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Pros and Cons: Compulsory 12 year education reform in Turkey**Başak Kasa**

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Turkey has undergone two significant education reforms in the last two decades. In 1997, the compulsory education period was increased from five years to eight years with the unification of primary school (five years) and middle school (three years) and vocational middle schools were dismissed. In 2012, compulsory education was increased from eight years to discrete 12 (4+4+4) years. In this study, the opinions of two separate prospective teacher groups were taken before (from 2012 graduates), and after (from 2013 graduates) the new 4+4+4 system was initiated and trend analyses was carried out. Because of the cultural and ideological mosaic structure of Turkey, the changes that were found to be "positive" by some participants were found to be "negative" by others. It is possible to assert that the initial implementation of the new system has been rather problematic, yet the efforts to render it more effective still continue.

Keywords: Compulsory education; Pre-service teachers opinions; Trend study; Turkish education system; 4+4+4 education system

Education Reforms and Their Reflections

Developing countries such as Turkey, South Africa, Brazil and China implement educational reforms to be active players in the global world and to sustain their economic growth (Yüksel, 2014). Education is one of the most important factors determining economic, social and political development (Öztürk, 2005). For example, in South Africa, different educational reforms were implemented to build the future of the country, the political transformation in 1994 also affected education, where the 1995 White Paper for Education and Training (Department of Education (DoE), Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 1995:4) has emphasised equality and democracy in education (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009). Education has always been used to rebuild or shape the future purposefully (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009). Examining the historical process of educational reforms shows that the Turkish Education System is under the influence of the West, particularly in terms of curriculum (Akyüz, 1996). Throughout the Republican period in Turkey, many regulations were made and most of the imported curriculums failed to be successful since they were not in line with the history, culture and socio-economic structure of the country (Akpınar, Dönder, Yildirim & Karahan, 2012). Due to its geopolitical position, constituting a transition and junction point between Islamic countries on the one hand, and western culture on the other, reforms in education face quite different challenges than they face in other countries (Zmas, 2012). In the context of Turkey's efforts to join the European Union, it is possible to assert that modernisation efforts in education and other necessary fields involves some difficult to resolve issues. In this context, Turkey has undergone three significant educational reforms in the last two decades. These reforms and the controversies they brought about are examined herein below.

Education Reform in Turkey

In the secular Turkish Republic founded under the leadership of Atatürk after the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1923), madrasahs that gave religion-oriented education were abolished, and education levels were rearranged by means of the radical reforms made in the field of education, under the Law on the Unification of Education (Akyüz, 1996). With the 1924 constitution, the five year primary school that provided basic education was made compulsory, and education following primary school (middle school, high school and university) was maintained as optional. Furthermore, religious vocational schools were opened for those who wished to receive religious education after the primary school (Özdalga, 1999). The structure of schools in the Turkish Education System remained five years of compulsory primary school, three years of middle school and three years of high school until 1997. In 1997, compulsory education period was increased from five years to eight years, with the unification of primary school (five years) and middle school (three years), where vocational middle schools were dismissed, and only secondary education sections continued to operate. Eight years of continuous compulsory education made it possible for more children to become students, and about 3.5 million children who were to stop attending school after the Fifth Grade were kept within the education system (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, 2012). However, the fact that six year old First Graders, whose self-care skills have developed, and 14 year old Eighth Graders experiencing a period of sexual development, receive education in the same building and use the same sinks and canteens during the playtimes, has brought with it many problems (Örs, Erdoğan & Kipici, 2013). In addition, certain outcomes, such as the abolishment of the middle school sections of religious vocational schools, and the reduced coefficients calculated for vocational high school graduates for university admission exams, has caused some further criticism.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics' report (2012), pre-university education is divided into four stages, the first of which varies from four to six years. Extension of the period of compulsory education to eight years in 1997 brought with it some problems. With the aim of rendering the Turkish Education system democratic and flexible (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB), 2012), the term of compulsory education was increased from continuous eight years, to a discrete 12 years (4+4+4). Discrete education allows for the grouping of students on the basis of different curriculums and school type, throughout the period of their compulsory education. With this system, whose implementation commenced in the 2012-2013 educational year with the last amendments, the term of compulsory education was divided as four years of primary school (First, Second, Third and Fourth Grades), four years of middle school (Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grades) and four years of high school (Ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th Grades) (Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014).

