

WCETR 2013

New Education System in Turkey (4 +4 +4): A Critical Outlook

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Abstract

Education systems, which are one of the factors determining development levels of countries in many fields such as social, economic, scientific and technologic, etc., sometimes are subject to various changes in order to keep up with the requirements of the age, remain effective and improve themselves. Various changes have been made in Turkey recently with the purpose of making national education system more qualified and catching up with the standards of developed countries. With “Primary Education Law no 6287” adopted on 30 March 2012, a radical decision is made in our education system and put into practice. This law, which is known by public as 4+4+4 and made a sudden change in Turkish education system, has brought along many discussions. In this study, it is aimed that the impacts of 4+4+4 education system, which is created with the purpose of increasing the period of compulsory education in Turkey to the average of EU and OECD countries and providing a more qualified education environment to the students, are analysed since the time it has come up for the first time. Literature review method is used in the research and the reviews covered in the media, texts published by universities, unions and various organisations and articles reflecting the opinions of the domain experts regarding the new education system are analysed. This data is evaluated and a critical perspective is developed about the effectiveness of the 4+4+4 system.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of WCETR 2013.

Keywords: New education system, 4+4+4, Turkey

1. Introduction

Education, which is defined as the process of making intentional and terminal changes in an individual's behaviours by way of his life (Ertürk, 1972), is an important factor for the human life. Education does not only aim training the individual in the most equipped way, it also serves to the purpose of providing qualified labour to the country. Educated labour plays a role in development of societies in economic, social, technologic and scientific

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fields. In constantly changing and developing world, education systems are also subject to various changes to keep up with the requirements of the age, remain effective and improve themselves since the qualities that an individual who is expected to provide benefit to the country should have. Search for education systems has been a longstanding problem in our country for long years. Education problems are not only today's problems and they have a history in each country (OECD, 1996). In Turkish education history, a series of radical innovations have been made which created in the life of our nation especially after the Republic of Turkey is founded; however, in addition to not being able to achieve some of the targets, a series of defects have also emerged (Baloğlu, 1990; Akyüz, 2004, Gür and Çelik, 2009).

One of the most important reforms in Turkish education system has been transition to 8-year compulsory primary education. This law, which was discussed for the first time in 3rd National Education Council assembled on 2-10 December 1946, but enacted with National Education Basic Law no 1739 dated 14 June 1973, has been one of the greatest steps in our education system. However, implementation of 8-year compulsory primary education was limited to pilot primary schools. In following years, recommendations and pressure have been made to the Ministry of National Education from both academic and economic circles throughout the country (Erçelebi, 1997). Then the Grand National Assembly of Turkey has provided political support to extending the period of compulsory education and the period of primary education is extended to eight years with law no 4306 dated 16 August 1997. (ERG, 2012).

Although the effectiveness of eight-year compulsory primary education system has been increasing especially with the generalization of preschool education and radical changes in the curriculums made in 2004, a sudden change has been made in the law to be implemented in 2012-2013 academic year. Law proposal, which is named as "4+4+4 Law" and submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on 20 February 2012, was adopted on 30 March 2012 and enacted as "Law on Making Amendments on Primary Education Law" no 6287. It was published in the Official Gazette on 11 April 2012 and came into force. "4+4+4" education system, which was enacted suddenly and without any pilot implementation, extended compulsory education to twelve years and defined by the Minister of National Education of the time as a "paradigm shift" (Gençdal, 2012), has brought along many serious changes. This caused various discussions. It is seen that the public both supports and criticizes this law. The first section that support these arrangements has described abovementioned reforms, which they describe as "modern", as the requirement of the age. These circles, which approve "4+4+4" education system in terms of developmental features of children (Öztürk, 2012), vocational education (Öztürk, 2012) and equal opportunities in education (Ünal, 2012), have evaluated the practice as a "great step in education" (Erdoğan, 2012). According to the supporting section, 8-year compulsory primary education was a practice imposed during 28 February process and 8-year education was not offered in any other country continuously (Memurlar.net, 2012). The second section, which is against these reforms, has described the mentioned reform as a breakaway from secular and democratic line in education. They stated that this change tries to exclude irrevocable provisions of the constitution by dividing the education system by the hand of government (Demir, 2012), it will cause a deterioration in the schooling rates of girls in formal education (Uluğbay, 2012), it serves to deepen the discrimination among social classes and one of the parties which will be affected as a result of this practice will be teachers (Ural, 2013). The ones who oppose to the bill stated that eight year compulsory primary education should not be given up stating that the schooling rate (of especially girls) and average education period has increased and number of child brides and child labour has decreased following the arrangement in 1997. In addition, it has been stated that increasing the period of compulsory education to eight years is not a hurried decision in 1997 unlike the current law and it goes back to the 3rd National Education Council which was held in 1946 (ERG, 2012a).

