

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TURKISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

© Zeynep VARLI
(Sakarya University, Turkey)

zvarli@hotmail.com

Turkish educational system consists of two main divisions: formal education and non-formal education. The school system has four levels: pre-school education, primary education, secondary education and higher education.

Keywords: educational system, Turkey, education

Formal education

Pre-school education is optional in Turkey. In Turkey children ranging in age from 6 to 14 are obliged to attend primary school. All state schools are free of charge. Primary Education consists of eight year schools and it is compulsory. At these schools, education is uninterrupted for a period of eight years and graduates are given primary school certificates. Primary education anticipates a process which takes into consideration interests, maturation, talents and vocational values in accordance with the aims of Turkish National Education and contemporary education (<http://www.byegm.gov.tr/references/education-system.htm>).

Secondary education covers general and vocational technical high schools which provide at least a four-year education for graduates of primary school. The aim of secondary education is to provide students, through various programs, with general culture and to prepare them for higher education, life and business according to their interests and talents.

Higher Education. Institutions of Higher Learning, the course of which is at least two years, is based on secondary education. These educational institutions aim to meet the requirements of society for skilled personnel at various levels. Today, the development of a country is determined according to its level of education, science and technology. Turkey's basic aim is to reach world standards of higher education both in quality and quantity.

Significant developments have occurred in higher education since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. In 1933 the "Darulfünun" was transformed into Istanbul University. During the 2004-2005 scholastic year, the number of universities reached 77 (includes private universities) and 2,073,428 students are presently enrolled in these universities. (<http://www.byegm.gov.tr/references/education-system.htm>)

Non-formal education

Non-formal education, which constitutes one of the two basic divisions of the national education system, covers education, training, guidance and applied activities, which are not included in the formal education system.

Non-formal education applies to those individuals who have never had a formal education, or who are currently at a particular stage.

Non-formal education aims at providing adults with literacy skills and basic knowledge, to further develop acquired knowledge and skills and to create new opportunities for improving their standards of living. Non-formal education includes two main parts, which comprise general and vocational-technical education. (Office Of The Prime Minister, Directorate General Of Press And Information, official web site)

History of the turkish education system

Modern Turkish Education System is starting with Tanzimat Reforms in Ottoman Empire time.

The Tanzimat Reforms (1839-1876). In 1845 before the Imperial Decree of 1856 confirming that European education, science and capital would be used, Sultan Abdulmecid, who succeeded Sultan Mahmut II, had message read, to top officials of his government.

The Ministry of General Schools, founded in 1846, was incorporated in 1857 to the Ministry of General Education. The new program included: The Alphabet, Turkish (writing two and three-letter words, ethics (brief, anecdotal stories), Calligraphy and Religious information (about Islam), Koran to be read twice (without memorizing by heart). Arithmetic (four basic operations), the Outline of Ottoman history and on outline of geography. For writing exercises, introduced anew, pupils were to be given slate boards to be supplied by Sultan himself. Schooling was to begin at the age of seven and continue for four years without yearly passes or failures, but terminating with a graduation exam at the end. Those failing the final exams were allowed to remain in school until the age of 13.

Tanzimat proposed three new schools, namely, Rushdiya İdadiya and Sultaniya: Rushdiya, a 4-year make-up or maturity school at the primary level; İdadiya, a 4-year school for preparation to higher and vocational education; and Sultaniya a 6-year secondary school (above Rushdiya but including İdadiya), which was the first Ottoman lycee. Due to the lack of a real university, the first Ottoman Sultanis established in Istanbul, like Galatasaray and Darushafaka ("Datchka") towards the end of Tanzimat, set up the national standards of a Baccalaureate degree, which was later taken up and continued by the Republicans. In 1848 the first teacher training school was opened in Istanbul for educating the Rushdiya teachers. There were in 1852 only 12 Rushdiya in Istanbul while in 1874 some 18. In big cities of the Empire there existed a total of 25 Rushdiya in 1853. The Tanzimat leaders' decision to open a university in 1846 came true in 1863 with an impressive list of Ottoman scholars lined up as teachers. The building, constructed of timber, burned down in 1865 with some 4000 books acquired from abroad.

The major educational breakthrough of the Tanzimat came with the 1869 "Ordinance of General Education", conceived and written by Sadullah Pasha in response to a diplomatic French note requesting the establishment of a modern lycee.

