

TRANSITION OF PLANNING PROCESS OF TURKISH TEACHER EDUCATION REFLECTED ON CURRICULUM STRUCTURES¹

Selahattin Turan

ABSTRACT

The planning efforts, including teacher training reforms, from the beginning of the first modernization attempts have been underlined by the notion of westernization and the passion to be ‘modern’ since the declaration of the new Turkish Republic on October 29, 1923. In the early years of the Republic, significant reform laws were adapted and put into force including the “Law of Unification of Education.” Since the early years of the Republic, education has always been identified as a transformational change agent within all aspects of Turkey’s social, political, and cultural structures, facilitating the dynamics of modernity. Modernization as a challenge has always created an ideological conflict between “conservatives” representing “status quo” and reformers struggling with the current challenges with the conservative paradigm. The aim of this study was to critically examine the transitional planning process of teacher education programs. In addition, another goal of this research project was to present the conflicts concerning Turkish educational reforms in the last decade by emphasizing a direct linkage between shifts in curriculum structure during in the 1996 and 2006 academic years. From a theoretical perspective, this study also purposed to examine the paradigmatic shift of Turkish teacher training programs within the initiatives of Turkish Higher Educational Council (HEC) in the last two decades. The results of this study indicated that the political agenda always has dictated the development of teaching policy in the country with little attention to social-cultural milieu on the governmental structures created to administer the policy since the declaration of the New Turkish Republic.

INTRODUCTION

For Turkish society, the Western style of enlightenment has served as a transitional period in which the concept of modernization has been engrained within all social, political, and ideological functions of education, specifically within the realm of teacher education. The modernization and educational reforms are basically understood in terms of positivistic Westernization traced within educational policies and implications through the modernization process. Throughout the modernization process of the Turkish Republic, the teaching profession has always had a component of central state bureaucracy, engaged with distinctive state function (Kazamias, 1966; Koçer, 1987; Akyuz, 2007). As Boyaci (1999) stated:

within this distinctive state function, their primary mission was to educate the masses in the line of Kemalist principles at schools. With this mission they also became crucial figures in the creation of legitimization bases for central political authorities, which have aimed to realization of social, economic, and

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political transformation. Within this framework, teachers were aligned with the modernization and secularization process in Turkey. (pp. 51-52)

With passage of the *Law of Unification of Instruction in 1924*, education as a public institution became centralized and bureaucratized within the state domain, so central political and ideological dominance could be centralized in order to disseminate notions of modernization over all the regions of the Turkish Republic. Today's bureaucratic structure of education was constructed during this important era. For the first time, teachers were defined as the members of the central state bureaucracy and were required to disseminate the mandated republican ideology. In this sense, curriculum structures of teacher training were composed of courses focusing on the basic social science structures of national identity and technical courses, which empowered teachers with contemporary skills that contributed to the modernization of the country. In 1924, sociology was introduced for the first time within teacher training programs, so future educators could emphasize national identity of citizenship in a professional domain. In 1937, the teacher training program introduced the core courses of pedagogy, psychology, history of education, instructional methodology, and school health to empower the professional aspect of teaching. 'Not being practice oriented' was the essential criticism directed to the directors of the 1937 program. In 1980, the structure of the teacher training curriculum was exposed to minor reforms, which focused only on the length of teacher education. All of the remaining modifications concerning teacher education focused on the modern, national, and secular development of society by targeting social and technical skills attributed to teachers. These policymakers ignored the implementation of demonstrated pedagogical skills in classroom settings, which was believed to have contributed to the failure of these changes. Since then, the reformation of curriculum structures of the teaching profession has preserved its popularity due in large part of its political and ideological missions. In this sense, a national debate over undergraduate teacher education has ensued due to the European Union (EU) integration process for the last two decades (Akyuz, 2007, 2006; Buchberger, Campos, Kallos, Stephenson, 2000; Somel, 2001; Turan, 2000).