2. What Did New Education System (4+4+4) Bring?

Although it has many dimensions, this system is mostly discussed because of schooling age, interrupted and compulsory education as 4 year primary, 4 year elementary and 4 year high school education, instead of 8-year compulsory primary education, elective courses, orientation towards selecting occupation at early ages and imam hatip elementary school dimensions.

In the previous system, it was essential that 69-80 month old children are enrolled to primary education. Although a legal change is not made regarding schooling age with the Law no 6287, with a circular published on 9 May 2012, it has been stated that children who completed 66 months as of 30 September 2012 will be enrolled to primary education and 60-66 month old children can start primary education if their parents want (Ministry of

National Education, Private Secretariat, 2012). Thus the official schooling age in Turkey is reduced down to 5,5 in line with the idea that an individual who starts education at an early age starts life one year early. Moreover, with this arrangement, medical reports to be taken from specialists or state hospitals are mandated to postpone schooling of children over 66 months. In addition, in that case it is required that the curriculums first grades and physical organisation of primary schools are changed and teachers are trained as to manage learning processes of 60-80 month old children simultaneously.

With drawing back the schooling age, concerns that the students will have to select occupations at an early age have occurred in the public. In addition, children graduated from primary schools now have the opportunity to continue imam hatip elementary schools. First of all, 9-10 ages is very early for vocational guidance. In vocational guidance of a child at an early age, neither he/she nor parents or experts can make the right decision. A healthy choice of profession is possible when the child knows his/her interests, abilities, values, characteristics, professions, training required by the professions, employment opportunities and conditions. Researches indicate that the attention of adolescents becomes determinant at 17-18 ages and changes constantly. Thus, the fact that vocational guidance is made in the final years of high school education in many countries, especially European countries is not a coincidence.

While it is expected in the new system that school types are diversified as a result of making vocational guidance along with elective courses, only imam hatip elementary schools are opened. Opening elementary schools of vocational high schools other than imam hatip is not mentioned in the circulars and regulations published. The Ministry of National Education (2012) has already stated that black propaganda is carried out in this matter, because vocational education will not be given in elementary schools, vocational education cannot begin at 9 years and this change is only made for establishing imam hatip elementary schools. The children, who graduated from primary school, will be able to continue to imam hatip elementary schools. According to them, none of the elementary schools except for imam hatip do not give vocational education and vocational education starts at ninth grade. However, we can say that guidance towards imam hatip elementary school will be early and parents of the children will have an impact of this decision. A child at that age did not complete the period in which he recognizes himself. His knowledge and interests about professions do not develop sufficiently and he is not aware of his abilities. Briefly, he does not have the competence to make a decision which will affect his whole life. Making such a wrong choice may cause bad results for both the student and the state in directly.

In addition, with elective courses at various stages, it is aimed that the expectations of citizens and students from education and their social and cultural demands are satisfied. Thus, if students have skills in sports, arts or any other field or if they want to improve themselves in these fields, they will have the opportunity from the fifth grade. However, the fact that it is said in the law that “Quran and Mohammed’s Life is given as elective course” but other courses are not mentioned has brought along another discussion. A paragraph especially related to these courses is not deemed appropriate by the people who think that religious education should be optional instead of elective with the concern that it may cause compulsion in the future and it has been emphasized that there should not be any incident which require selecting elective religion courses. Due to physical environment and/or limited human resources, schools can offer limited number of elective courses or schools may direct parents and students about selecting courses. This may cause that elective religion courses are not elective in the real sense and they will be compulsory elective courses.

