

A Qualitative Study On Changes Of Educational Values Among Teacher*

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate both the positive and negative changes in the aims and practices of current schools and, in addition, identify teacher values that have influenced the Turkish educational system from the early years of the Turkish Republic till now. With this in mind, a set of semi structured open-ended questions were directed to 50 retired teachers in Ankara, Samsun, and Çorum. Questions aimed to identify the comparative views and thoughts on education, living conditions, and teaching objectives between 1940 and 2006. The information for eight study problems were listed, grouped and summarized in ten-year sessions. For descriptive purposes, Microsoft Excel version 7.00 was used in order to provide frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations of the data for the first two questions. The answers to the remaining six questions were categorized and conceptualized line by line for each respondent. According to the results, there have been noteworthy changes on the teachers' perceptions regarding the values, such as the goals of education, human rights, participation, productivity, creativity, and critical thinking over time. In addition, old photographs, memories, diaries and letters that belong to the participating retired teachers were used as the study materials. As the result, the emerging themes were summarized in order to demonstrate the changes in the teacher values over the years, from the early days of the Republic to today.

Keywords

Values, Change in Values, Democracy, Equality, Human Rights, Participation.

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The field of education had its shares from the overwhelming changes that the Republican state in Turkey had to go through. The Turkish Republic has turned to 86 years old in 2008. From the Ottoman Empire days to the Republic days, many things have changed in the country, including the educational system. From then to now, Turkey has evolved from a gender-segregated education to co-education, Arabic numbers and alphabet to Latin numbers and alphabet. The Republican schools also had a strong faith on religion-segregated education and this was one of the most drastic changes came with the new regime.

Education in current times is surely very different from the days of our grandfathers. However, one may wonder how different is the educational values taught to our parents compared to the ones now or whether there has been an improvement over time. The teachers that were employed during the early times of the Republican period are now retired. What do they think about the changes in the values taught at schools over the years? According to these teachers, in what values there have been changes over the years, if any?

John Dewey focused on education by saying “*education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.*” According to Nelson Mandela, “*education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world.*” These quotes emphasize the importance of education as a medium for social change. The American example also proves the importance of education in harboring people from different languages, religions, and cultures in order to construct a multicultural nation. In this sense, in order to provide the required social changes, one needs to reflect on the pioneer changes first in education system. Clark (1940) proposes education as an effective tool for social change. According to him, education facilitates technological improvement and as a result, social structure changes accordingly.

As all social organizations, education is also a sub-system of society and it is closely affected by the changes in the society. In the process of change, the changes that are forced on to the society by educational systems will force the educational systems to change accordingly. The role of teachers who are the main work force in educational systems is undeniable. In order to create social change through education, there is a great need to make changes in the struc-

ture of the teacher preparation programs. Again, every change in the social structure will closely affect the teachers and educational organizations for teacher preparation (Richardson, 2002).

Since the days of the Ottoman Empire's last century, there have been efforts to improve the educational system in the country. In 1870, teacher preparation schools were opened to prepare teachers for girls only elementary and middle schools (İçli, 1997). These schools were opened in many Ottoman cities such as Bagdad, Adana, Beirut, Damascus, Halep, and Trabzon in a fifteen year period (Koçer, 1991). When these changes were compared to the ones in European and American countries, it was also seen that it took a lot of time and effort to have equal rights in education for women and men. For example, fifty percent of American universities were admitting only male students in 1870 (Riordan, 1994). According to Kermes (1820), Boston primary schools started to admit girls in 1789 while it took 31 years longer for high schools to admit girls (Kermes, 2004). In the same ways, only 25% of student population was females in the 1939s England (Dyhouse, 1995).