Teacher education has been structured within the university system under the strict control and supervision of the government's Higher Education Council (HEC). This commission is the central supreme council which regulates all Turkish public and private universities, community colleges, and all vocational and technical schools. Planning policies and policy implications of the HEC continuously have come under criticism, and many scholars believe it has not realized its mission to modernize the country (Akyuz, 2007; Guler, 1994; Tosun, 2004; Sisman, 2003). One fact, which has contributed to this notion, is the HEC's planning hierarchy, which includes the State Planning Organization (SPO), the Teacher Education General Directorate, the Research Planning Branch (RPB) of the Ministry of National Education, the Training and Education Advisory Board of the Ministry of National Education, and the National Committee of Teacher Education of HEC. In addition, a policy organization called the National Educational Council, composed of bureaucrats, teachers, principals, local governors, and peoples from different civil, public, and private sectors, exists to

functions as a nation-wide counseling board. Despite the existence of these bureaucratic structures, strategic planning in the public domain, particularly within the realm of public education, is thought to be dysfunctional and ineffective, especially when taking into consideration the implications of various educational plans. The reason for the failure needs to be questioned by scholars and policymakers to determine whether the failure stems from the planning process itself or from the failure of the institutions and administrative structures to implement the mandated reforms.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Analyzing brief historical milestones of the Turkish teacher training process within a socio-economic and socio-political context will enable readers to place these issues within a critical context. Formal Turkish teacher preparation dates back to 11th century with the madrasah (theologically dominated higher education institutions attached to a mosque) system imparting mores while simultaneously shaping social structures with its rich religious tradition. Yet, the first comprehensive teacher training programs emerged in 1869 with the enactment of *General Law of Education*. With this law, the first teacher schools were established, and the codification of the necessary qualifications for teachers and requirements for students desiring to become teachers were identified. As a result, the social and legal status of the teaching profession increased (Akyuz, 2007, 2006). The critical organizational and curriculum structures of the schools were established with standards imported from the Western tradition. The schools within the modernization endeavor, accelerated by the Ottoman bureaucratic elite, constituted a challenge for representatives of the ruling Islamic elite. A conflicting dual structure emerged, which instituted antagonism between traditional structures focusing on Islamic values and tradition and the new elites, who were more accepting of secular values. With the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, the focus shifted towards the modernization process and the apparent abolishment of conflicting cultural paradigms, which ultimately favored 'modernity.' Through modernization, the education of Turkish youth was viewed as an ideological change agent and a method by politicians to uplift the entire society (Akyuz, 2007; Kazamias, 1966; Turan, 2000). Within this perspective the strategic planning process within the public domain was redesigned and restructured to realize this ideological goal. As part of the modernization of Turkish education leading scholars such as John Dewey, Miss Parker, W. Dickermann, K. V. Wofford, John Rufi, E. Thomkins, L. Beals, R. J. Maaske, E. S. Gorvine, P. Schwartz, and O. Buyse were invited to help design a new educational structure for the new Turkish Republic.

Several reforms and innovations were started to take place in the early years of the Republic, and teachers were identified as the leaders of Turkey's transition from a traditional to a modern society. During this era of reform, the Turkish educational system was centralized by enactment of the *Law of Unification of Instruction in 1924*. This act placed all educational institutions under the strict control of the Ministry of National Education. Since then, all important policy and administrative decisions, including the appointment of teachers and administrators, the adoption of textbooks, the selection of

subjects for the curriculum, have been made by the Ministry of National Education. This centralized educational system continues to remain in place. In the first half of the century, great differences between the needs of the rural and urban parts of the country led to different approaches to teacher education programs for rural and urban areas. As a result, two types of teacher education schools were designed to meet the different demands of the country in 1926: (a) primary teacher schools for urban areas; and (b) village teacher schools for rural areas. As stated by Boyaci (1999):

In order to provide teachers especially for rural areas, proper teacher training institutions, village institutions, were established. Although the critical goal of the village institutions were to improve the educational conditions of rural areas by training the village youth as the teachers for their villages, there existed two main goals behind that: That were to train village youth (a) as the leaders of their community, who would start a drastic economic development of their villages and (b) as the political and ideological leaders who would disseminate modernist republican ideology and prevent the destructive effects of religious leaders in the mosque of the village, who were against the non-traditional notions that came with foundation of Turkish Republic. (pp. 61-62)

The village institutions were abolished with the political turbulence originating from ideological debate over the village institutions in 1954. From this date until now, there has been no differentiation between rural and urban areas in terms of teacher education curriculum, including taking into consideration the unique needs of rural areas within a highly centralized educational bureaucracy. In the second half of the 20th Century, two major changes in teacher education policy in Turkey were realized. The first one was the acceptance of the *Basic Law for National Education in 1973*. Up until this date, teachers had been educated in either certain boarding teacher schools or in more formalized institutes of education. Teacher schools were actually secondary schools from grades 6 to 12. Institutes of education were two- or three-year higher education institutions admitting students after graduating from high school. In 1973 in the light of the *Basic Law of National Education*, all teachers were required to be educated in higher education institutions. Such a policy shift resulted in the redesigning of teacher schools as higher teacher colleges, and teacher education programs for elementary education were transferred to two-year post-secondary education institutes. The students who were graduated from these Institutes were employed as classroom teachers in elementary schools.

