

The Current Developments in Teacher Education in Turkey on the Threshold of European Union

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Abstract

The last ten years have witnessed many changes, reforms and developments in the all fields of social life in Turkey. Education, inevitably, had been the first and the important one to be reconstructed and reshaped. In line with the European Union acqui, many reforms were put in to life. Having about 150 years of background, teacher education was focused initially. The structure, the access the training periods and the institutions were the main concern of these reforms. This paper aimed at describing these current developments in Turkish teacher training system. Within this framework, first, the structures of educational system and teacher education system were briefly analysed. Then the current quality development studies were described. The study showed that, although considerable improvements were put into action, the system has some dimensions to be revised.

Keywords: Education System, Teacher Training, Standards and Accreditation, Teaching Profession Competencies, Career Development Steps,

1. Introduction

In recent years the compact technology using in the fields of rapid production and widespread service, which defines the countries' development level, has extending not only international associations but also, international competitions. Shortly defined as globalisation, this has resulted in comprehensive and fundamental changes socially, politically and economically almost in all countries. These current and widespread developments are reshaping the means of social life. It is has been a great necessity for individuals to gain the skills and information required in this new life and era. As well as other social systems, these changes force the educational system to rearrange its mechanisms and functions. Because, in education, to maintain and to extend these changes and developments in desired way and level, it is compulsory to train the creative, critical thinking, inquisitive, problem solver, constructive individuals that is necessary for becoming information society in 21st era. Thus, new reforms are necessary in the functions and mechanisms of education system from preschool to lifelong education and from primary to post graduate education.

Three fundamental components determining the functions and mechanisms of education system are curriculum, teacher, and student. Of these components, teachers are responsible for ensuring the desired behaviours of individuals entering the system and applying the school curriculum developed for training quality individuals needed for society and reforms (Büyükkaragöz, 1998; Küçükahmet, 1999). As Varış (1996) states teacher, as the one putting the education policies into life and changing them according to application results, is the chief component training the, main input of system- the student- with his training skills and abilities.

For a teacher, to fulfil this responsibility and duty successfully depends both on taking quality pre-service education and permanently on developing himself in in-service education. Therefore, In Turkey, in accordance with social developments and changes based on society's own powers and international facts and formations, considerable structural and educational reforms have been conducted regarding quality improvement both in the whole education system and teacher education in terms of pre-service and in-service. In this study, after defining the Turkish national education system briefly, the structure of teacher education system and reforms regarding quality development studies in teacher education have been explained.

2. Developments in the Structure of National Education System

The structure of Turkish national education system was rearranged in 1973 and 1997. With the National Education Basic Act in 1973, The National education system was formed of four steps: pre-primary, primary education, secondary education and higher education (MEB, 2001).

As to this act, pre-primary education involves the education of children in the age group of 0 to 6 who have not reached the age of compulsory primary education. Primary education involving the compulsory education and training of children in the age group of 6 to 14 includes five-year primary school (I. stage) and three-year lower secondary schools (II. stage). Before this act, three-year lower secondary schools were defined as the first stage of secondary education. Secondary education includes institutions of a general or vocational and technical character of at least three or four years following the primary education (Figure 1). Finally, higher education includes all education institutions offering at least two years of higher education after secondary education.