Considering the Turkish Republic's little over a century history, Turkish educational system have had many revolutionary changes. In a few decades, from technical education to teacher education many schools were opened and the number of schools and universities increased rapidly (Akkutay, 1993). Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Turkish Republic, valued education as a force for social change and emphasized how important teachers were in this mission during many of his public addressess (Akyüz, 2004; Sağ, 1986; Sağ, 1990). John Dewey was invited to Turkey by Atatürk in 1924. Dewey's visit had great influence on Turkish Educational system and consequwntly his books (Dewey, 1921; Dewey 1922; Dewey 1928) were translated into Turkish. In many ways, the influence of Dewey' pragmatic education can easily be seen in Turkish education system. "Village Institutudes" called as "Köy Enstitüleri" in Turkish can be given as an example to Dewey's influence on Turkish education system. These were teacher preparation schools, located in the villages to help educate the society (Başgöz, 1996). İsmail Hakkı Tonguç and Hasan Ali Yücel, the two influential Turkish educators from the Deweyian school, were the founders of these pragmatic schools. According to Tonguç (1947), a village teacher

should be a competent teacher. In addition, he/she needs to be effective in the beliefs of the society and also in its social and economic life. Because of the problems in the application process, these schools were closed in 1953; however, by the time they were closed, 17341 (1308 female and 15943 male) teachers have already been graduated from these schools (Çetin & Gülseren, 2003).

In addition, “people houses” were opened in 1932 to educate people in their own environments but these were also closed in 1951 (Yaşar, 2008). After a long debate on whether the religious education should be provided by the state in middle schools and high schools, religiously based schools were opened in the 1950s (Sağ, 1986). At the same time, with the start of Marshall, students were sent abroad for higher education. Along with many schools, teacher education programs were opened in many big cities of the country (Akkutay, 1993).

Starting the 1960s, free five year elementary education became mandatory for every citizen. The stipends were started to be given to the ones who were in need in higher education. There were also preparations to open schools for special education (Başgöz, 1995).

Method

This is a phenomenological study of the changes in educational values, if any, according to the teachers’ views. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2005) phenomenological research helps the researcher focus on the issues and understand the phenomena in depth. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the findings from semi structured interviews conducted to see whether there were differences on teacher views on the educational values over six decades.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was the retired teachers who live in Ankara, Çorum, Denizli, and Samsun in Turkey. The participants of the study were 50 retired teachers, selected through snowball sampling. In order to reach these teachers, a meeting was organized in retired teacher organizations and teachers were asked to give communication information of the oldest retired teacher they have known. With this way, 62 retired teachers were identified and thro-

ugh phone calls, individual meetings were arranged. Fifty teachers that showed up at the appointments were made up the sample of the study. In the meetings, first, these teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to deliver the semi-structured interview form along with related materials such as photographs, diaries, letters, and memories after they have assured anything they submit would be returned right after they were reproduced for the study. Of these 50 teachers, 14 were males (28%) and 36 were females (72%). The age range of this sample was from 47 to 93 years old. All of the attendees reported that they had worked in government schools. Among the attendees, the minimum service time in the Ministry of Education was 20 years. The minimum service time was 38 years either as a teacher or as a principal. Four of the attendants reported that they started working sometime between 1940 and 1950, 18 between 1960 and 1970, 16 between 1970 and 1980, and 12 between 1980 and 1990. Two of the attendees retired sometime between 1970 and 1980, six between 80 and 90, 22 between 1990 and 2000, and 20 reported that they were retired after 2000.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview form was designed as a qualitative data collection tool in this study. According to Avcı (2008), through this way, it is possible to withdraw similar answers to the same questions. In order to improve its validity, a detailed literature review focused on the Turkish Education history was conducted and possible items were formed in the light of this review. With a group of ten teachers some of whom were retired teachers and some were still in service, the first draft of the items was constructed. Next, a focus group study was conducted with a group of graduate students in educational sciences and the items were discussed in order to make sure that they meant what they were purposed to ask. After consulting the view of the area specialists, the statements that were going to be directed to the study group were improved. Three Turkish language specialists offered their views about the form regarding its language. They were asked to write down their understanding of each statement. In the light of the feedback gathered, the form was reconstructed and a piloting of the form took place on a small sample of teachers. After the piloting, the final changes were made to the form

and the resulting form was given to every attendant in the same way. Observation forms were numbered in order to make sure that they would be presented in the sample only once. In the application process, one of the researchers submitted the interview form to 50 retired teachers who kept their appointment in Ankara, Samsun, Çorum, and Denizli. For reliability purposes, it was decided that the same researcher perform all of the coding.