This new implementation known by the public as the "4+4+4 Education System" brought about some reforms, such as having middle schools open either independent schools, allowing middle schools where different curriculums are followed, or opening religious vocational middle schools. Some elective courses were added in middle school and high school curriculums such as "The Koran" and "The Life of the Prophet". Also, since the schooling age was pulled down from six to five, the curriculum for teaching reading and writing was renewed and a game-focused orientation programme was prepared (MEB, 2012).

Some changes in the new organisation of the education system, on the other hand, caused some controversy among the public, as well as in-educational circles. For instance there has been criticism that the new structure was implemented without a pilot implementation, where in 2012 schooling age was pulled down from six years of age to five years of age (only one year later in 2013, it was once again decided to be 5,5 years of age); that significant emphasis was made on some elective courses ("The Koran" and "The Life of the Prophet"); that the students are made to continue middle school after the Fourth Grade; that the four year arrangement of the stages is not in line with children's developmental periods, and that Fourth Grade children (10 years of age) are taught in middle school, which requires abstract skills, while they are merely in the period of concrete operations (Bahtiyar-Karadeniz, 2012; Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, 2012; Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2012; Inal, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the 4+4+4 education system in line with the opinions of two different groups as the senior (Fourth) Grade students who attended to the Faculty of Education - Classroom Teaching programme in the educational years of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. In this context, our data collection tool consists of two questions:

- i. What are the positive aspects of 4+4+4 educational reform?
- ii. What are the negative aspects of 4+4+4 educational reform?

In 2012, when the 12-year compulsory education system (4+4+4) was voted in by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and amid controversy, prospective teachers who were attending the last year of education faculties graduated without having clear information on this new system. In particular, with the new law, the schooling age was lowered from six years of age to five years of age, causing concern that primary school teachers facing students for the first time would not have sufficiently developed skills. In this context, it is important to determine what the prospective teachers find positive and negative concerning the new system, because they will probably start their professional life in the 2012-2013 educational year, which is the first year of its implementation.

In addition, considering the fact that in the 2012-2013 educational year, as the first year of the implementation of the new education system, senior students attending to the Primary School Teaching Programme have completed their training in primary schools and therefore experienced the advantages and disadvantages of the new system, these students have learned how to cope with difficulties of the new system. As such, it is considered of value to receive their opinion on the 4+4+4 education system, since "educational change depends on what teachers do and think" (Fullan, 2001:77) and the school practicum that fills the gap between theory and practice has a critical role in the professional development of teachers (Tavil, 2014).

In this way, a result regarding the rate with which the hypothetical positive and negative aspects of the new system put forward to motivate the implementation of the system can be obtained before it is realised, can be spoken to from the perspective of prospective class teachers.

Method

Within the scope of the study, the opinions of two separate prospective teacher groups were taken before (from 2012 graduates) and after (from 2013 graduates) the new 4+4+4 system commenced and

trend analyses were carried out. Trend study or analysis is an approach, which provides the required data for curriculum planning, curriculum evaluation and policy development (Rosenberg, 1997), where the selected factor is repetitively examined across a certain timeframe, and on different samples (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This provides a dynamic perspective rather than a stable one, and enabling the estimation of future trends (Rosenberg, 1997).

Participants of the Study

The population of the study consisted of the prospective teachers who have attended the Fourth Grade of the Primary School Teaching programme of the Education Faculty of Inonu University in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 educational years. In this context, all the targeted participants were reached and the data was collected from a total of 286 prospective class teachers, 142 of whom attended the Fourth Grade in the 2011-2012 educational year, and 144 of which attended the Fourth Grade in the 2012-2013 educational year.

Data Collection Tool and Analysis

As the data collection tool the researchers used an open ended questionnaire and the participants were asked to state the positive and negative aspects of the new education system according to their own opinions. The Fourth Grade of the primary school teaching programme students filled this questionnaire in 20 minutes in the Turkish Education History course, at the end of the term. Data was analysed with the use of the Nvivo8 package software as per content analysis. The main objective of content analysis is to reach the concepts and

relations that can explain the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In line with the data, sub-themes belonging to the main themes were determined; two researchers carried out encoding separately, which were later compared. Frequencies were assigned to these encodings and content analysis was conducted.