In summary, the Tanzimat Reforms created a system of contemporary schools of three years each: Sibyan schools, Rushdiya, İdadiya and Sultaniya, Teachers Colleges and University, respectively. With few exceptions most of these schools were located in Istanbul. A generation after the decision for Tanzimat Reforms, nearly 20 % of the Imperial schools were following the modern curricula, while more than 70% still remained the

darkness of the Madrasa tradition. This dichotomy invited a remark from a minister of education "If not for the schools, he would run the education perfectly." He was not complaining of schools as such but rather, and ironically, of the ruthless opposition by the Madrasa directed to schools. In brief, despite a variety of obstacles, Tanzimat succeeded in creating Rushdiya and Idadiya and in training their teachers in the western tradition. Though University failed or fell short of its objectives, the professional schools filled the vacuum. More specifically, Tanzimat was successful in introducing:

- Writing, mathematics, history, geography and some natural sciences.
- Modern techniques and aids in classroom teaching and applications.
- Teaching of Turkish and modern languages (ie, French) in schools.

In all fairness, it should be underlined that if they could not do any better, it was not because they did not know better, but because they did not have the financial means and the political will to support them. Many broad visions of the 1869 Ordinances, are, by and large, valid models of reforms. Tanzimat was further handicapped from the fact, that although there was a Ministry of General Education, madrasa, military schools, private or foreign school and vocational and professional (higher) schools were all supervised by different State Ministries of equal rank-without an effective cooperation or coordination between them. (History of Turkish Education ,BOZKURT GÜVENÇ,Turkish Education Association, Part II. From Tanzimat to Democracy: Hunderd Years, II.2. The Tanzimat Reforms, 1839-1876.)

From Monarchy to Republic (1878-1923). One of the political consequences of the Tanzimat was that the Ottoman Empire had its first Constitution in 1876. It was however a short-lived, little appreciated experiment. His Imperial Majesty Abdulhamit II, exercising the constitutional power invested in the Sultan, indefinitely dissolved the Parliament until the second Hurriyet in 1908. This interim period is known as the "absolute monarchy". Tanzimat education had aimed to save the Empire by creating an Ottoman nation out of its ethnic diversity. More realistically perhaps, the Sultan followed a policy to hold its own and create a Muslim nation. Hence technical and vocational schools replaced the Tanzimat programs displaying positivism and natural history. Although private schools and colleges were developed, general schools, teacher training programs, books and press came under the strict (and nervous) censure of the Palace. The Ministry of General Education published educational Almanacs. In 1880 the first School of Law was established and in 1883, an educational tax was introduced, in addition to Ashar (literally a plus 10% tax taken from agricultural producers). In 1885, the first Idadiya out of Istanbul was opened in the Kastamonu vilayet, and in 1891 teachers schools for elementary and secondary levels were incorporated as a Teacher Training College. The Grand Vizier (Küçük) Said Pasha speculated (in the 1890's) that a secular university could perhaps be founded without risking the fate of the Throne. The same university was opened for a fourth time (1900). In 1904, under Education Minister Hashim Pasha, the program of 3-year elementary (iptidai) schools was radically revised. (History of Turkish Education ,BOZKURT GÜVENÇ,Turkish Education Association, From Monarchy to Republic (1878-1923))

Quest for Cultural Modernity (1923-1950). This was the state of affairs when the National Assembly of Representatives convened for the first time (1920) in Ankara, where Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the leader of the nationalist movement, discreetly proclaimed on a mural poster: "*Sovereignty*

belongs to the People!" - by inference - not to God the Almighty or any imperial [human] dynasty! The early declaration of Respublica (Cumhuriyet) was a signal of things to come, the unfolding Turkish Revolution. The moving spirit of revolution saw the salvation of his "semi-colonised, warweary, agrarian people" in the creation of a new Turkish Man, a new Turkish Society and a new Turkish Culture so that it would not fall again to the brink of extinction. How, then, was the cultural (Islamic) heritage to be reconciled with the revolutionary Republic? There appeared two, distinct strategies: first, an "Islamic Republic of Turkey"; second, a national culture to sustain the secular republic. Though the first option seemed difficult - remembering the long dichotomy lingering between Madrasa and school- the second was not much easier, although there were enlightened Muslim scholars like Mehmet Akif Ersoy who earnestly believed and proposed that "bearded hojhas" could be more effective and therefore should be given a role. "The foundation of the Turkish Republic was [going to be] culture" declared the leader -not the "obsolete culture" inherited from Ottomans but a viable culture to be created anew by the educational policies and purposes of the Turkish Republic: *The purpose of our revolution is to render the people of the Turkish Republic a modern and civilized society, in every and proper sense of the words, in substance and form.*

