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A Comparative Research About Basic Training In Turkey
And EU Communities

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Abstract

In every country, educational systems resist to the change more than other systems. This resistance is a result of the social mission that is associated with schools. When educational institutions which are in charge of transferring the changing values to the new generations, could not realize social changes; they tend to preserve their status quo and they adapt models from institutions which have changed before. These attempts do not fit into ‘the unique structure of education’ (Ozden, 2010:154). Countries often carry out reforms to realize unique changes and establish the most appropriate system. In Turkey there has been a strong debate in society about the new elementary education and training legislation. Especially the contradictions about early childhood education and vocational training were justified by referring to the European Union educational systems which Turkey aims to be a member of (TBMM, 2012). This study aims to examine new Turkish educational system -namely 4+4+4 in colloquial speech- and basic educational processes of some EU countries’ educational systems in a comparative way.

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1. Introduction

The three dimensions which learning and teaching focused on are; the changes occur in the core of schooling, the changing professional positions of educators (in organization structure, workplace conditions and decision making processes) and the changes occur between the power distribution of school and schools’ stakeholders (Elmore, 1990:11).

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In every country, educational systems resist to the change more than other systems. This resistance is a result of the social mission that is associated with schools. When educational institutions which are in charge of transferring the changing values to the new generations, could not realize social changes; they tend to preserve their status quo and they adapt models from institutions which have changed before. These attempts do not fit into ‘the unique structure of education’ (Ozden, 2010:154). Countries often carry out reforms to realize unique changes and establish the most appropriate system.

In Turkey there has been a strong debate in society about the new elementary education and training legislation. Especially the contradictions about early childhood education and vocational training were justified by referring to the European Union educational systems which Turkey aims to be a member of (TBMM, 2012).

It is stated that students in USA, United Kingdom and France, grouped in a segmented structure according to age groups and physical features in the newly regulated Turkish Education Law Proposal. According to this proposal, uninterrupted education has negative effects on vocational education, it makes the village schools nonfunctional by means of unsuitable physical conditions. Also it is emphasized the fact that the students who have just enrolled and older adolescences having a common learning environment could have some negative effects. Therefore Turkish government passed an education law on basic compulsory education which has 3 four-year segments and called as 4+4+4. First two segments (first 8 years) of this structure is compulsory.

Vocational education is the main focus of these adaptations. This reform provisions that after the first four-year education, students would be guided to vocational education, the ten years old students are exposed to their initial vocational guidance and during their basic training students are separated to different programs and school types.

Via this legalized proposal, the compulsory education would start a year earlier, that is; the five-year old students are going to enroll primary education in 2012-2013 academic year. A five-year old student who starts school is within the range of 60 months to 72 months. Compulsory education starting age range is reduced to 6-13 years with this regulation in Turkey. Preschool education, which has been the biggest policy priority of the last couple of years, is completely removed from the proposal and compulsory preschool education is not considered within this context.

2. Compulsory Uninterrupted Education and Preschool Education

Education process is a continuing and lifelong process from birth to death which exist also out of school. So why do we need formal education at school? Because individuals need to gain “intellectual knowledge beyond the direct area of their daily life”. It has crucial value for children that they could get this knowledge in a systematical way. Furthermore, compulsory education takes part in every countries’ education policy in order to eliminate the inequality that appears with the progress of civilization and development of individual variety (Rothbard, 1999).

The earliest thoughts about compulsory primary education was stated in Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it was important particularly due to the fact that being the first-ever. Afterwards these statements were supported with the European Convention on Human Rights, Protocol 1 (1952), UNESCO (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, the Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the European Social Charter (1996) (Tomasevski, 2001). Compulsory education durations in European Union Countries and Turkey appears in the following table (Eurydice, 2012a).
Table 1: Compulsory education durations in European Union Countries and Turkey

| Country   | Full-time compulsory education starting age | Full-time compulsory education ending age | Duration of full-time compulsory education (in years) |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Germany   | 6                                          | 15-16                                    | 9-10                                                |
| Austria   | 6                                          | 15                                       | 9                                                   |
| Belgium   | 6                                          | 15                                       | 9                                                   |
| Bulgaria  | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| Denmark   | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| Italy     | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| France    | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| Netherlands | 5                                        | 18                                       | 13                                                  |
| United Kingdom | 4-5                                    | 16                                       | 11-12                                               |
| Norway    | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| Turkey    | 6                                          | 14                                       | 8                                                   |
| Spain     | 6                                          | 16                                       | 10                                                  |
| Portugal  | 6                                          | 18                                       | 12                                                  |
| Finland   | 6                                          | 15                                       | 9                                                   |

1 Compulsory education in high schools called ‘Gymnasium’ lasts for 9 years, as to the others are 10 yeared schools.
2 In Northern Ireland starting age is 4. In the other regions of United Kingdom, students start school at 5.
3 With the last regulation in Turkey compulsory education starting age is reduced to 5, therefore the finishing age changed as 13.

