

# “Turkish Modernization,” Democracy, and Education: An Analysis from Dewey’s Perspective

*Seçkin ÖZSOY\**

## **Abstract**

Dewey is an important representative of the libertarian education movement, which has its roots based on the values of the enlightenment. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between “Turkish modernization” and education from Dewey’s perspective. In the paper, the place and effect of Dewey in the Turkish pedagogical vision was analyzed within a wider historical context such as the “modernization problematic.” The characteristic of the “Turkish modernization,” which, at the same time, comes out as a tendency to become an education project, constituted the reason for this approach to the issue. This analysis relating to the “Turkish modernization” from the perspective of Dewey, who is a democracy philosopher, was inevitably regarding how much room this project gives to libertarian and democratic values in education. In the study, it was concluded that there was an irreconcilable conflict between the values that “Turkish modernization” is based on which also constitutes the reference framework of the education system and the libertarian and democratic values Dewey advocates.

## **Key Words**

Turkish Modernization, Democracy, Education, John Dewey.

\* *Correspondence:* Assist. Prof. Dr., Seçkin Özsoy, Ankara University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Policy and Administration, 06590 Cebeci-Ankara / Turkey  
E-mail: sozsoy@education.ankara.edu.tr

This study can be described as a reading on Dewey and the relationship between the “Turkish modernization” and education from his perspective. The fundamental aim of the study was to evaluate the influence of Dewey on Turkish pedagogical thinking within a wider historical context such as the “modernization problematic.”

### **Dewey in Turkey: An Intellectual Conundrum**

In Turkey, Dewey is a thinker who was discovered by a very small intellectual circle, relatively late, often misunderstood and misintroduced (Wolf-Gazo, 1996). In Turkey, Dewey is seen only as an education philosopher, his works in other fields have not received enough attention and almost ignored. It is striking that educationists in Turkey, whilst evaluating Dewey within the context of the conflicts between reconstructivist, progressive, or pragmatist approaches or whilst taking his criticisms aimed at traditional education into consideration, have not felt the need to associate these thoughts of his with the other dimensions of his philosophy and to link these to the issue of democracy. The lack of a holistic approach in intellectuals in Turkey relating to Dewey has also led to inadequacies in interpreting his report (Dewey, 1939) relating to the Turkish national education (Ata, 2001; Bal, 1974; Bender, 2005; Brickman, 1984; Wilson & Başgöz, 1968).

Dewey visited Turkey approximately a year after the declaration of the Republic (in 1924), during a twilight period when the “old” had disappeared but the “new” had not yet materialized. It is seen that as a result of his observations in Turkey, he approached the reformation efforts made in the field of education positively, was impressed by the ideal of the Republic, the infrastructure of which was being founded in Ankara under conditions of deprivation and that he viewed this ideal sympathetically (Akyüz, 1999). Dewey’s short (2 months) visit to Turkey is completely a conundrum (Ata, 2001). There is no clear and certain information in the literature regarding either the start or end dates of this visit, by whom or which institution and for what purpose and with what authority Dewey was invited (Bilgi & Özsoy, 2005).

Dewey has a specific place among the foreign experts who have come to Turkey (Akkutay, 1996; Ergun, 1982). The founding leaders of the Republic who wanted to achieve a lot in a little time were influenced by Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy to a great extent (Bal, 1989, 1991;

Büyükdüvenci, 1995; Ergun, 1987; Kırbay, 2000). Dewey's holistic approach to educational issues renders him unique among the foreign experts who have come to Turkey.

### **"Turkish Modernization" and Education**

The most distinctive characteristic of Turkish modernization which distinguishes it from its western examples is that it is a state-centered project (Aktar, 1993; Ercan, 1996; İnsel, 1996, 2002; Mardin, 2000; Sarıbay, 1982; Tarih Vakfı, 1998, 1999a). In Turkey, instead of transforming the individual into the citizen-subject position through a "rights philosophy," a modernization strategy was followed which brought the nation-state to the position of organizing and defining dominant subject of the society (Can, 1998; Durgun, 1997; Keyman, & İçduygu, 1998; Nişancı, 2001; Öğün, 1995). Furthermore, Turkey is the only Muslim country adopting secularism as the fundamental principle of the modernization project. Another principal characteristic setting the Turkish modernization separate from the modernization projects (Berman, 1992) of other countries is that it is at the same time an education project (Eisenstadt, 1999; Vaner, 2000).

