

# A POLICY ANALYSIS ON RECENT 12-YEAR-COMPULSORY EDUCATION LAW IN TURKEY

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## ABSTRACT

*Education is an essential process to train and guide the future generations. This process must be organized to guarantee quality learning environments which provide all the students to be equipped with the intended skills. Maintaining the education process effectively would give the opportunity to the nations to supply prospective required qualified manpower. Turkey is one of these nations considering education as way to bring up qualified individuals and develops educational policies based on this objective. Turkish educational system has experienced a recent reform introducing 12-year-compulsory education. Until 2012, the children were obliged to take eight year primary education. In 2012, current legislation which is also known as 4+4+4 has been introduced; that is 4 years of primary, 4 years of lower secondary and 4 years of upper secondary education. The current reform has caused drastic changes which influence the whole system profoundly. To illustrate, the children's starting age to primary schools, the duration of the primary and lower secondary education, the set and content of the courses given during primary and secondary education have all been redesigned. However, these radical changes in the system have been done all of a sudden, without making any pilot study. Thus, the reform have been started to be criticized heavily even if there are supporting views. This is a theoretical study based on formal documents and experiences and aims to submit a policy analysis of the recent education reform realized in Turkey, discussing the strong and weak points upon the first year of its implementation.*

**Keywords:** *educational policy, compulsory education, Turkish education system*

## INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, the government has introduced 12 years compulsory education and a new system which is formulated by 4+4+4 from 2012-2013 education year. In the new compulsory education system, there has been some regulations on the children's school starting year and it has been determined as 5 years old. So, compared with the previous system, the children will have to start school 1.5 – 2 years earlier.

With the regulation of 4+4+4 educational system, four years secondary education was included in compulsory education. Compulsory education which was previously eight years was heightened to twelve years. From now on students will be able to get

their diplomas when they complete the secondary education not elementary education. As from 2012-2013 educational year, it will be compulsory to continue high school for students who graduate from 8th grade. Also, students who graduate from 8th grade or continue their high school education can complete their secondary education in an open high school if they like.

MEB also declared that with legally compulsory secondary education mobile education which was practiced in elementary education in rural areas and inclusive education which was practiced for exceptional students would be generalized in high school education. The new regulation which touches nearly 15 million students and their parents has also brought about some debates. In this study, what the new regulation which has legally approved by the government has been examined from different aspects by analyzing based on previous studies and legal documents.

### **Preparation Process of Related Law**

According to many stakeholders such as universities, experts and non-governmental organizations, before bill of law it wasn't discussed in any platform so it hasn't become persuasive. In a subject matter like education that is very crucial for our country's future, it was necessary to examine the subject thoroughly and to discuss it in detail before making law. Before the bill of law, there wasn't any groundwork. There was no pilot practice and experts were not consulted. Additionally, the views of NGOs and universities weren't taken. That's why, the support of society and stakeholders in education to new system is low. Karadeniz (2012) in a study with teacher stated that %62,8 of the teachers don't support the new system. In addition to this, %66,9 of the teachers think that the ones who prepared this law regulated it based on their political view.

### **60 months old children's starting to school**

Most academicians and studies think that lowering the school age to 60 months is not suitable to children's physical and emotional development. In this education system, a child goes to primary school at the age of 5 in which he is not at the age of concrete operations. He goes to elementary school at the age of 9 which is before abstract operations. He goes to high school at the age of 13 (Karadeniz, 2012).

Generally children start school at least at the age of 7 and there are practices of preschool education in many countries all over the world. These practices are not coincidences. On the other hand, it is known that in 1983-1985 educational years children at the age of 5 were accepted to primary schools and it was not a successful practice.

### **60 and 72 months old children's studying together**

Also, this practice will require 60 and 72 months old children to be taught in the same classroom. Yet, these children are quite different in terms of mental, physical, social, emotional and personality traits. 3 months difference is regarded as a very important difference at an age in which a child grows very fast in all terms (Hacettepe University, 2013). To teach 60 and 72 months children who have such differences in the same classroom will create a negative effect on their psychology (Karadeniz, 2012).