Data Analysis

In 1940-1950 and 1950-1960 sessions, there were just a few participants and because of their limited validity; they were not included in the final count of the terms and themes. The data were entered into Microsoft Excel version 7.00. The statements were coded in 10-year sessions. By the use of list technique, the frequency of similar statements for the same decade was counted. The answers to the same questions coming from the different decade groups were compared in order to see whether there were changes in the values over time. It was possible to graph the results in the first two questions because the categories were limited and there were not too many ideas other than provided in the questions (question 1 and 2). There were no set themes provided for the respondents to select from in the rest of the questions. Therefore, there were too many different themes that emerged and it was hard to conceptualize. For these questions (3,4,5,6,7, and 8) the categorizing (coding) and contextualizing strategies were applied together and the results are provided in tables.

Results

Democracy, Human Rights, Equality, and Participation Values in the Turkish Educational System

According to the findings, the 1980s were the term that values related to democracy, human rights, equality, and participation in the Turkish educational system were felt the least. The results indicated that there was a speedy increase in the place of these values in the Turkish educational system in immediately following years. Globalization and efforts in the process of being a part of the European Union were given as the reasons for this increase.

Views on Creativeness, Productivity, and Critical Thinking Values over Time

The participants indicated that creativity and productivity values were expressed more in the 1960s and 1970s. There was a rapid decrease in these values starting in the 1970s. According to the participants, the economical problems in the 1980s also played part in this persistent decrease. Because of the economical crises in the country, people were persuaded to go into the areas where they can provide economic stability for their families. Again, participants reported that this forced-choice created individuals who do not like what they do, who were low in productivity and far from creativity. Participants' concerns after the 2000s have shifted from the sadness over the decrease in the values on creativity and critical thinking to the worries for the nation's future. Persistently, they have repeated the need for empowering these values in education once again.

Interestingly, but not surprising, there was no report on critical thinking for the 1960s, probably because of the military coup of the 1960s. A rapid decrease for the 1980s and a gradual increase from that point to the 2000s were reported in the importance of critical thinking in the Turkish educational system.

The Change in the Acquired Main Skills by Students in the Turkish Educational System

In the 1940s and 1950s, it was crucial to educate students as strong nationalists, self-efficient, and creative persons. They were also expected to possess a genuine interest in reading and writing skills. Starting the 1960s, even though the content was similar with the 1940s and 1950s, there was a change in the order. In addition, there was an emphasis on the productivity, creativity, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. While the 1970s were reported as the years that being self-expressive, possessing good writing and reading skills, having a universal point of view, occupational and technical skills, being productive and creative were pointed out frequently, in the 1980s, citizenship education, competencies in academic areas, a special interest in mathematics and science-centered education were in interest. While the teachers were expressing the need for the people who obeyed the society's general rules in the 1980s, they reported the importance of teaching students who co-

uld tolerate other's ideas and apply critical thinking skills into their lives in the 1990s. This change can be seen as the consequences of the social and political changes in the country and its effects on people. According to the participants, the values in education for the year 2000 are to have students, directed to occupations that they have interest in, who value the importance of freedom of thinking, and possess critical thinking skills and modern values.

Views on Discipline-related issued in Turkish Education

According to the findings of this study, corporal punishment, force, and respect-based discipline were reported as the way discipline issue was dealt with in schools from the 1940s to 1990s. After the 1990s, there was a gradual shift toward counseling, persuasion, and love-based respect to deal with this issue. The concepts of student rights and family-school partnership have also been heard more often again with the start of the 1990s.

The Level of Importance Given to Teacher, Student, and Parents' Expectations in Educational Organizations

In the 1940s, the country's expectations from teachers, students, and parents were emphasized more. Starting with the 1980s, teachers' expectations has started being an issue; student and parents' expectations also got more attention with the 1990s and after the year 2000, teachers' expectations has started to get its deserved attention.