In order to enhance the reliability of the study, direct quotations from participants' statements were used, where the prospective teachers who graduated in the 2011-2012 educational year (2012 graduates) were assigned the code 'F' (for first application of questionnaire), while those that graduated in the 2012-2013 educational year (2013 graduates) were assigned with the code 'S' (for second application of questionnaire). Later on, participant numbers were added.

Results

The opinions of the two separate groups of prospective teachers (2012 graduates and 2013 graduates) were examined under two main themes, viz. 'positive opinions' and 'negative opinions'. These main themes were further separated into the sub-themes of 'moving schooling age to an earlier age', 'renewal of the education system' and 'vocational education'.

Positive Opinions regarding the Prospective Class Teachers on 4+4+4 Educational Reform

The *positive* opinions of the prospective class teachers graduated in 2012 (before new educational system enforcement) and in 2013 (first year of enforcement of new educational system), related to the 4+4+4 education system are presented in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1 Positive opinions of the prospective class teachers about 4+4+4 educational reform

| Sub-theme | f (2012) | f (2013) | Categories | f (2012) | f (2013) |
|--|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Renewal of the Education System</i> | 265 | 65 | Extension of compulsory education to 12 years | 140 | 39 |
| | | | Changes in the curriculum | 74 | 18 |
| | | | Changes in the school system | 51 | 8 |
| <i>Vocational Education</i> | 141 | 32 | Early guidance to vocational education | 83 | 13 |
| | | | Increase in the importance of vocational schools | 22 | 15 |
| | | | Rectification of the coefficient problem for university entrance exam | 6 | 2 |
| | | | Opening of religious vocational schools | 12 | 2 |
| | | | Possibility to change education field* | 18 | - |
| <i>Lowering the age of schooling</i> | 75 | 63 | Early commencement of the education process | 40 | 31 |
| | | | Starting the professional life earlier | 15 | 20 |
| | | | Socialisation | 14 | 12 |
| | | | Development of language | 6 | - |

Note: * i.e. between the options of religious education or vocational education.

Sub-theme: 'Renewal of the education system'

Examining Table 1 shows positive opinions to be mostly concentrated under the title 'renewal of the education system'. Under this title the participants stated their positive opinions regarding the extension of compulsory education to 12 years, the changes in the curriculum, and the changes in the

school system. Also for the category 'Extension of compulsory education to 12 years', the participants stated their positive opinions on the introduction of gradual education, the increase in education level, the inclusion of the Fifth Grade within the scope of middle school, teacher-related gains and the increased attendance rate of female children. For

instance, concerning the inclusion of the Fifth Grade in middle school, while the participant F14 stated that *“the education provided will be better with earlier branching. Because the science course taught by the class teacher and the science course taught by the science teacher would not be the same”*; while S17 stated *“since class teachers are inadequate in field courses in further classes, attendance of branch teachers after the Fourth Grade will improve the quality of education”*. In a study conducted by Baykan, Çiftçi and Arıkan (2013) the inclusion of the Fifth Grade to middle school was reported to be the most positive reflection of the new 4+4+4 system. With regard to the teacher-related gains, the participants usually expressed positive opinions regarding teacher assignments, such as in the participant F11’s statement that *“by means of earlier schooling age, more classroom teachers will be assigned”* and S107 stated *“teachers will have to make an effort for their personal development”*. Concerning teacher-related gains, the participants usually expressed their positive opinions on teacher assignments, such as in the participant F11’s statement that *“by means of earlier schooling age, more classroom teachers will be assigned”*, where participant F102 meanwhile stated, *“with the inclusion of the Fifth Grade to middle school, more branch teachers will be assigned.”*

With regards to the category ‘changes in the curriculum’, the participants expressed their positive opinions about provision of elective courses, the orientation process for first graders, renewal of the curriculum, and the changes in examination system. Prospective teachers’ positive opinions on the ‘changes in the curriculum’ can be summarised with F15’s statement, namely that *“it is positive to have elective courses in the second phase of primary education”*; F14 meanwhile noted *“game play focused education will be carried out in the first grade, and therefore adaptation will be made easy”*; while F77 expressed that *“concerning the long-term goals of the country it may be useful, because curricula are also being improved”*. S35’s statement that *“the elective courses recently added to the curriculum are important particularly for religious education”* and S32’s statement that *“the adaptation process implemented in the initial grades before education has positive aspects for students”* and S2’s statement that *“weekly hours of science courses was increased”* may be set forth as examples.