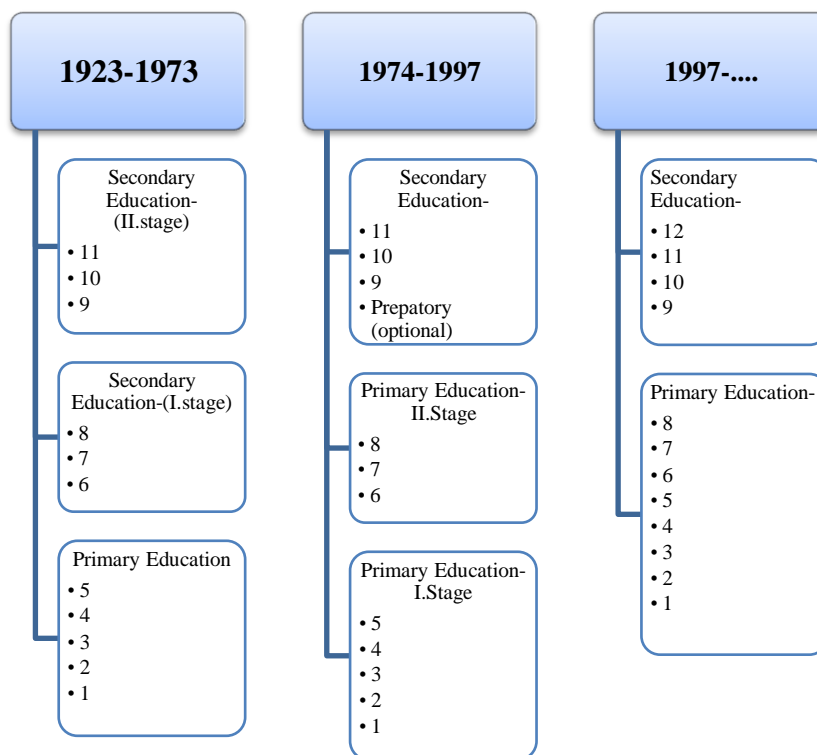


Figure 1. The Structure of Turkish National Education System

The second crucial structural regulation in Turkish national education system was held in 1997. With this regulation, the duration of compulsory education was raised to eight years and planned to be carried in eight-year primary education schools. Therefore, five-year primary schools and three-year lower secondary schools were combined as eight-year primary education schools. On the other hand no regulations were done in secondary education, but the duration of education has been raised to four years in 2005 (Resmi Gazete, 2005).

The students in the last year of primary education enter the exam for secondary education institutions and choose one of the general, vocational, or technical high schools. After secondary education, the students who have intention to go on higher education have to pass the University entrance exams and get the required score for their programs. A central unit carries out this placement (Sağlam, 2004).

3. The Structure of Teacher Education System

In Turkey, the structure of teacher education system has been designed in accordance with the national education steps. In line with the regulations done in education system, teacher education system was readjusted in 1973, 1982 and 1997. In 1973, the levels of all teacher education programs were increased to higher education level; in 1982, the responsibilities for teacher education were given to universities, and lastly in 1997, the structure and the programs of teacher education were reregulated.

The first extensive reform in teacher education took place in 1973. Before 1973, the classroom teachers for five-year primary schools had been trained in four-year “Primary Teacher Schools” in secondary education level; the branch teachers for three-year lower secondary school had been trained in “Three-year Education Institutes” and the branch teachers for high schools had been trained in four-year “High Teacher Schools”.

With the “National Education Basic Law” (article 1739), it was determined that all teachers must earn higher education degrees. Thus, in 1973-1974 school year, “Primary Teacher Schools” were closed and “Two-year Education Institutes” were established to train classroom teachers instead. Same as this regulation, in 1978 “Three-year Education Institutes” to train branch teachers for lower secondary school were closed and changed as four-year High Teacher Schools (YÖK, 1997).

The second important regulation in teacher education took place in 1982. With the Higher Education Law in 1981, which restructured the higher education, all higher education institutions followed by secondary education were gathered under the responsibility of universities. Consequently, all teacher education institutions connected to Ministry of National Education (MNE) and the responsibilities concerning teacher education were transferred to universities in 1982. With this reform, for training of classroom teachers, two-year education high schools, and for branch teachers, four-year faculties of education were founded. In 1989, it was decided that teachers, regardless of level they teach, must complete four years of undergraduate education. Therefore, the curriculum of “Education School of Higher Education was increased from two to four years and then in 1992, these schools turned into Primary Education Departments in Faculties of Education.