### **"Turkish Modernization" and Education from Dewey's Perspective: A Balance Sheet Attempt**

A clear distinction needs to be made between Dewey's democracy design and an authoritarian modernization design implemented as some kind of a human and social engineering. The method adopted in the Republic's education project is "from the top to the bottom, from the outside towards the inside." This method contradicts with Dewey's pedagogical principles as much as his understanding of democracy (Chomsky, 2007). Whilst education always acquires meaning and value with its instrumental aspect in the Turkish modernization project; Dewey (1996) attributes education an "intrinsic" value instead of an "instrumental" one.

In the Turkish modernization, which is a typical nation-state creation project, individuals have been left face to face with the necessity of defining and legitimizing their differences and interactions according to the priorities and interests of the nation-state (Nişancı, 2001). On looking from the Deweyian perspective, a nation-state form which adopts

homogeneity as a principle is a restrictive social institution restricting the creation and interaction of free individuals.

Although the Republic's education project was based on "equality of opportunity" and "coed education" principles as discourse, in practice, a mentality which turned these principles into their opposites prevailed (Arat, 1999; Özsoy, 2004a; Tan, 1994; Ünal & Özsoy, 1999). In the Dewey pedagogy, the principles of democratic localization of the education system and the autonomy of the school have an important place (Barber, 1995; Pereira, 2007; Shook, 2002). It has not been possible to implement these principles during any period in the history of Turkish education. This in turn may be evaluated as a striking indicator of the weakness of the Turkish modernization project on the democracy front.

In all types and levels of the Turkish education system, one of the fundamental objectives of the school has been to prepare the student for the next level of education and life. Whereas according to Dewey (1996), school should not be a preparation for life but life itself. In the Republic's education project, a "pedagogyzn" is prevalent which exhibits itself in the form of attributing an educational value in itself independent of education and educational issues (Özsoy, 2004b). One of Dewey's (1996) fundamental pedagogical beliefs is that there is no lesson or subject which can attribute educational value on its own.

Whilst Dewey objected to all types of social exclusion and supervision mechanisms in education; starting from the early years of the Republic, education has increasingly become an exam and success focused selective system in Turkey. In reality, in the Turkish modernization project run by the state elites, the fundamental priority of education has been bringing up elites (Eskicumalı, 2003; Tarih Vakfı, 1999b; Tekeli, 1983; Türköne, 2003; Ünal, 1999; Zürcher, 1998). Dewey argues that modernization cannot be brought about by bringing up a small number of leaders, and that it is a requirement of democracy for all citizens to receive education (Westbrook, 1993; Eastman, 1968).

### Conclusion

In the present study, it was concluded that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the values the Turkish modernization is based on which is at the same time an education project and the libertarian and democratic values Dewey advocates.