As for the category of ‘changes in the school system’, prospective teachers expressed positive opinions regarding the separation of primary school and middle school buildings, the opening of new school buildings, and the possibility of finishing high school via distance education. The statement of participant F23 is noteworthy in this respect: *“it is a positive development that older children and*

younger children are not taught in the same environment”; while S24 noted: *“I believe in the separation of primary schools from other schools, where the prevention of the primary school students being negatively influenced by the higher grades is a positive development”*. In the study conducted by Demir, Doğan and Pinar (2013), all of the principal participants have stated that after the separation of primary schools and middle schools, the disciplinary problems experienced due to children of different age groups being together, were negated. Considering the findings of various studies, which indicate that primary school and middle school students placed together results in harm to the younger cohort (Dinler, 2011), that children of early childhood frequently get hurt in shared areas with children going through puberty (Kaya, 2011), and that younger children cannot even leave their classroom due to bullying (Demirtaş, 2011), the most viable solution of the 4+4+4 system may be seen as children of different age groups being educated in separate buildings (Memişoğlu & İsmetoğlu, 2013).

Sub-theme: ‘Vocational education’

There are five categories included under the ‘vocational education’ sub-theme of the Positive Opinions main theme. As it can be understood from these categories, prospective teachers expressed their positive opinions on early guidance for vocational education, increased importance of vocational high schools, rectification of the coefficient problem for university entrance exam, opening of religious vocational middle schools and the possibility to change fields. Example statements with regards to ‘early guidance for vocational education’, include participant F116’s statement that *“it is important to learn about and guide one’s skills as early as possible”* and S8’s statement that *“it enables students to determine their fields at an early age according to their skills”*. Since Turkey is among the The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, where the proportion of the population below 15 years of age is considerably high, it is important to make sure that these children are prepared properly for their future education and profession (OECD, 2013). As a matter of fact, in Germany likewise, the application which evaluates the students in terms of their level of success at the end of the Sixth Grade and guides them to either stay at the same school or attend to another vocational school, aims to enable students to transfer to schools of higher levels and facilitates students’ transition to vocational education in order to meet the ever growing demands of the business world (Gultekin, 1998).

With regard to the ‘increase in the importance of vocational schools’, F120 stated, *“the need for intermediate staff in industry will be met as a result*

of more importance attached to vocational high schools”, while S109 stated “students are now free to make choices concerning their lives”.

With regards to the ‘rectification of the coefficient problem for university entrance exams’, participant F51 stated that “the inequality of coefficients calculated for university admission exams was negated”.

Sub-theme: ‘Lowering the age of schooling’

As for the moving schooling age to an earlier age sub-theme under positive opinion, there are four categories. Prospective classroom teachers expressed their positive opinions on the early commencement of the education process, the early start of professional life, as well as the social development and language development categories. Concerning ‘early commencement of the education process’, F109 stated: “starting to go to school earlier means to get adapted earlier”, while S21 stated: “children that develop earlier due to their individual differences are allowed to utilize the educational opportunities earlier”. S48 made the following positive statement regarding socialisation: “social harmony and starting to communi-

cate with others at earlier ages is a positive development”.

Concerning the ‘early start of professional life’, F111 stated that “students will finish their school at an earlier age and thus will start to work also earlier”. With regards to ‘social development’, F19 stated that “social development of students will start earlier”. With regards to ‘language development’, F2 stated that “facing stimulants at early ages expedites the development of language”, while F133 stated that “proper use of Turkish is established at an earlier age”.