The second major change in teacher education occurred in 1981. A unified system of higher education was introduced and the responsibility for teacher education was transferred to the universities within the HEC established as a planning and coordinating agency. Some four-year teacher training colleges were transformed into new faculties' educational institutions. In doing so, the responsibility of teacher preparation was transferred from the Ministry of National Education to the HEC. After 1981, prospective elementary and secondary school teachers were required to complete four years of university education, while elementary teachers were only required to attend two years of college. In 1989, regardless all teacher trainees were required to have B.A.

degree in education approved by the HEC. Since then, the schools of education have been officially identified as the main source providing teachers to Turkey's national education system (Altun, 1996; HEC, 1995, 1998, 2007).

REVITALIZATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM STRUCTURE IN THE LAST DECADE

HEC is a unique institution in that it is responsible for the restructuring process of teacher education. All teacher education programs within the colleges of education are under strict administrative and instructional control and supervision of HEC. For example, in 1997, HEC identified and reformed teacher training programs in kindergarten, general classroom instruction, science, elementary math, social studies, Turkish, English, German, French, music, art, physical education and sport, hear-impaired, mentally handicapped, visual impaired, information and computer technologies teacher training programs. In addition, curriculum structures of the courses concerning pedagogical formation such as educational administration, curriculum development, educational psychology were also revised based upon the belief those courses were deemed to be inefficient and outdated. After the HEC's decision in 1997, curriculum structures of teacher training were standardized throughout Turkey's all colleges of education.

With the addition of new programs such as: introduction to teaching profession, school experience I and II, psychological development and learning, planning and evaluation in instruction, instructional technologies and material development, classroom management, branch based instructional methodologies I and II, counseling and guidance, an additional course entitled teaching practice was initiated. Ultimately the goal was to create a practice based curriculum utilizing all the essential skills required from the teaching profession. However, these reforms did not go unchallenged. The curriculum structure was criticized for ignoring the social, political and ethical aspects of teaching profession. In addition, a dispute in the agency emerged over the belief that the HEC reduced the importance of the teaching profession to just another market-based profession dominated by academic elites centered in Ankara. The rationale behind 1997 Reform of Turkish Teacher Education was:

- Lack of coordination between the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and Higher Education Council.
- Duplication of courses and programs having same academic objectives between the education and the of art and science faculties.
- Research topics and activities in schools of education which ignored the needs of teaching professionals.
- A teacher training focused mostly on theory rather than clinical practice.
- Lack of professional development on topics deemed relevant by teacher training faculty (HEC, 1998).

As a result of the growing criticism and changing political agenda, the HEC in 2006 decided to once again revise the curriculum structure of teacher training. With this last revision, four new programs were created and several of the previously abolished courses were reinstated. Arabic teaching, culture of religion and morals,

Japanese teaching, and talented and gifted teaching programs were established in colleges of education. In addition to the new content, the pedagogical curriculum was also modified have become the essential courses for current teachers for the Turkish Republic. The 2006 reforms also loosened the strict curriculum structure and enabled college administrators to design new electives. When compared to 1997 reforms, the features of curriculum revisions in 2006 have the following similarities:

- In both curriculum reform efforts, comprehensive needs assessments and pilot studies concerning teacher education were not made within a Turkish cultural context.
- The academicians and the policy makers at the HEC in Ankara became the unique actors in the planning process.
- The participation of those affecting and being affected by teaching–learning activities into teacher education planning process was limited.
- Though in the reform effort in 1996, there had been cooperation between Higher Education Council and Ministry of National Education. In 2006 there was no cooperation with the Ministry of Education because of the perceived ideological differences between the conservative Turkish government and the more secular members of HEC, who regard themselves as the protectors of the ‘secular’ state (HEC, 2007).

One of the amendments undertaken by the new arrangement was the training of branch teachers for upper secondary schools. The new arrangement stipulated that branch teachers for upper secondary schools are trained by means of graduate studies (without dissertation), a modification, which differed from the former practice of a single comprehensive exam that encompassed all 4 years of post-secondary education. Accordingly, the duration of the training programs for branch teachers in upper secondary education was increased to 5 years (HEC, 1998, 2007).