After the proclamation of the Republic (1923), a series of three laws were enacted on 3 March 1924. They affirmed that the Republic of Turkey:

1. Abolished the Ministry of Pious Foundations (Madrasa) and Religious (Sharia) Courts (Law No 429/1924),
2. Placed all educational institutions (except Istanbul University but including all Madrasa) under the Ministry of Education (Unification of Education Act, Law No 430/1924),
3. Shut down the office of Khaliphate and exiled the remaining members of the Ottoman Dynasty (Law No 431/ 1924).

The third article of the Unification Act (430/1924) gave the financial control of all educational endowments to the Ministry of Education. The fourth article, however, authorised the Ministry to open special schools for educating the Imam-Hatib (Pastor-Preachers) schools and a Theology (Ilahiya) Faculty at the University for educating enlightened scholars of Islam. Madrasa were closed down but 29 new schools were opened for training the Imam-Hatibs who suddenly fell out of favour or demand; in the early 30's the new schools were closed.

Bold and decisive steps and measures followed and complemented one another. In 1924, Mustafa Kemal addressed the convention of teachers: *"Teachers! The new generation will be your creation. The Republic needs and wants guardians who are strong physically, intellectually and spiritually."* Parallel to this call to arms, the principle of coeducation was introduced to elementary schools. A few months later in Samsun, the leader declared that "Science is the most reliable guide in life!" For the first time Imam Ghazali's, "incompatibility verdict" was publicly challenged. Years later this maxim was engraved on the façade of Ankara University. During the same (1924) year, educator John Dewey recommended a Ministerial Board of National Education and the famous policy slogan "A school at each work place and a work place in each school." It sounded convincing but there weren't many schools or any work places in the country. Before going into action, Turkish educators pondered this "work- school" idea for nearly 15 years.

In 1925, all mystic or esoteric associations and shrines of any religious affiliation (like tekke, zaviye and türbe) were closed.

In two years, all public education at all levels was made free of tuition fees and the civil code was adapted from the *Swiss*. In Nutuk, the "Speech" read before the National Assembly in 1927, the leader for the first time pronounced the word *laïcité* ("secularism") although all legal foundations of secularism were already laid and much had been done without publicity. In 1928 the Latin alphabet was adapted and accepted. Soon thereafter folk-schools or courses were opened for teaching the nation its new Latin alphabet. Teachers themselves were mastering it with their adult students. Turkish students were required, by law, to attend Turkish primary schools. The Arabic Ezan or prayer call was given in Turkish for the first time soon followed by ritualistic reading of the Kur'an in Turkish.

The article stating that "The religion of State is Islam" was dropped (1928) from the Constitution. Soon the secularism principle was incorporated into by-laws of the CHP (Republican People's Party) and the Turkish nationalist Akcura was installed as President of the newly founded Historical Foundation (THK). The Turkish Linguistic Society followed the lead in History, in reviving a forgotten language. In 1931, Peoples' Houses and Peoples' Chambers were inaugurated for educating the parents of pupils going to Republican schools. The youth probably benefited more from the novel programs of these culture centers which convened the community together. The Faculty of Theology was closed because there wasn't sufficient demand (students). In 1933 at the Tenth Commemoration of the Republic, the semi-autonomous Istanbul University was reorganised (with the help of some Academicians running away from Nazi Germany) and brought under Ministerial supervision. The use of all honorific and titular titles, Islamic or otherwise, was outlawed in 1934. A new nation was coming of age and seemed proud of its accomplishments. Before the death of President Atatürk in 1938, by another amendment to the Constitution, the Turkish Republic was declared to be a "secular state" (Law No 3115/1937). An old dream had finally come true. A year later in 1939 the first Convention of National Education was held in Ankara.