Negative Opinions regarding the Prospective Class Teachers on 4+4+4 Education System

The negative opinions of prospective class teachers regarding the 4+4+4 education system was also divided into the same sub-themes, namely ‘lowering the age of schooling’, ‘renewal of the education system’ and ‘vocational education’, each with several sub-categories. The negative opinions of the prospective class teachers who graduated in 2012 and in 2013 concerning the 4+4+4 education system are presented in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2 Negative opinions of the prospective class teachers about 4+4+4 education system

| Sub-theme | f (2012) | f (2013) | Categories | f (2012) | f (2013) |
|---|----------|----------|--|----------|----------|
| <i>Renewal of the Education System</i> | 338 | 173 | Extension of compulsory education to 12 years | 193 | 113 |
| | | | Changes in the school structure | 90 | 25 |
| | | | Changes in the curriculum | 55 | 35 |
| <i>Lowering of the age of schooling</i> | 207 | 214 | Early commencement of the education | 112 | 94 |
| | | | Unsuitability with developmental traits | 82 | 75 |
| | | | Keeping mixed age groups together | 13 | 45 |
| <i>Vocational Education</i> | 48 | 25 | Early choice of profession | 23 | 13 |
| | | | Guidance to vocational education | 23 | 10 |
| | | | Opening of religious vocational middle schools | 2 | 2 |

Sub-theme: ‘Renewal of the Education System’

There are three categories under the sub-theme ‘renewal of the education system’. At the first category ‘extension of compulsory education to 12 years’, prospective teachers stated their negative opinions on ‘teacher-related problems’, the ‘ambiguity of the system’, the ‘pre-school education becoming of secondary importance’, the ‘inclusion of the Fifth Grade to middle school’ and the ‘introduction of a 12-year education’. As for some examples of the negative opinions the prospective teachers had, for the teacher-related problems F106 stated “we were not raised according to this system; they will have to provide us in-service training”. Social and political reasons as well as teachers not being informed sufficiently can impede curricular reforms. For example, the curriculum update project in South Africa, known as Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), was widely found to be problematic in terms of both not providing in-

service training to teachers, and the teacher education programmes not including sufficient information (Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014). In the current study, S113 stated that “we are not getting assigned. Many class teachers have simply become redundant”. With the term of primary school being shortened from five years to four years, some class teachers have become redundant. Due to this, it was reported that the majority of teachers are not satisfied with the renewed system, and that their degree of professional motivation fell (Ekiz, Altun & Siyambas, 2013).

Concerning the ambiguity of the system, F13 stated “the public was not adequately informed”, and S28 stated “it is quite thought-provoking that the system was started to be implemented without any preliminary application or implementation in pilot schools”. Prospective class teachers' most important criticism is that the new education system was initiated without conferring with all the relevant stakeholders (Bahtiyar-Karadeniz, 2012).

Because Turkey has an overly-centralist education system when it comes to the chain of applications (Fretwell & Wheeler, 2001; OECD, 2013).

On the subject of the reduced importance attached to pre-school education, F1 stated that *“making pre-school education non-compulsory is a negative development”*, while concerning the inclusion of the Fifth Grade to middle school, F107 asked *“how will branch teachers teach the Fifth Graders, who are still in the phase of concrete (rather than abstract) learning”*, while S117 stated that *“branch teachers are not always able to go down to the level of Fifth Graders”*. Considering the findings of a study that compare the children that attend the Sixth and Seventh Grades in primary schools and in middle schools in the USA, the middle school students experienced disciplinary problems much more frequently (Cook, MacCoun, Muschkin & Vigdor, 2008) where the possibility of being unsuccessful in middle school increases in cases where the duration of primary school education is shortened (Bedard & Do, 2005), the positive contribution of the eight-year continuous education in educational terms cannot be overlooked.

For the introduction of the 12-year education, F130 stated that *“some regions in our country cannot cope with 12 year compulsory education”*, while S138 stated that *“division of the levels (4+4+4) is not in line with developmental processes”*.

In the second category, ‘changes in the school structure’ the prospective teachers expressed their negative opinions on the lack of infrastructure and the distant high school education. As for exemplary statements, F135 stated that *“the present schools are not ready for this system”* and S25 stated that *“the equipment in schools is too large for First graders, due to their young age”*. In the study conducted by Memişoğlu and İsmetoğlu (2013), it was reported that school executives consider the lack of infrastructure (provision of buildings, classrooms etc.) to be the most important problem in the application of 4+4+4 system.