With the transferred responsibility regarding teacher education from MNE to University, the status of teacher profession has been raised, the teacher education has been discussed in scientific sessions, the contemporary teacher education applications have been investigated, and finally the teacher educators have been trained in higher education level. However, because the universities took the this responsibility while they were restructuring themselves, and because the broken relationship between universities and MNE in terms of teacher supply and demand, the reforms done in 80ies resulted in some problems. The main problems are as follows (YÖK, 1997):

- Because of university’s academic structure, a great priority was given to train the branch teachers; academic expertise in branches became attractive instead of teaching core knowledge and skills to candidates. Thus, the field of primary education was neglected and gradually branch teachers such as science, social science teachers, and classroom teachers for primary education schools could not meet the needs.
- In many fields, there were teacher density because of Faculty of Arts and Sciences providing branch teachers with pedagogical Formation Certificate programs.
- Training teachers only in one branch prevented productivity in teacher employment.
- Due to the broken relationship between universities and schools, in teacher education programs, applied education such as teaching practice and school experience was neglected.

Because of these reasons, to meet the teacher need effectively and productively, to carry out programs training more qualified teacher and to fulfil their functions, it was compulsory to search the ways of developing quality in teacher education programs. Hence, in accordance with the scope of National Education Development Project carried by the co-operation of Higher Education Council (HEC) and World Bank, the teacher education programs were reorganized in 1997 (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003). The structural and educational features of this third important, extensive, and quality development based regulation are discussed in detail in the following parts.

4. Quality development studies in teacher education

One part of the reforms regarding quality development in teacher education applied since 1998-1999 school year, has been carried out by HEC, the only authority of pre-service education of teacher, and the other part has been carried out by MNE, the only authority of employment and in-service education of teachers. According to this authority distribution, HEC reforming teacher education curriculum has started to develop standards and accreditation application in teacher education. On the other hand, MNE together with HEC has initiated to determine “teachers’ teaching competencies” and to establish a selection exam to appoint teachers. Besides, MNE has readjusted the probationary education and started the application “Carrier Development Steps in Teaching Profession”

4.1. Development of Teacher Education Programs

In line with the length of eight-year compulsory primary education and short- and long-term teacher needs for new primary and secondary schools, teacher education system and programs have been restructured by the ministry and HEC. The system put into implementation in 1998-1999 academic year aimed at;

- training teachers with bachelor's degree for pre-primary and primary school
- training Foreign Languages, Music, Art, Physical Education, Special education, Computer Education and Instructional Technologies teachers with bachelor's degrees for secondary schools
- training Science, Mathematics and Social Science teachers with non-thesis graduate degrees (3.5+1.5=5 year integrated model or 4+1.5=5.5 year consecutive model).

Integrated and consecutive models are applied in secondary school teacher education (figure 2 & 3). In the first model, students are required to complete the first seven-semester courses of the major field in Faculties of Education or Faculties of Arts and Sciences. Then, they are given courses related to the teaching profession from the Faculties of Education. On the other hand, in the consecutive model, merely the graduates of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences have chance to take the teaching profession courses in Graduate Schools of Educational Sciences, Science, or Social Sciences in three-semester. In both models, students meeting the requirements are granted a non-thesis master's degree and if they pass the entrance examination for teaching profession, they are employed in secondary schools (YOK, 2007).