At the start, Republican schools were a continuation of the Ottoman 3+3+3+3 system which was first changed to 6+3+3 and later to a 5+3+3 years model. In which the 5-year elementary schools replaced the 3-year *iptidai* and the 3-year *Rushdiya*, the 3-year *Idadiya* became the middle (*orta*) school and the *Sultani* was now called the "Lise". Primary schools concentrated on the 3-R's rather than Holy Kur'an, plus life studies, history, geography, science and civics, handiwork, drawing, PT and music, all taught in Turkish. The middle (*Orta*) school and *lise* were considered the first and second levels of the new secondary education.

The positivistic character and the secular purposes of the curricula are evident as no Kur'anic readings or Islamic studies appear in the official syllabi.

Parallel to the modernisation of public education, the young Republic made serious efforts to develop the programs for primary school teachers. In early years these programs reflected an Ottoman (Islamic) character but in the 1930's they became a corollary of the new secular education.

During the Second World War years, the Turkish Republic undertook two major projects of educational significance. (1) An "educational mobilisation program for social change", better known as the "Village Institutes" and (2) Parallel to the general (academic) schools, a second track of "vocational-technical" secondary schools for training the manpower to be employed in industrial productions - or eventual industrialization.

According to the first official program published, the Village Institutes were designed as 5-year, coeducational, boarding, workschools after and above the 5-year elementary schools. Students were selected by examination.

Village Institutes at long last seem to be designed to fulfill John Dewey's idea of combining work and education. Graduates were expected to be both school teachers and community leaders at the same time. Students actually built their own schools, homes, barracks, work places etc; and learned by doing and living together. Perceiving education as learning the 3R's in a classroom, many parents were shocked to see their children working hard out in the field with pick and shovel in hand. Some parents also objected to the novel but alien "co-educational boarding school" idea. Sibyan schools were coeducational but not for teenagers.

According to the law of establishment (1940), only highly qualified, university graduates were to be appointed as Institute teachers. Rumours that there had been leftist infiltrations into the Institutes caused probably more harm than the leftist teachers themselves, proving the tenet that "rumours are more powerful than actions".

Resisting all pressures or temptations to enter the Second World War, Turkey maintained her neutrality until the very end. This meant hardship not only for Village Institutes but for the whole country and nation. A huge army mobilised to protect the country consumed the limited resources, causing shortages of basic foods, consumer goods, high prices, blackmarket profiteering and an ensuing general discontent.

Hence, the year 1945, was a turning point in the Republic's destiny. The Allied Nations notified that, in order to become a founder of the UNO, the Turkish Republic had to qualify as a liberal (western) democracy. Turkey responded without delay and a Democratic Party was formed, in opposition to the People's Republicans Party in power. The population census gave a demographic profile of the nation in 1945.

After Atatürk's death however, one philosophy teacher turned educator, Hasan Ali Yücel, as the Minister of Education, for nearly a decade towered and outshone the rest. From mobilisation for national literacy, to program developments in primary, secondary, rural, vocational-technical, teacher training, adult and informal education projects (like the translation of the World Heritage of Literature) and finally, to the autonomy of higher educations, he became the legendary minister and unchallenged "Champion of National Education". From time immemorial, he conveyed the message "know thyself". He said, for a nation or individual, "What is important is to know who you are!" In the 1940-1941 School Year, classical branches of selected lycees offered five hours of Latin as an elective. Under political pressure this option was discontinued after 1949. With the phenomenal rise of democratic opposition, Minister Yücel yielded to conservative colleagues (1946).

In 1947, some parliamentarians recommended religious courses as a counter or preventive measure to the growing Communist threat. In 1949 the Republican Party Caucus decided that subject to parental request, religion may be taught in only the 4th and 5th grades of public schools, and that Imam-Hatib Courses, too, may be opened by the Ministry of National Education. (History of Turkish Education *Bozkurt Güvenç*, Turkish Education Association, *Quest for Cultural Modernity: 1923-1950*)

From Scholastic to Social Education (1950 to Present). Dichotomies: General or Technical, Separate or Comprehensive; Private or Public; English or Turkish; Tuition Fees or Free School?