With the new 4+4+4 education system, 8-year compulsory primary education is ended and the period of compulsory education is extended to 12 years as of 2012-2013 education year as 4 years primary school, 4 years elementary school and 4 years high school. With the implementation of this change, it is expected that problems caused by the fact that students at different age groups have to use the same places, this paves the way for incidents even such as sexual abuse, ending preliminary vocational guidance in elementary schools with continuous primary education (Öztürk, 2012) which are listed among the disadvantages of 8-year compulsory primary education will be reduced. The new system has reduced down the age range and enabled that primary schools provide education at separate buildings and children attending other schools (elementary and high school) are educated at separate buildings (MEB, 2012).

3. Impacts of the New Education System within One Year

When we look at the impacts of the regulations related to the schooling age, 60-66 month, 72 month and up to 83 month children starting school at the same time, in the same classroom and even at the same desks caused that

classrooms become overcrowded and schools adopted double education in addition to very important problems caused by teaching children at different ages in the same environment. In addition to not separating children according to their age groups in most of the schools, teaching 60-66-72-80 month old children in the same classroom caused problems in the implementation of first grade curriculum. It has been observed that children over 72 months get bored during games at school and the ones who had preschool education get bored in activities such as cut-paste and in addition to that, younger children could not use the scissors. It has been reported that there are students who come to school with baby food, call their classmates as “brother”, have difficulties in toilet habits, have difficulties in holding pencil and similar motor abilities due to the insufficient muscle development and fall asleep in the classroom because of intensive tempo and course hours (Eğitim-Sen, 2013). Interesting data is obtained as a result of the survey that Anadolu Eğitim Sendikası has carried out with 1867 first grade teachers between 5 April and 15 May 2013. According to this, 44 per cent of first grade students had to sit on desks, which are not appropriate for their length, 67 per cent of 60-66 month old, children have pissed themselves at least once, cried and caused serious distraction. While all of the students in higher age groups started reading in April, for the children younger than 66 months, this ratio is 18 per cent. While 65 per cent of teachers, who should have been trained as to manage learning processes of 60-80 month old children simultaneously, have stated that they are not trained when they are asked whether they are trained in relation to the change in the system and curriculum in the first grades, 31 per cent has stated that they were trained but it did not work and 4 per cent has stated that they were trained and it worked (Anadolu Eğitim Sendikası, 2013).

When we look at the impacts of the arrangements in the course schedules related to elective courses, it is interesting that the total number of courses in elementary schools did not increase significantly. While total number of courses in 6th, 7th and 8th grades was 30 in previous years, it is increased to 36 in 5th and 6th grades and to 37 in 7th and 8th grades with the increase in elective courses. It has been observed that the increase in course hours has affected schools which implement double education as morning and afternoon education negatively. Increasing course hours cause that students go to school at early hours in the morning and leave school late in the evening or reducing recess time down to five minutes (Eğitim-Sen, 2012).

In addition, selecting courses has turned into a process ruled by uncertainty for parents, students and schools as a result of the insufficient briefing related to courses at the beginning of 2012-2013 academic year. Schools had difficulties in preparing course schedules which contain elective courses because of limited time and limited number of classrooms and fulfilling the teachers who will teach elective courses. Human resources and physical opportunities are two main factors which determine the number of elective courses offered by the schools and which courses they can offer. Limited number of classrooms in schools required that the schools especially in the schools where double education is provided limit the elective course options. This situation has constituted an impediment on implementing elective courses as elective in the real sense and restricted the freedom of choice of the schools and students (ERG, 2012).