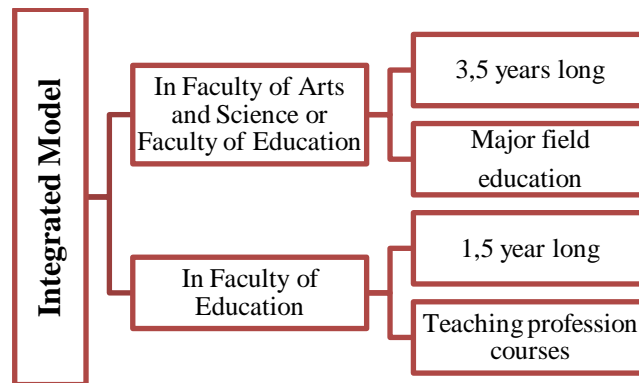


Figure 2. Integrated Model for Teacher Training for Secondary Schools

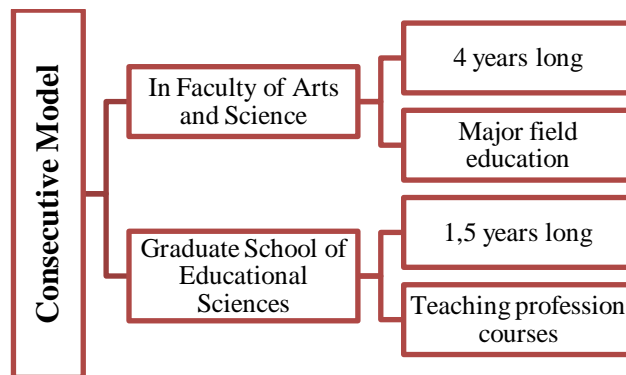


Figure 3. Consecutive Model for Teacher Training for Secondary Schools

In the light of these reforms, the features of teacher education programs are as follows:

- In all teacher education programs, the candidates study the same teaching profession courses. The ratio of these courses to the curricula is 30 %
- The ratio of applied courses and school experience has been raised.
- The importance and the duration of Methodology in the Area of Specialization have been increased.
- The candidates studying branch education have been given opportunity of minor program.
- Teaching Practice has become important in the curricula and to ensure effective teaching practice, faculty-school co-operation was determined to certain rules.
- The level of Secondary Schools Teacher Education has increased to master degree.

4.2 The Studies on Standard Development and Accreditation in Turkish Teacher Education

In Turkey, the reforms in teacher education include not only innovations in programs but also studies on standard development and construction of accreditation model in order to increase quality in training.

For this purpose, Turkish National Committee of Teacher Training was founded by HEC and this committee was assigned with developing of teacher education program and determining the needs of faculties. Thus, to assure the qualities of teacher education institutions, and to take required precautions for increasing this quality the committee, taking the sample applications of England and USA, firstly developed teacher education standards and an accreditation model. The determined standards were pilot-tested in six faculties, reviewed at a national seminar and published. Afterwards, all faculties of education were asked for initiating the required studies to meet these standards considering their needs and capacities (YÖK, 1999).

In Turkey, by determining teacher education standards, it is aimed at specifying the minimum requirements for a system and stating what is required to produce and assure high quality programs. In addition, in accordance with these defined standards, by accreditation, it is intended to improve and secure the quality of teacher education, to develop systematically a constant inner and outer control mechanism, and finally to inform parents, schools, students etc. with the quality of education.

The Turkish accreditation system of teacher education is based on input, process standards, and output standards. Input standards stands for the resource requirements for training well-equipped and qualified teachers. Process standards characterize the actions the academic staff must take in to consideration to ensure the adequate education and training of teachers. Finally, output standards are the performances required as a result of the proper use of adequate inputs through a suitable process. These standards the seven domains defined below (YOK, 1999).

- *Curriculum*: Standards for assuring students have the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills required.
- *Personnel*: Standards for ensuring adequate numbers of qualified academic staff.
- *Students*: Standards for assuring satisfactory numbers of qualified students.
- *Relationships*: Standards for good arrangements with, and teaching opportunities in, partner schools.
- *Physical facilities*: Standards for sufficient classrooms, libraries, specialist rooms, computer resources, and necessary equipment utilised.
- *Management*: Standards for an effective system of managing in the faculty management.
- *Quality assurance*: Standards for a system that provides for on-going review and improvement of the teacher education program.

Based on these standards, the accreditation process of the faculties starts (Figure 4). Initially, faculty of education and its programs to be accredited are chosen by HEC and the faculty is informed for the accreditation process. Then, an assessment team consisted of academic staff nominated by faculties is established and they are to attend a training program for accreditation. Meanwhile, the faculty prepares a self-evaluation report describing how well standards were met and delivers the report to the Assessment Team. The team reviews the self-evaluation report and other documents; observes facilities and classes, and interviews with deans, staff, students, and others. The team then prepares a draft evaluation report on how the faculty met the standards for accreditation and sends to the faculty dean. The dean examines draft evaluation report and gives a response. The team constructs the final evaluation report and delivers it to HEC attaching the dean's response. Finally, HEC reviews the documents and makes an accreditation decision.