After the 1950's when the process of change began gaining momentum, Turkish education has faced several dichotomies. While both the Industry

and economy needed more technical-vocational graduates, the popular trend was in the opposite direction: white-collar professions like medicine, law and engineering (geometrics, that is) were popular with families in the middle echelons wanted their sons to move to, or marry someone from the top. Most of the secondary and technical schools were not coeducational. Separate schools developed different programs. What the economy and democracy badly needed was a comprehensive school of general and technical education, boys and girls under the same roof or on the same campus. One school with a variety of programs.

Educators talked and planners worked on such schemes but did not have the political will to implement them. American schemes versus the European STET the French one often led to stalemates. If we have a comprehensive high school what will be the fate or future of the Turkish lycee. What is a lycee anyway? In the National Education Convention held in 1960, educators deliberated for a month just to define it as a "school that prepared individuals for University". If this is what a Lycee is, then everybody would prefer to go to the a Lycee. Why not the best? The idea of Sultaniya was so dear that educators wanted to insure its high standards. They succeeded in creating nearly 70 different lycees, all equivalent to the lycee, ie, all graduates eligible at least to apply and go to university. Screening the unqualified rather than selecting the qualified, an elaborate system of entrance and placement examinations was innovated. Then there was the crucial question of secondary graduates who were not admitted to, or placed in a university. Some contended that the examination for Higher Education should be abandoned, without offering however, a feasible alternative. The Open University did not prove to be the panacea that it was once hoped to be.

It may make up for the shortcomings of secondary education but not for much of a higher or technical education. There are two viable contenders to a higher education degree: foreign languages and computer sciences. Most of the public advertisements for market employment require both, even before the diploma or the institution. Then the question is how to acquire these skills. One of the dilemmas of recent decades has been (a) "teaching of a foreign language" (Yes) or (b) "teaching in a foreign language (No!) Private schools that teach in a foreign language also seem to be more successful in teaching the foreign language. Families in middle income groups who cannot afford the high tuition fees charged by private schools, forced the ministry to have a new category of "Anatolian Schools" teaching some selected subjects like maths and sciences in foreign languages so that students will learn. Then, in the name of "equal opportunity", everybody is for an Anadolu College or Lyceé. Educators with some common sense further argue that teaching the Turkish language is just as important as learning a foreign Language. If foreign languages replace the mother tongue, will this not lead to a modern Madrasa? Having bitter memories of recent history, educators do not want to take this responsibility. Everybody agrees that mastering at least one foreign language is essential. Yet the method and techniques of teaching it have yet to be found or innovated, without sacrificing, the language of national instruction-Turkish. The popularity of private secondary school teaching a foreign language is so high that the "private classrooms" (dershaneler) of tutoring have already become a billion dollar business. But the "equal opportunity" principle is still dear and valid, Turks half ironically remark that "Everybody is equal but some are more so" (the upper one-fifth of the society gets 55% and remaining four fifths the 45% of the GNP). Among the cries for educational reform, those who can afford the tuition fees of private colleges teaching one or two foreign languages stand

better chances in the higher education placement exams, for admission to a foreign language university and finding a job waiting ready at graduation. This is but the classical "Socio-Economic-Status" paradigm: Good family background - good school - good education and success in life cycle. Many Turkish families aspire to break into this vicious cycle at some point or phase. So they send their children to tutoring classrooms but refuse the educational tax or paying a tuition in public school. The state, on the other hand, rightfully contends that though it is constitutionally responsible for free and compulsory basic education, the cost of secondary education, at least, should be shaved (lycee or college), and for tuition charges in higher education - public or private, established by nonprofit foundations. The constitution was recently amended to legitimize the dichotomy. (History of Turkish Education ,BOZKURT GÜVENÇ,Turkish Education Association, From Scholastic to Social Education (1950 to Present))

Current system of higher education

Higher education is defined as all post-secondary programs with a duration of at least two years. The system consists of universities (53 state and 23 foundation) and non-university institutions of higher education (police and military academies and colleges).