The former system let the parents keep their children who were born at the end of the year in preschool education by writing a petition. But in the new system these parents who don't want to send their children to school are obliged to get sick certificate for their children. In this certificate it has to say that 'child is not competent physically and mentally'. It means that parents are obliged to get incompetent certificate for their children.

### **More than 1 million students start school**

In 2012-2013 educational year, nearly 1 million students started school additionally. This increase in students' number is one of the most important difficulties that the new regulation will bring about. Such an increase has created a burden difficult to handle with for education system which has already some problems such as lack of teacher and room. And there are inequalities between different parts of the country.

Firstly, it has been claimed that there are not enough classrooms in schools to meet the need that has emerged from additional students. Although Provincial directorate of national education has tried to open new classrooms, especially in some parts of the big cities which get migration and densely populated the number of students in a classroom may exceed 70. With this increase, the quality of education which has already many problems will be under a serious risk (ERI, 2012).

Physical condition of schools isn't appropriate for 66 month children for whom school is compulsory and 60-65 month children whose parents wants their children to start school also with the increasing number of students. Various modifications and preparations have been made to school buildings. According to this, gradual transition to new education system made most of the school buildings consist of primary school, middle school and imam hatip (religious) school at the same time. During the three-year transition period, students with different course schedules, different hours and different programmes have to get education under the same roof. Inconvenience of physical environments threatens both quality of education and pupils safety (ERI, 2012).

## **Curriculum and Courses**

In the new curriculum, one hour has been diminished from each of Turkish, Free Activity, Visual Arts and Music lessons while one hour has been added to Math lessons. Joining to Free Activity course is no longer obligatory and it is depended on school management according to parent's will.

Additionally, physical education lesson is changed to "Game and Physical Activities" and lesson hours are increased to five hours from two hours. Lesson programme is announced at the last week of August. Because the lesson book is prepared this year, education materials arranged by related head office was used in 2012-2013 education term.

The Ministry aims to reduce the academic burden of students and develop sense of belonging to school with the changes in course schedule. Considering the changes, five hours for Game and Physical Activities lesson is a motivating step for developing sense of belongings of younger students. However it is not possible to say students' lesson burden is reduced as it is aimed. When one hour is reduced in Turkish lesson, one hour is added to Math lesson. To save five hours for Game and Physical Activities, one hour is diminished from each of Visual Arts and Music lessons. Compulsory lesson hours of first grades are 26 when compared to last year it is one hour more, total lesson hour is still same.

Classroom teachers didn't get a comprehensive education about the new curriculum so this prevented to apply the programme effectively. Teachers are provided distance education for new system but it is limited to five days starting on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Teachers who are educating students belonging to new age group in a different system aren't prepared and experienced with the new system and programme except from these seminars. Furthermore no matter how better the programme is designed, effectively applying the new activities focusing on learning with games isn't applicable for some districts probably having 70 students in a class.

## **High Schools**

Some of the students in middle schools which is equal to secondary stage of primary school (ages 10-14) will be guided for vocational schools. It could be inconvenient for students at those ages going to vocational schools. Vocational education for students whose characteristic attitudes just developing is controversial with one of the aims of the legislative proposal; "determining the students interests and skills and providing required guiding". Giving education for just one occupation to 10-14 ages students means these students decided which occupation they are going to have at between 6-10 ages which is too early age to make this decision (Karadeniz, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

As a result, legislative proposal mentioned should be withdrew as it isn't related with scientific basis, it isn't appropriate to developmental characteristics of child and it doesn't have beneficial effects on public welfare. Instead of this, it is thought that there is a necessity for all stakeholders to attend the process and reach an agreement for structuring human based education system which is more contemporary and more democratic for solving the basic problems of education system.

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