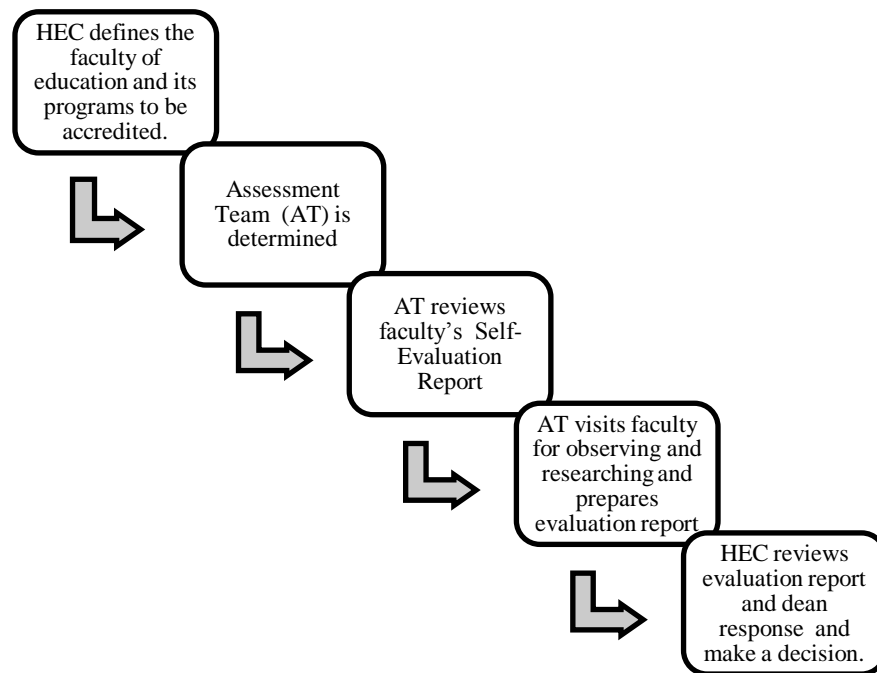


Figure 4. Teacher Education Accreditation Model in Turkey

This process started in 1998-1999 school year and since then, faculties of education preparing their self-evaluation reports have been consummating their insufficiencies according to their capacities and needs. Although some interventions were held on some universities, accreditation process needs to be picked up.

4.3 Determination of Teacher Competencies

Development of teacher education standards and construction of an accreditation model has required the determination of teacher competencies. Regarding this issue, in 2000 with the co-operation of Turkey and European Union Commission, Basic Education Support Project was put into practice. Within the scope of this project, studies to determine the teaching profession general competencies and specific branchcompetencies started in 2002. As a result of these studies, teaching profession general competencies were collected under six basic domains (MEB, 2006). Then these basic domains were divided into sub competencies and for every sub-competency, performance indicators were defined. The six basic domain competencies in “Teaching Profession General Competencies” are as follows:

- Individual and Professional Values-Professional Development
- Student Identification
- Teaching and Learning Process
- Monitoring and Assessing Learning and Development
- School, Parent and Society Relationships
- Program and Content Knowledge

4.4 Teaching Profession Entrance Examination

The employment of candidates graduated from one of the teacher education programs is carried out by MNE. In Turkey, state civil servants to be assigned in official service units have been selected with a central elimination exam done once a year since 2001. As teaching profession is considered as civil service, all candidates are obliged to enter this exam. The selection exam consists of general culture, general ability sections, and session for evaluating teaching profession competencies. According to the state needs, MNE defines minimum application grade, and selects the successful candidates from those who meet this grade (ÖSYM, 2006).

4.5 Probationary Teacher Education

After the process defined above, teacher candidates are assigned as probationary teachers by MNE. Additionally, they are required to participate one-year probationary teacher education.