Schools have offered limited number of elective courses due to physical environment and/or human resources problems. This has caused those schools guided and even force parents and students about selecting courses. Especially the religious courses such as Quran and Mohammed's Life, which were told to be elective are not elective in the real sense and they are offered to students as compulsory elective courses. For example, in Diyarbakır, a first grade student in a high school, who is Christian and is exempt from Religious Culture and Ethics Course was told that he has to select one of the three Islamic elective courses (Basic Religious Information, Quran and Mohammed's Life) since no other elective course is opened, otherwise he would fail because he did not complete the required number of courses and the student was forced to select one of these courses (Protestant Churches Association, 2013). Similarly, in schools where only religious elective courses are opened, Alevi students have to take four religious courses with Religious Culture and Ethics course or there may be incidents where an Alevi perception is reflected to course books which does not represent them (Mutluer, 2013). Such incidents are important interventions both in terms of freedom of thought, religion or belief of both parents and children. The Ministry should take necessary measures to offer sufficient number of elective courses at schools with the purpose of securing students' freedom of religion and belief.

One of the most significant results of 4+4+4 arrangement in education is the significant increase in the number of imam hatip elementary schools and imam hatip high schools after separation of primary schools and elementary schools. When the students graduated from primary schools are able to continue to imam hatip elementary schools with the Law no 6287, elementary schools are divided into two as imam hatip elementary schools and elementary schools. This required that physical buildings which served as primary schools during compulsory primary

education are adapted for the implementation of the new education system. For that reason, it was necessary to decide whether the imam hatip elementary schools will be opened by transforming primary schools or using the physical places of imam hatip high schools. In 2012-2013 academic year, 1,099 imam hatip elementary schools were opened, 733 of which are independent and 369 of which are within the imam hatip high schools. Considering that the number of imam hatip elementary schools was 601 before 1998, it is seen that the number of schools this year is relatively high (ERG, 2012).

According to the study of Eğitim-Bir-Sen (2013) to identify the status and results of the 4+4+4 gradual education system, which completed one year; participants have stated that increasing the time of compulsory education has not caused any change in Anatolian high schools and imam hatip high schools. Vocational high schools are affected in a negative way in this process since general high schools are transformed into Anatolian high schools and Anatolian high schools accept limited number of students with an exam. It has been stated that there has been a significant increase in the number of students in vocational high schools and classrooms has become overcrowded. In addition to this, all of the managers and teachers of vocational high schools that participated in the study have stated that the students do not want to go to school, their motivation and readiness levels are inadequate. Along with this, it has been shared that these students are absent most of the time and dropout ratios are high. Again according to this study, it has been stated by most of the participants that more than one school in the same building or environment constitutes a significant problem. In some places, primary school, elementary school and imam hatip elementary school are in the same building or environment. The fact that purposes and weekly course hours of these schools are different causes problems in maintaining order and discipline.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Improvement moves, which have been realized gradually for a long time but gained momentum with the “4+4+4” education system are not independent from constant and rapid changes in the world for sure. However, this rapid and sudden change with the “4+4+4” education system has brought along various problems and criticism. Such a reform in education has gathered reaction on many platforms especially in the education circles since the time it has come up and until it is implemented. According to many people in education circles, current education system in our country does not function completely; there are significant deficiencies and defects and some changes are needed. However, does this new education system satisfy this need? It is apparent that many deficiencies have been observed in the past year and going to be observed in the new education system. Survey studies of various unions are indicators of this. This will not be possible with a sudden and unexpected education system which does not remedy the deficiencies of the current system, on the contrary drags it to new dead ends without any preliminary study, planning or pilot implementation, without considering cost benefit analyses, without considering the opinions of all kinds of shareholders who can contribute in education, without detailed academic studies and in which important changes that will determine the future of children in this country. Moreover, guiding children at primary school age to distant education is one of the biggest problems that this system will cause in the future. Education and teaching activities are carried out at school and it does not only consist of course books. Education and teaching are concepts which bring along socialization. For that reason, distant education practice should be given up within the framework of compulsory education and a different route should be determined in relation to this practice which may cause that girls do not go to school or increase the number of child brides or child labour. Defining schooling age as 66 months but requiring health report for the children who are not ready to start school should be given up. It is appropriate to decide whether the child should start school or not with the collaboration of parents and school. Considering the inadequacy of the number of current schools and classrooms and the problems caused by double education system, it should be focused on production of new schools and classrooms. Teachers should be employed in order to satisfy the need in elective courses and field teachers. Vocational guidance should not be made at early ages and an age range in which the student has reached maturity to make his own decisions should be chosen for this.

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