Students' Expectations from Educational System and Teachers

According to the participants, students' general expectations until the 1970s were to get to know the world better through education and to be enlightened according to needs of the day. With the 1970s, these expectations were shifted towards to be able to get a job and become a civil worker in the government sector. In the 1980s and 90s, most students started to come to schools with the expectations of earning a diploma and succeeding in the national examinations. According to the participant teachers, this was the result of the changes in our educational system and the entrance exams going on almost in every area of education. However, the teachers reported that the recent changes in education had a positive influence on students through directing them to improve their talents.

The Socio-Economic Level of Teachers

According to the participant teacher, in the 1940s and 50s, country was poor and just like everybody else in government service, the teachers' wages were also inadequate. Despite the lower wages, teaching profession was one of the most respected occupations in the society in those days and that made a huge change.

With the start of the 1960s, teachers' reputation has decreased in the society. Participants gave two reasons for this decrease: The first was the quick fall of the teachers' wages in the 1980s and the second was the attainment of some incompetent teachers after a short period of education. According to participants, the teachers' statue has been too low in recent years and the lower payment was the main reason. The periods with sufficient pay were reported as the decades from 1960 to 1970 and 1970 to 1980. Participants stated that they believed that as the teacher' wages were increased; the prestige of the occupation would become more popular. Because of this, education faculties will draw better students' attention and the quality of the educational system and the social status of teachers will increase as well.

Pros and Cons of Educational System

According to the participant teachers, from the 1940s till today, freedom, interest in students, teachers and parents' expectations, and the technological competencies have increased, while there was a decrease in students' sense of responsibility and teachers' reading, searching, planning, and inspection habits. Participants reported positive views on education for the decades between 1960-1970 and 1970-1980. The most criticized decades were the decades of 1950-1960 and 1980-1990.

Discussion

The study has shown that there has been a strong change in values in the Turkish educational system over the years. In the 1960s, while there was not much interest in democracy, human rights, participation, and equality, with the start of the 2000s, these values have been taken tremendous attention. Creativity, productivity, and critical thinking have also obtained substantial attention since the

1990s. As an interesting point, creativity and productivity values have been reported by many participants consistently in the 1940s. This can be the result of teacher preparation programs in the 1940s. The skills that were expected to be acquired by students have also changed over the years. While the citizenship education was in the first place in the 1940s, self-expression and free thinking became in demand after 2000. As far as the discipline issue goes, corporal punishment, force, and respect-based discipline transformed itself into the school-family empowerment based discipline. When it comes to the teacher, student and parent expectations, there was a shift from country's expectations from people to people's expectations from government. When the teachers were asked about how happy they were economically and socially, a consistent unhappiness among the participant teachers came to our attention from their lower wages except the period between 1960 and 1970. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, these lower paychecks were accommodated by the respect toward the occupation in the society. Students' expectations from their education were reported as being a civil worker in government force and being able to write and read in the 1940s. Over the years, these were not enough to land a job. Therefore, earning a diploma, and succeeding in national examinations have become students' new expectations from education.

In this study, the answers to eight open-ended questions given by 50 retired teachers on the issues such as human rights, equality, creativity, discipline, and expectations from educational system have been summarized by thematic coding. The answers by each respondent were open-coded line by line for each question. Through the analysis, it was expected to have a picture of the value change in education area over about the last seven decades. Small samples are known as threats to external validity and generalizability of the qualitative studies. Even though the sample size may seem small in the current study, because of the qualitative nature of the study, the extensive time was required to analyze and synthesize the answers and the sample was hardly manageable considering the depth and width of the study. It may also seem as another disadvantage that the sample was drawn only from a few cities in the country, namely Ankara, Samsun, Çorum, and Denizli. However, since the participating retired teachers were worked in a rotation system in

the Ministry of Education schools, they have worked all over the country. Therefore, this was not thought to be a serious threat to the current research.

Through this research, the changes in teacher values in the Turkish educational system over the years were summarized. A study with a similar methodology can be conducted on other occupation groups in order to discover students' views on the issue of change in values over the time.

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