This period consists of three stages: basic education, preparatory education, and applied education (ResmiGazete, 2005; Yağcı 2003). The purpose for basic education is to provide the candidates with the required knowledge about the common features of civil servants. The preparatory education provides the candidates with knowledge and skills needed for their teaching profession and with adapting them to profession. Those who finish this stage are taken to applied education. The main goal of this education is to ensure them to apply their acquired knowledge and skills. If they pass these three stages successfully, they are employed as permanent teachers by MNE.

4.6 Career Development Application in Teaching Profession

Because of rapid changes and developments in information, for teachers, the competencies and knowledge acquired in pre-service education are losing their significance and it becomes difficult to perform their duties. Therefore, teachers are in need of developing themselves in every stage of their profession (Deniz, 2009; Sağlam, 1992; Şirin et al. 2010). Consequently, since 2005, MNE has been maintaining the “Career development application” based on teachers’ professional seniority and success to ensure their professional and individual developments and to improve their status according to importance, difficulty, and responsibility of their duty. With this application, after probationary education, teaching profession is divided into three steps: teacher, expert teacher, and head teacher (ResmiGazete, 2005).

Those who finished the probationary education successful and employed in all kind and level schools are assigned as “teachers”. To be “Expert Teacher” or “Head Teacher”, teachers have to meet these requirements (Deniz, 2009; MEB, 2006; Şirin et al. 2010; Zeyrek, 2008;):

- To become “**Expert Teacher**”, at least seven-year experience in “teacher” status is required. Those who meet this requirement can apply the “Promotion Examination between Career Steps”. Promotion of a candidate is carried out according to his/her achievement grade that includes exam points, in-service education and other activities participated, employment record, professional success. The achievement grade has to be 60 out of 100. On the other hand, those who finished MS/MA or PhD in his/her field or educational sciences are excused of the examination. However, they are graded according to criteria in achievement grade except for exam points.
- To become “**Head Teacher**”, at least six-year experience in “expert teacher” status is required. Those who meet this requirement can apply the “Promotion Examination between Career Steps”. Promotion of a candidate is carried out according to his/her achievement grade that includes exam points, in-service education and other activities participated, employment record, professional success. The achievement grade has to be 60 out of 100. On the other hand, “seven-year teachers” who finished PhD in his/her field or educational sciences are excused of this examination. However, they are graded according to criteria in achievement grade except for exam points.

MNE does not determine any number limits for “teacher” positions. On the contrary, the ministry has determined some ratios for “expert teacher and head teacher positions according to teacher numbers: for expert teacher positions 20% of teachers and for head teacher positions 10% of expert teachers. The first implementation exams were carried out in 2005 and 2006. From 558.3005 “teachers” working in Turkey in 2005, the 152.652 of them applied the exam and 106.536 of them took 60 and high points.

5. Conclusion

The recent developments and changes in the field of education has also influences Turkey so much. Turkey, with the influences of both its social dynamics and various international facts and formations like EU adaptation process, has started comprehensive regulations regarding the education system and teacher education. In this context, education system has been rearranged and important regulations concerning pre-service and in-service teacher education have been put into practice.

Firstly, with the cooperation of HEC and World Bank, teacher education programs have been readjusted and a common curriculum in all teacher education institutions has been applied. To increase the quality in this application, teacher education standards and an accreditation model have been developed. Afterwards, to complete the application finally, HEC and MNE have determined the teacher competencies.

Maintaining these regulations in pre-service education has required new regulation in in-service education. Thus, to ensure quality teacher input in the profession, an examination has been set. The successful candidates in the light of state needs are taken to probationary education. In this one-year education, the candidates finish three-staged education and then they are assigned as “teachers”.

The last and important reform to improve teacher quality in in-service education is Career Development Application in teacher education based on teachers’ professional seniority and success. With this application, after probationary education, teaching profession is divided into three steps: teacher, expert teacher, and head teacher. The promotions between these steps are carried out in accordance with their professional experiences, successes, activities, and promotion exam.

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