When it came to the third category of ‘changes in the curriculum’, the prospective teachers expressed their negative opinions on the introduction of elective courses and the renewal of the curricula. For the introduction of elective courses, F117 stated that *“it will be the parents who will pick the elective courses”*, while S30 noted *“the courses introduced as elective courses aim to reflect certain ideologies to young generations, and therefore, prevent Turkish society from reaching the level of modern civilisations”*. Concerning the renewal of the curriculum, F50 has stated *“the curriculum should be prepared once again, which means a significant loss of effort and time”*, while and S128 stated, *“first grade courses resemble the*

pre-school period”.

Sub-theme: ‘Lowering the age of schooling’

The sub-theme ‘Moving schooling age to an earlier age’ includes three categories. As for some of the examples of the negative statements made by the participants, for ‘early commencement of the education’ process, F1 stated *“the children will start school before playing enough”*, while S121 stated *“children of different ages make teachers’ jobs harder”*.

Concerning the ‘developmental traits’ of children, F94 stated *“starting school before reaching sufficient mental maturity causes children to feel unsuccessful”*, and S10 stated *“since the students start school at early ages, their muscular development is not yet completed and they fall behind the seven year-olds”*. Some children might feel diffident, because in the first implementation year of this new system, there were two different age groups placed together in the First Grade of primary school, where one group consisted of 60-66 months, according to new regulations, while another group consisted of 66-80 months. These children showed different levels of cognitive, affective and psychomotor ability.

With regards to ‘keeping mixed age groups together’, F13 stated *“five and a half years old and seven-year-old children will be in the same classes”*, while S127 stated that *“while teachers try to adapt to small children, seven year olds fell significantly behind”*. Concerning the decrease in schooling age from seven to 5,5 years of age which saw implementation from 2012, it was determined that in comparison with older children, children of 60-66 months of age were found to be less developed, both emotionally and physically; that they were not ready to start school; that their adaptation and academic performance in school was weaker; that they have difficulty in terms of following the rules, self-care skills, and using their fine motor muscle skills; and it was thus concluded that it is likely that these children experience lack of self-confidence, and as a result, develop a negative attitude towards the school (Baykan et al., 2013; Ekiz et al., 2013).

Sub-theme: ‘Vocational Education’

Under the last sub-theme of ‘vocational education’, there are three categories. While concerning the category of ‘early choice of profession’, F111 stated that *“vocational education at young ages may cause regret in following years”*, and S100 stated that *“early choice of profession may cause regrets in the future”*.

With regards to the category of ‘guidance to vocational education’, F131 stated *“it will be the families that select the fields”*, while S48 stated that *“the fact is that a choice of vocation is made before*

getting to know the fields of interest and skills of children (at 10 years of age), and where this is rather left to the parents instead of the children, there are negative outcomes”.

For the category of the ‘opening of religious vocational middle schools’, F21 stated that “the numbers of religious vocational schools may increase excessively”, where S85 stated that “the emphasis given to religious education is contrary to secularism”. As for those authors who find the system rather ideological, they argue that some of the newly introduced applications do not cohere with the founding values and principles of the Republic of Turkey (Bahtiyar-Karadeniz, 2012), characterising the new law as “stillborn” (Güven, 2012).

Conclusion and Suggestions

Educational change is sometimes highly problematic, according to Fullan (2001:3), “one person claims that schools are being bombarded by change; another observes that there is nothing new under the sun. Making a certain judgment concerning the new 12-year (4+4+4) compulsory education is quite difficult on the sole basis of the prospective class teachers’ opinions about the system.” In fact, examining Table 1 and Table 2 for the prospective teachers that graduated in 2012 and in 2013, shows that the specific changes found positive by some participants were found negative by others, which can be accounted for by the fact that Turkey plays host to abounding ideological differences. In order to understand the causes of this situation, one should keep in mind the fact that Turkey resembles a mosaic of many different colours, in the way that it embodies many different perspectives and ideas in social, cultural, ideological and political terms. In addition, it should also be noted that teacher candidates’ personal beliefs and differences of perception with regards to ethics have an effect on their perspective towards education (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014). Examining the opinions of the prospective teachers that graduated in 2012, that is, when the 4+4+4 system had not yet been initiated, shows that the encodings belonging to negative opinions (f = 338) was higher than that of positive opinions (f = 265) under the theme of the *Renewal of the Education System*, where most of the opinions – whether positive or negative – were made on the extension of compulsory education to 12 years. Meanwhile, most of the supporting statements were related to the transition from continuous education to discrete education, where the point that received the most criticism was the fact that the new education system would decrease the number of teacher assignments to be made. With regard to the changes in the curriculum, while the introduction of elective courses received the most support, the point that received the most criticism was that only elective