## References/Kaynakça

- Akkutay, Ü. (1996). *Milli eğitimde yabancı uzman raporları*. Ankara: Avni Akyol Kültür ve Eğitim Ümit Vakfı Yayını.
- Aktar, C. (1993). *Türkiye'nin Batılaşdırılması*. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Akyüz, Y. (1999). *Türk eğitim tarihi (başlangıçtan 1999'a)* (7. baskı). İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları.
- Alves-Bernard, I. (1996). Des médiations éducatives à l'actualité de John Dewey. *Spirale- Revue de Recherches en Education*, 17, 101-115.
- Arat, Y. (1999). Türkiye'de Modernleşme Projesi ve kadınlar. S. Bozdoğan ve R. Kasaba (Ed.), *Türkiye'de modernleşme ve ulusal kimlik* içinde (2. baskı, s. 82-98). İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.
- Ata, B. (2001). 1924 Türk basını ışığında Amerikalı eğitimci John Dewey'nin Türkiye seyahati. *Gazi Üniversitesi Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 21(3), 193-207.
- Bal, H. (1989). John Dewey – M. Necati ve Türkiye'de öğretmen yetiştirme sorunu. *Çağdaş Eğitim*, 14 (142), 29-33.
- Bal, H. (1991). *John Dewey'in eğitim felsefesi*. İstanbul: Kor.
- Barber, B. R. (1995). *Güçlü demokrasi* (çev. M. Beşikçi). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Bauman, Z. (2006). *Sosyolojik düşünmek* (çev. A. Yılmaz, 5. basım). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Bender, M. T. (2005). John Dewey'nin eğitime bakışı üzerine yeni bir yorum. *Gazi Üniversitesi Kırsebir Eğitim Fakültesi*, 6(1), 13-19.
- Berman, M. (1992). Modernlik-dün, bugün ve yarın (çev. Ü. Altuğ). *Birikim Dergisi*, 34, 43-53.
- Bilgi, S. & Özsoy, S. (2005). John Dewey's travelings into the project of Turkish modernity. In T. S. Popkewitz (Ed.), *Inventing the modern self and John Dewey modernities and the traveling of pragmatism in education* (pp. 153-177). New York, NY: Palgrave Mac Millan.
- Brickman, W.W. (1984). The Turkish cultural and educational revolution: John Dewey's report of 1924. *Western European Education*, XVI (4), 3-18.
- Brubacher, J. S. (1982). Yarırcılık, aletçilik ve deneycilik (çev. S. Büyükdüvenci). *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi*, 15(2), 299-309.
- Büyükdüvenci, S. (1995). John Dewey's impact on Turkish education. In J. Garrison (Ed.), *The new scholarship on Dewey* (pp. 393-400). Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Can, B. B. (1998). (Az)gelişme efsanesi ve Eurosentrist-modern standardizasyon. *Özgür Üniversite Forumu*, 1(4), 186-222.
- Chomsky, N. (2007). *Demokrasi ve eğitim* (yay. hzl. N. Ersoy). İstanbul: BGST Yayınları.
- Dewey, J. (1995). *Eğitimde ablak ilkeleri* (çev. F. Oğuzkan). Ankara: Şafak Matbaacılık.
- Dewey, J. (1966). *Tecrübe ve eğitim* (çev. F. Başaran ve F. Varış). Ankara.

- Dewey, J. (1962). *Özgürlük ve kültür* (çev. V. Günyol). İstanbul: Çan Yayınları.
- Dewey, J. (1939). *Türk maarifi hakkında rapor*. Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı.
- Dewey, J. (1996). *Demokrasi ve eğitim* (çev. M. S. Otaran). İstanbul: Başarı Yayınları.
- Dewey, J. (2003). *Reconstruction en philosophie*. Pau: Presses Universitaires de Pau/ Farrago.
- Durgun, Ş. (1997). Tamamlanmamış bir proje: Modernleşme ya da demokratikleşmenin önündeki engeller. *Yeni Türkiye*, 17, 41-48.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1999). Kemalist yönetim ve modernleşme: Bazı karşılaştırmalı ve analitik görüşler (çev. M. Alakuş). J. M. Landau (Ed.), *Atatürk ve Türkiye'nin modernleşmesi* içinde (s. 19-37). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Ercan, F. (1996). *Modernizm, kapitalizm ve az gelişmişlik*. İstanbul: Sorunsal Yayınevi.
- Ergun, M. (1982). *Atatürk devri Türk eğitimi*. Ankara: A.Ü. DTCF Yayınları.
- Ergun, D. (1987). *Sosyoloji ve eğitim*. Ankara: V Yayınları.
- Eskicümalı, A. (2003). Eğitim ve toplumsal değişim: Türkiye'nin değişim sürecinde eğitimin rolü, 1923-1946. *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eğitim Dergisi*, 19(2), 15-28.
- Eastman, M. (1968). John Dewey'nin eğitim dünyasına hizmetleri (çev. İ. N. Özgür). *Kültür*, 13(2), 20-22.
- Giddens, A. (1994). *Modernliğin sonuçları* (çev. E. Kuşdil). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Göle, N. (2002). Batı dışı modernlik: Kavram üzerine. U. Kocabaşoğlu (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de siyasi düşünce - modernleşme ve batıcılık* - içinde. (C. 3, s. 56-67). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- İnsel, A. (1996). *Düzen ve kalkınma kısıncısında Türkiye*. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- İnsel, A. (2002). *Türkiye toplumunun bunalımı* (4. baskı). İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları.
- Karaömerlioğlu, A. (1998). Köy enstitüleri üzerine düşünceler. *Toplum ve Bilim*, 76, 56-85.
- Keyman, F. ve İçduygu, A. (1998). Türk modernleşmesi ve ulusal kimlik sorunu: Anayasal vatandaşlık ve demokratik açılım olasılığı. A. Ünsal (Ed.), *75. yılda tebaadan yurttaş'a doğru* içinde (s. 169-180). İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları.
- Kırby, F. (2000). *Türkiye'de köy enstitüleri* (yay. hzl. E. Tonguç, 2. baskı). Ankara: Güldiken Yayınları.
- Mardin, Ş. (2000). *Türk modernleşmesi -makaleler 4-* (drl. M. Türköne ve T. Önder, 8. baskı). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Ortaylı, İ. (2001). *İmparatorluğun en uzun yüzyılı*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Nişancı, E. (2001). *Geleneksel patrimonyalizmden modern neo-patrimonyalizme bir modernleşme denemesi*. İstanbul: Haliç Üniversitesi.
- Öğün, S. S. (1995). *Modernleşme, milliyetçilik ve Türkiye*. İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları.
- Özsoy, S. (2004a). Eğitim hakkı: Kendi dilini bulamamış bir söylem. *Eğitim Bilim Toplum*, 2(6), 58-83.
- Özsoy, S. (2004b). 'Demokrasi eğitimi'nin imkânsızlığı üzerine. *Uluslararası Demokrasi Eğitimi Sempozyumu (20-21 Mayıs 2004) bildiriler kitabı* içinde (s. 150-161). Çanakkale: Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi.