In Europe preschool education is compulsory in Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Denmark and Sweden (Eurydice, 2012b: 28). The countries whose pre-primary education implementations are optional, have pre-primary enrollment rates over 90% (World Bank, 2012). It is known that within the range of 36-72 months, male student enrollment rate is 30.23% while female student enrollment is 29.43% (MEB, 2011: 88). Some countries’ pre-primary education enrollment ratios are listed in the following table (UNESCO, 2011).

![Pre-primary education enrollment ratios in Turkey and some EU Countries](image)
Qualified pre-primary education is an effective education policy alternative to reduce the socio-economical inequalities and to improve learning outcomes. Pre-primary school enrollment rates can be increased by compulsory pre-primary education to improve educational quality and to encourage the progress of education. Non-compulsory pre-primary education results in disparities in terms of preparation to the enrollment processes, on the side of the students from lower socio-economic status.

3. Vocational Education

Educational systems in Europe are divided into the levels as pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education however these levels do not have different curriculums. The earliest guidance to vocational education in Europe is in Germany and Austria although the OECD countries’ average is 15. It’s known that three states of Germany postpone the guidance age by three years (qtd. ERG, 2012a: 6). The Austrian government aims to integrate all Realschule (lower secondary education-middle schools) and Hauptschule (lower secondary education- basic training school) under a single structure of curriculum until 2015 (IFES, 2010; qtd. ERG, 2012b). The ratios of vocational and technical programs in upper secondary education are listed in the following table (OECD, 2012b).

![The percentage of vocational and technical programs in upper secondary education](image)

In the following section, some countries’ basic education systems are examined (Eurydice, 2012b).

3.1. France

Primary school (École primaire) and following middle school (Collège) are categorized under compulsory education in France. The curriculum has a single structure. In addition to the core subjects
elective courses are included in the second level schools known as Collège. These courses with elective subject are known as the vocational discovery modules. In the last year of this module, 14-15 year old students are guided to the secondary school levels named as 3rd-guidance cycle. By offering profession and field subjects, voluntary students (on the average age of 14) are guided to the vocational education effectively. After Collège education, approximately 15 years old students are guided to general, technical or vocational education.

3.2. United Kingdom

All levels of education levels are the same in three states of United Kingdom, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Primary and secondary school are categorized under compulsory education and 16 year old students are guided to a different curriculum for the very first time. These education levels are divided into four categories (key stages) and there are elective courses on technical, art, design and foreign language subjects. After completing the compulsory education, students can attend general high schools or sixth form schools with general academic education or they can start their vocational education at the further education colleges.

Scotland differs from the other states in terms of segmentation. The earliest guidance age is 16 after the compulsory education. Types of secondary schools are the same as the other states of United Kingdom.

3.3. Germany

Students are guided to different school types and curriculums starting from the age of 10 except Berlin and Brandenburg. At lower secondary education, including 5th and 10th grades, there are schools named as Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium and Gesamtschule. Pre-vocational courses take part in the last two years of compulsory education. In comparison to Hauptschule and Realschule, Gymnasium has more elective vocational courses.

Lower secondary education is predominantly of a general nature whereas, apart from Gymnasien, vocational education predominates at upper secondary level. Students graduated from Hauptschule usually attend to vocational schools (Berufsschule). Realschule provides the opportunity to enter preparatory schools of tertiary education (for example Fachoberschule). In this manner, the major part of students go to Vocational Collages (Fachhochschule) and Collages (Hochschulen). Gymnasium is a kind of general lower and upper secondary school. The nine-year Gymnasiums (Gymnasium in Aufbauform) is completed by taking maturity examination (Abitur) which gives the right to enter the collages. Gesamtschule (multi-programmed schools) are formed by integration of Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium. Hauptschule aims to bring students in general culture and prepare them to a vocational school or upper secondary education. Realschule aims to educate students to their career or upper secondary education. Gymnasium aims to prepare students to higher education by offering a general education.

3.4. Austria

Compulsory education covers 6 to 15 years old students. There are academic general secondary or general secondary levels in lower secondary education. Students are guided to different curriculums (general, technical and vocational schools) at this level. There are compulsory courses about ‘vocational education guidance’ for lower secondary level. In some cases, there is an integrated form of compulsory courses and vocational education guidance.
3.5. Finland

7 year-old students attend uninterrupted nine years education in the basic training schools named as Perusopetus/Grundläggande utbildning until they become 16. They are guided to vocational or general secondary schools starting from the age of 16. Vocational education guidance is integrated into the first years of curriculum. Students take compulsory vocational courses in the lower secondary level however this compulsory form transforms into an elective form in the upper secondary level.

3.6. Netherlands

Compulsory education covers 5 to 17 years old students. Primary education, lower secondary education and the first two years of upper secondary education are compulsory. Students are guided to VWO or HAVO schools with general education or they can attend to VMBO schools with vocational options. VMBO schools have general programs for the first two years. Students can attend to vocational secondary schools at the age of 16. Vocational guidance is integrated into the whole secondary education curriculum. All of the students take vocational guidance courses during their secondary education.

