and the problems it brings on are discussed since then. Although there are several attempts on the preparation of a new higher education law, a new higher education law in social consensus couldn't be prepared and implemented.

Although it consists of many regulatory and accreditation bodies on higher education, there are concerns about if they can improve academic standards. New disciplines emerging in higher education and the abandonment of the old disciplines are being brought to agenda.

In the globalization process, higher education has gained an international dimension. In this context, thousands of students, with increasing numbers day to day, are continues their higher education programs through internet while they are residing in their own country or becoming students in other countries for a face to face based education. Increased use of open and distance learning is suitable to today's conditions and should

be developed. Higher education opportunities should be provided for anyone who demands; and therefore e-university system should be expanded. However, while quantity is increasing, quality should not be compromised; education quality shouldn't be lowered because of being able to give everyone a diploma.

Turkey should increase the number of external student entries by starting from the closer ones to distant ones. Turkey should develop co-operations with other universities in other countries by starting from the neighboring countries.

Religious Education

In our country, religious education is carried out in schools as a formal education or through directorate of religious affairs and civil society organizations as a non-formal education. Religious services given both in schools and by directorate of religious affairs have been a subject of a continuous debate and even a fight. First of all, this issue is needed to solve by keeping it away from being a political fight in Turkey and also it should be solved by considering the needs of society and in accordance with its nature and its base.

Every society may have different practices of religious education according to its own historical, cultural and social structure. Turkey has developed a model by trying a variety of applications about religious education, in its own historical and political structure.

In developed countries religious education is being perceived within the concept of "religious freedom". As a result of this, as the government is perceiving interference with the religion of citizens as an intervention, it leaves religious education to the private sector ie. to the representatives of the religious communities and institutions.

Turkey sees religious education as a "right" in terms of citizens and "a duty" in terms of government. Constitutional preferences are on the direction that religious education is not an issue of "freedom", it should be regulated as "social right" which must be fulfilled by the government. According to the constitution, government is monopolizing education and religious education in the meantime. In a system that religious education regulated as a "right" and "duty", and the choice made in this direction, government must meet people's demands and needs of religious education. Directorate of religious affairs exists as a result of this approach and religious education is taking part in public schools.

As ruled in the 1982 constitution, through the religious culture and moral knowledge which is given as compulsory lesson 2 hours in primary and secondary schools and 1

hour in high schools, it is aimed to create a common religious culture. Parents who think that this religious knowledge is not enough are insisting their children at least should be able to read Qur'an and have an idea about its content through the main lines. Today, this demand of people is being answered by Qur'an courses that are opened by mosques in summer holidays, by religious culture and moral knowledge compulsory lesson in schools and since 2013, through optional Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's life lessons.

In the discussions on European Union and decisions of European Court of Human Rights, the issue of removal of religious culture and moral knowledge lessons from being a compulsory lesson or its modification is coming up to the agenda. Changes in the content of the lessons can always be discussed but this lesson should remain among the compulsory lessons. In this lessons nobody is being forced into a belief, only information about the religions of the world and moral knowledge are being provided. There are two types of approaches about how religious education is implemented in schools of the world. One is religious education approach (confessional) which is based on religion/sect and the other one is supra-religious education approach (non-confessional) which is not based on religion/sect. Turkey has adopted the second religious approach and the name has also been set accordingly as religious culture and moral knowledge lessons.

About religious lessons in schools, Turkey has tried different approaches such as optional and compulsory lessons and with the 1982 constitution it has made this lesson as a compulsory one. Making religious culture and moral knowledge lessons compulsory is one of the most auspicious work done throughout the history of the Republic. Therefore, the omission of this lesson from being a compulsory lesson would be one of the biggest damage for this country and our people.

Our education system, with optional religious lessons, has come to a level that is able to meet the needs of citizens largely. But the families that are not satisfied are send their children to imams and preachers secondary and high schools to protect their children from bad influences and raise them as religious people. In the historical experience, the reason of increasing interest in imam and preachers schools is coming from the perception of people considering schools as a shelter.

Despite of optional lessons in schools, the interest of families about sending their children to imam and preachers schools, seems like it is because of people's interest in religion or being religious at first sight, as well as in the long term it may decrease

attention to optional religion lessons. As it is no matter how much the demand gets higher for imam and preachers school, the rates of other schools will still be remaining high. Gathering of the students who are interested in with religion education in imam and preachers schools will decrease the interest and demand to optional religion lessons in other schools and this will be able to make it ineffective.

One of the basic conditions of religious education is to train qualified religion officials and religion lessons teachers. Religion officials are being trained in theology faculties. Religion and morals teachers have been trained in theology faculties before, and then they transferred to education faculties, but later they finally returned again to theology faculties. Pedagogical training of the students of theology faculties are not being implemented clearly, it is implemented as a temporary solution. This situation causes uncertainty and confusion for the assignment of teachers. Therefore, the issue of giving pedagogical trainings to all theology faculty students and providing their graduation as a teacher should be clearly put forward.

Training Education Executives and Teachers and Their Employment

When talking about human resources in education, teachers, inspectors and personnel in training executives positions come to mind. Being a teacher in Turkey, is the minimum requirement to be assigned for other positions. Turkey has tried many models on teachers' training since Ottoman times. After 1982, teacher training duty was transferred to the universities.

Another prerequisite of being a teacher is being chosen as a qualified teacher for education faculties. In the present system, selecting process is performed according to the choices made after the OSS (student selection examination). Apart from this, there is no system for choosing candidate teachers which will help to determine their aptness to the profession and their various specialties.

In Turkey, while there are an excess number of teachers in certain provinces and in certain branches, other provinces are still in need of teachers. In recent years, there have also efforts to achieve the balance in this regard. While going from center to countryside or from city centers to towns and villages it can be observed that teacher and branch teacher shortage is increasing. For the solution of this situation, healthy, consistent employment policies need to be created and they also need to be put into practice.

There should be a merit system established for promotions in education system; regulations that became like a scratch pad in terms of training, election and employment

of education executives should be reconstituted based on objective criteria and should be continuously updated in accordance with the developments.

Except OSS (student selection examination), a selection system which considers profession aptness and also psychological or even physical characteristics of candidate teachers should be established. A strategic cooperation and coordination must be ensured between the Ministry of Education and YOK. Teacher need of Turkey for the next 50 years should be identified from today, according to this need, while opening departments in faculties of education, the country's needs should be considered. Teaching experience for a certain time in elementary or secondary education should be required from the teachers who will be employed in faculties of education.

Conclusion

Our education system as a human training system, like in all over the world, hosting some problems at all stages. While performing any kind of reform and restructuring works on the system, relationships of all stages with others should be taken into consideration with a general system integrity/association. Otherwise, partial improvements will not be enough to solve problems about education.