Pereira, I. (2007). La théorie pragmatiste de l'action collective de Dewey. *Interrogations. Revue pluridisciplinaire en sciences de l'homme et de la société*, 5, 135-144.

Popkewitz, T. S. (Ed.) (2005). *Inventing the modern self and John Dewey modernites and the traveling of pragmatism in education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Mac Millan.

Sarıbay, A. Y. (1982). Kemalist ideolojide modernleşmenin anlamı: Sosyo-ekonomik bir çözümleme denemesi. *Cahit Orhan Tütengil'e armağan* içinde (ss. 141-162). İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayınları.

Shook, J. R. (2002). Dewey'in pedagojik inançlarının felsefi bağlamı (çev. C. Turer). *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi II, 1*, 13-131.

Tan, M. (1994). Toplumsal değişme ve eğitim ilkeleri. *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi*, 27(1), 83-96.

Tarih Vakfı. (1998). *75 yılda tebaa'dan yurttaşlığı doğru* (Ed. A. Ünsal). İstanbul: Yazar.

Tarih Vakfı. (1999a). *Türkiye'de modernleşme ve ulusal kimlik* (Ed. S. Bozdoğan ve R. Kasaba, 2. baskı). İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.

Tarih Vakfı. (1999b). *75 yılda eğitim, bilanço'98*. (Ed. F. Gök). İstanbul: Yazar.

Tekeli, İ. (1983). Osmanlı İmparatorluğundan günümüze eğitim kurumlarının gelişimi. *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 3, s. 650-672). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi. (1999). *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin 75. yılında bilim*. Ankara: TÜBA Yayınları.

Türköne, M. (2003). *Türk modernleşmesi*. Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi.

Ünal, L. I. (1999). Kalkınma kısılcısındaki eğitimin bir bilançosu. N. Tural (Ed.), *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin 75. Yılında Toplumumuz ve Eğitim Sempozyumu bildiriler ve panel tartışmaları* içinde (s. 47-73). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Ünal, L. I. ve Özsoy, S. (1999). Modern Türkiye'nin Sisiphos miti: Eğitimde fırsat eşitliği. F. Gök (Ed.), *75. yılda eğitim* içinde (s. 39-72). İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı.

Vaner, S. (2000). *Modernisation autoritaire en Turquie et en Iran*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Weber, M. (2004). *Sosyolojinin temel kavramları: Meslek olarak ilim* (çev. M. Beyaztaş). İstanbul: Efkâr Yayınları.

Westbrook, R. B. (1993). John Dewey. *Perspectives, XXIII*(1-2), 277-293.

Wilson, H. E. ve Başgöz, İ. (1968). *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde eğitim ve Atatürk*. Ankara: Dost Yayınları.

Wolf-Gazo, E. (1996). John Dewey in Turkey: An educational mission. *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 3, 15-42.

Zürcher, E. J. (1998). *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin tarihi* (çev. Ö. Laçiner). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.