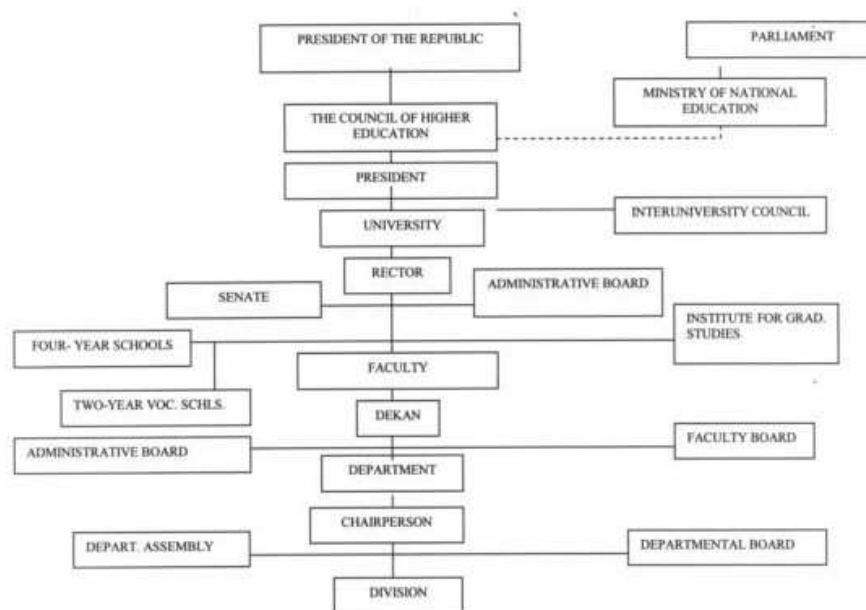
Admission to higher education is centralized and based on a nation-wide single-stage examination administered by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) every year. The center was established in 1974 and affiliated with the Council of Higher Education in 1981.

Each university consists of faculties and four-year schools, offering bachelor's level programs, the latter with a vocational emphasis, and two-year vocational schools offering pre-bachelor's (associate's) level programs of a strictly vocational nature. There are presently 468 types of bachelor's and 267 types of pre-bachelor's level programs operating in 2835 bachelor's and 3336 pre-bachelor's programs in universities. (Towards The European Higher Education Area,Bologna Process Template For National Reports 2004-2005)

Graduate-level programmes consist of Master's and Doctoral programmes, coordinated by graduate schools. Medical specialty training programmes equivalent to Doctoral level programmes are carried out within the faculties of medicine, university hospitals and the training hospitals owned by the Ministry of Health and the Social Insurance Organization.

The examination, named the Student Selection Examination (ÖSS), consists of verbal and quantitative parts. Candidates with scores between 105 and 120 points are offered a restricted choice of higher education programs. Placement of the candidate is based upon the composite score calculated by taking into account the score of the entrance examination as well as the high school grade-point average, normalized nationally using the success of the classmates of the candidate in the entrance examination and also using a factor which depends on the high school type and the program of the candidate.(The Council of Higher education of The Republic of Turkey, http://www.yok.gov.tr/english/index_en.htm ,The Turkish Higher Education System,Part 3 -Current Status)

You can also see organizational chart of The Turkish Education System in the table.

Organizational Chart Of The Turkish Education System**Turkish higher education and Europe**

Turkish Higher Education Council is working for adaptation to European Union's general education quality. During the Bologna Process students got many possibilities to be exchange students in 30 foreign countries. Exchange possibility (Socrates, Erasmus programme) gave us travel opportunities to Europe, international friends, new perspectives on an academic subject and life, confidence to live in another country etc. Also university lecturers have some possibilities with European adaptation process.

References

- <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/References/Education-system.htm>
Office Of The Prime Minister, Directorate General Of Press And Information, official web site
- History of Turkish Education Part 1, Bozkurt Güvenç, Turkish Education Association, Part II. From Tanzimat to Democracy: Hunderd Years, II.2. The Tanzimat Reforms (1839-1876)
- History of Turkish Education Part 2, Bozkurt Güvenç, Turkish Education Association, From Monarchy to Republic (1878-1923)
- History of Turkish Education Part 3, Bozkurt Güvenç, Turkish Education Association, Quest for Cultural Modernity: 1923-1950
- History of Turkish Education Part 4, Bozkurt Güvenç, Turkish Education Association, From Scholastic to Social Education (1950 to Present)
- Towards The European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process Template For National Reports 2004-2005
- The Council of Higher education of The Republic of Turkey, http://www.yok.gov.tr/english/index_en.htm, The Turkish Higher Education System, Part 3 Current Status