3.7. Sweden

Like Finland, students are guided to vocational education or general secondary education for the first time after nine-year uninterrupted education. The earliest guidance age is 16. There are seventeen different programs in three-year high school education. Thirteen of these programs include detailed vocational education.

3.8. Czech Republic

Students attend to the uninterrupted nine-year education in basic training schools named as Základní škola. This level includes two segments but a single structured program. Students can continue their education on upper secondary schools named as gymnasium or conservatory. However, students are guided to vocational education after completing compulsory education. Students who finish the secondary education after taking maturitní zkouška exam, can attend to general, technical, vocational education or conservatory.

3.9. Denmark

Students who are 7-16 year old enroll to compulsory education. From the first year to 9th year of compulsory education there is career education in the curriculum with a multi-dimensional approach. Compulsory basic training schools called as Folkeskole has a curriculum that consists of 3 subject blocks. These blocks are on social sciences, fine arts and life sciences. Folkeskole is designed as a single structure and there is no transition between primary school and lower secondary school. Students can take elective courses from the blocks that they attend or can attend the general education.

3.10. Spain

Primary school is composed of six-year education known as 2+2+2. Including lower secondary education, compulsory education lasts for 10 years. This segmentation is being organized according to students’ age groups. After completing the two-year first cycle, students can attend only conservatory (Enseñanzas de régimen especial) to study dance and music. Students are being chosen in accordance with their competences. The earliest guidance age is 16. Lower secondary education includes four school
years is divided into two equal parts. Compulsory secondary education prepares students to vocational education. Students are guided by means of elective courses in preparation phase. In the last two years of compulsory education, there are guidance and vocational guidance activities predominantly.

3.11. Italy

Compulsory education lasts for ten years and serves for 6-16 year old pupils. Students who are fourteen years old are guided to upper secondary education or initial vocational education (FPI). In addition to this there are vocational guidance services. While lower secondary education offers general education, fourteen years old students are guided to different programs in upper secondary education. These schools are Liceo classico (classic high school), Liceo scientifico (science high school), Liceo Linguistico (language school), Liceo Socio-psico-pedagogico (sociological, psychological and pedagogical high school), Liceo Artistico (art school), Istituto tecnico (technical high school), Istituto professionale (vocational high school) / Istituti d’arte (craft high school) and Fomazione professionale di base (apprenticeship education).

3.12. Turkey

Compulsory education is composed of four-year two cycles and lasts for 8 years. First four years of these cycles correspond to primary education while the next four years stand for middle school. After completing first four-year education, 10 years old students are guided to general, vocational education or schools that require examination results for enrollment. Vocational schools include vocational trade high schools, vocational industrial high schools, girls’ vocational school, religious vocational school, multi-program high school and vocational and technical education centers.

The proposal which became law in Turkey, set the earliest age, when education is being interrupted as 10. Some countries’ earliest guidance ages are listed in the following table (OECD, 2012a: 57).

| Countries     | Earliest age when education is being interrupted | Countries     | Earliest age when education is being interrupted |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Denmark       | 16                                            | Japan         | 15                                            |
| France        | 15                                            | Mexico        | 15                                            |
| Iceland       | 16                                            | Portugal      | 15                                            |
| New Zealand   | 16                                            | Italy         | 14                                            |
| Norway        | 16                                            | Belgium       | 12                                            |
| Sweden        | 16                                            | Netherlands   | 12                                            |
| Spain         | 16                                            | Switzerland   | 12                                            |
| United Kingdom| 16                                            | Germany       | 10                                            |
| USA           | 16                                            | Austria       | 10                                            |

Table 2. Earliest age when education is being interrupted in some countries

4. Conclusion

In Europe; there are specific cross-national diversities when it comes to preschool education and vocational guidance activities. These activities alter as to country’s level of welfare, geopolitical position, demographic structure etc. The comparisons between countries should be done with regard to these variables. While comparing countries in terms of educational processes, countries’ academic achievement
in the international tests can be examined instead of doing this comparison only in the context of social welfare. The most effective policy implementations for every nation will arise as a result of such a comparison.

If there is a segmented structure at primary level, Turkey may need an elective guidance system at the end of first four-year cycle. When the existing social and economic disparities and quality differences between schools in Turkey are considered, as opposed to the international trends; such a guidance of a very early age, may increase inequalities. Particularly this may reduce the opportunity to access qualified education by children with disabilities.

Non-compulsory pre-primary education results in undesired lower levels of pre-primary enrollment ratios. It is known that students who do not enroll preschool, differ from their peers in the coming years (Kagitcibasi et. all, 2005).

It is realized that countries which guide students to vocational education at early ages, support these practices with elective courses or similar activities. Countries should consider the negative effects of early vocational guidance on students. Hence all variable conditions of countries’ should be examined and vocational guidance implementations should be organized in this manner.

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