courses with religious content were emphasised. In terms of the change in the school system, separation of primary school and middle school buildings received the most support, while the inability to rectify the issue of inadequate infrastructure received the most criticism. Under the theme of *vocational education*, the frequency of the positive opinions (f = 141) is higher than that of negative opinions (f = 48). While guidance to vocational education was the point that was considered to be the most positive, most of the criticisms were related to the choice of profession at an early age. This is resonant with European educational policy discussions over the past 20 years, which has considered at length how it might be possible to create closer links between school life and working life (Griffiths & Guile, 2004). Investment in people can be noted to be the most profitable investment, since the return speed of investments in education are ultimately higher than the return speed of investments in physical capital (Öztürk, 2005). Additionally, all European countries have attempted to come up with curriculum innovation projects to bridge the gap between these two spheres of life (Griffiths & Guile, 2004).

In the theme *Lowering the age of schooling* the frequency of negative opinions (f = 207) was determined to be much more than that of positive opinions (f = 75). Under this theme, the greatest amount of both positive and negative feedback was given on the early commencement of the education process. According to Slavin (2013), children develop more complex thinking skills and social abilities when they start school. At the same time, this period corresponds to Ericson’s fourth stage of success vs. inferiority (Sokol, 2009), where, if children experience failure during this period, they can suffer from lack of self-confidence at the later education levels (Senemoğlu, 2005). The prospective class teachers who did not still graduate in 2013, where the 4+4+4 system began to be implemented, completed their traineeship during this period, and had the chance to observe the advantages and disadvantages of the practical implementation of the system. Accordingly, the opinions of these participants who graduated in 2013 may present more realistic clues, because participants who graduated in 2012 stated their assumptions before the implementation of the new system.

It was however observed that the opinions of these group of prospective teachers were generally in line with the opinions of the prospective teachers who graduated in 2012. It can be understood from this point that the assumptions of prospective teachers who graduated in 2012 are prophetic, because they could see the positive and negative effect of educational change before implication. Lowering the age of schooling was criticised in both of the years as not being suitable to children’s

developmental traits, the prospect of children of mixed groups of age being educated together in the same school environment was only criticised by the 2012 graduate prospective teachers. This is due to the fact that, at the end of the first year of implementation (2012-2013), age of schooling was once again increased from 60 to 66 months.

Another significant aspect responded to in detail in the 2012 questionnaire, received less of a response in 2013. There are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, it may have stemmed from the limitations that accompany an open-ended questionnaire. It may be the case that participants may be unwilling to write detailed answers, or questionnaires were filled out hurriedly (Cohen et al., 2007). Secondly, the new education system was initially very popular in the mass media in 2012, before the implementation of system, where in 2013, on implementation, this popularity had somewhat decreased. Thus, the discussion of the new education system may have faded from the participants' agenda.

It is possible to assert that the initial implementation of the new system has been rather problematic, yet the efforts to render it more effective still continue. Although it is being criticised in pedagogical and ideological terms, considering the fact that obtaining the desired results from education system reforms in a rather short period such as two years is not really possible, (e.g. higher scores in global exams, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) etc., resurrection of vocational schools), monitoring the effects of reform may be necessary in the long term. The reactions of stakeholders to educational changes in the world are among the most important reasons for developing new educational policies (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015), and educational reforms can be seen to have effects that extend beyond individual country borders. Investigating these reforms and their results can be instructive for other developing countries and countries that experience similar periods of political conflict (Çelik & Kasapoğlu, 2014).

Note

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