DISCUSSION

The planning efforts from the beginning of the first modernization attempts have been underlined by the notion of westernization and the passion to be ‘modern.’ Actually up until now it has been a transition process. During this timeframe, education has always been identified as a transformational change agent within all aspects of Turkey’s social, political, and cultural structures facilitating the dynamics of modernity and the strategic planning process. Modernization as a challenge has always created an ideological conflict between “conservatives” representing “status quo” and reformers struggling with the current challenging conservative paradigm. In this sense, strategic planning has been a key component of an ever-political agenda rather than rational thinking throughout historical process of this transition. Although within a historical perspective teacher training goes back to 1860’s with the opening of the first teacher schools, sociologically their failure has resulted in constructing authentic teacher training programs, system compatible with indigenous values and socio-cultural demands of Turkish society. From an administrative perspective, the failure of the strategic planning process has been accelerated.

The first attempt at reforming teacher training program structures was realized in the second half of the 19th century with the establishment of specifically designed teacher schools utilizing Western pedagogies. At the same time, these reforms created tensions between bureaucratic elites and scholars regarding the ideological and political functions of universal education. In fact, during this period of a transition from traditional religious-based education to modern educational pedagogy, education failed to realize its objectives due to the existence of conflicting structures between traditional and modern teacher training systems. The reasons for these planning failures was due to the Ottoman bureaucratic elites' attempts to construct a new system predicated upon an old paradigm, which ignored the resistance coming from traditional layers of the society. With the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, teachers were awarded the status of civil servants and were seen as the disseminators of the state ideology with a continual focus on creating national, secular, and modern social structure in the early 1920's and 1930's. In other words, Turkish leaders regarded education as a power in transforming and uplifting the entire society as stated in Kazamias (1966):

Education was inextricably bound up with political, economic, and cultural independence and with breaking the shackles of traditional beliefs and outlooks; it was the means of nourishing national aspirations, creating the consensus necessary to sustain a free national state, training new Turkish leaders, and paving the way towards a dynamic and modern society. Knowledge and science were regarded as power and as the leverage in transforming and uplifting the entire society. (p. 115)

During this timeframe, strategic planning was approached from a political and ideological perspective, primarily focused on the creation of the national state and the amelioration of education within Turkish society. Thus, centralized educational planning served as key instrument providing education improvements across all regions of the country and enabled the educational system to become more compatible with the social, cultural, and political agenda of the new Turkish Republic. When these nationwide central planning outcomes in education were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, it can be discerned that considerable improvement was realized through creating a modern society until the 1940s.

The political turbulence between 1940 and 1960 created an upheaval in determining the priorities of educational planning. In 1961, with the establishment of the State Planning Organization, socio-economic development of the country was linked to the government's central planning policies. Although educational policies were directly tied to the implementation of various socio-economic priorities of the nation, teacher education programs failed to be the primary component of any planned state sponsored modifications. There are several reasons for this assertion. The first is no official and legal obligations existed to implement central educational and socio-economic plans. In addition, central planning process lacked the collective participation of classroom professionals and those administrators directly or indirectly involved in educating students. Finally, planning of teacher education programs has been relegated only to the professional domains of bureaucratic experts.

Although there is a planning hierarchy, which includes the State Planning Organization (SPO), Teacher Education General Directorate, Research Planning Branch (RPB), Training and Education Advisory Board of Ministry of National Education, and the National Committee of Teacher Education of HEC, a lack of coordination exists causing problems among those institutions and commissions. While many scholars believe the reason for this failure emerged in the higher education planning process, it should be noted the failures probably lie within the planning paradigm itself. Centralized planning in the Turkish higher education system as an integral part of an overall central public planning structure has been in conflict with contemporary planning approaches, attempting to establish standardized practices and the inefficient delegating to those individuals previously involved in the planning process. Another explanation for the inconsistency in educational planning reforms relies upon the belief by some scholars that the planning process seeks to affirm the political agenda of the nation's leaders rather than being constructed on an evidence-based decision making process. The Turkish higher education planning system is highly centralized. Within this highly bureaucratic structure among planners and policy makers, no consensus or long-term strategic objectives for the training of competent and highly qualified teachers capable of producing improvements in student learning has been developed. Until such unanimity has been reached among planners and policy makers, the essential knowledge and skills that teachers must possess are yet to be achieved.

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