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THE PROBLEM OF TEACHER TRAINING IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

One of the problems of higher education in Turkey is related with teacher training. Therefore, in the center of the attempts for renewing the Turkish Higher Education system lies the problem of teacher training and thus this article evaluates the teacher training policies that are presently being applied by the Higher Education Council. In this article, first a brief review of the history of teacher training is done, and in relation to this, the teacher training model that is being implemented in line with the related national and international improvements is examined in terms of the programs, management policies, quality of education, course contents, etc. In addition, it is discussed whether the courses' being classified as compulsory, elective, theoretical, practical, world knowledge, pedagogical formation, etc and the courses' credit formats are suitable for the profession of teaching. Within this framework, first the problems observed in the coordination and cooperation issues between the Ministry of National Education that is responsible for the employment of teachers and the Higher Education Council that is responsible for the training of teachers are pointed out, and a new structure and model is proposed considering the universal improvements. In order to make the teacher training and employment compatible with the local, regional, national, and international expectations and requirements and to develop a more functional and applicable model, a flexible and dynamic teacher training policy must be applied. In this respect, considering the realities of today's world, a consistent balance should be provided between the conflicting and shared needs of the individual and the society. As an extension of this, special attention must be paid to the prospective teachers' attainment of an awareness of universal citizenship by including multi-cultural and multi-lingual programs. This will ease the process of the internalization of the universal values such as democracy and human rights that have become widespread with the influence of globalization. In this article, the view that current teacher training policies, in their present formats, cannot meet the requirements of the country is supported. To provide a basis for this argument, Turkish teacher training program is examined as a sample that demonstrates the characteristic features of this system. Accordingly, by pointing out the restrictive features of a single type program which is standardized through a strict and categorical perspective and whose application is made compulsory in all parts of the country by the central authority, the adoption of new policies based on the universal improvements in training branch and classroom teachers is proposed. In summary, this article analyzes the problem of teacher training in Turkey through a technical, academic, and scientific perspective and supports the reconstruction of the current teacher training model of higher education by emphasizing the special importance of the profession of teaching in today's conditions.

The Problem of Teacher Training In Turkey The History of Teacher Training in Turkey

In Turkey, a school for training teachers named Darülmüallimin. This indicates that was first established in 1848 and it was Turkey has a history and background of

150 years on this issue. However, the issue of training teachers had long been excluded from the university system. The most important improvement with respect to this issue was the inclusion of the education institutes -which used to depend on the Ministry of National Education (MNE)- within the body of the university system as education faculties in 1982. (1)

Arguments About The Current Teacher Training System

The inclusion of teacher training institutes within the body of the university system and the standardization of their programs does not mean that a permanent solution for the problem was found. One of the most important problems encountered related with this issue was the lack of planning. That is, the conversion of the three-year education institutes to the education faculties aimed at training teachers by a four-year program; however, the lengthening of the training period resulted in an increased demand for teachers. The problem became much more serious with the emergence of the problem of coordination and cooperation between the Higher Education Council (HEC) and the Ministry of National Education (MNE).

Because of this problem, starting from 1985-86 academic year, the graduates of some faculties other than the education faculties such as arts and sciences, agriculture, economy, and engineering were employed as teachers after being trained in some pedagogical formation courses for a short period of time. As for the current situation, in branches such as Turkish, English, classroom teacher, there is a high demand for teachers, while there is teacher surplus in the branches of chemistry, biology, and mathematics. This situation is a reflection of the problem of coordination and cooperation among the institutions frequently observed in Turkish Public Administration. In other words, the dishar-

mony between the institution of the Ministry of National Education (MNE) –which is responsible for employing teachers- and the institution of Higher Education Council (HEC) –which is responsible for training teachers- provides the basis for this problem. As a matter of fact, in 1994, HEC started the pre-service teacher training project in collaboration with the World Bank, and this project was put into practice in 1998-99 academic year by a central decision without being further argued in the education society. (2,3)

In summary, this article aims to argue the problem of teacher training in Turkey with respect to the recent improvements.

The Grounds For The New Teacher Training Project

In HEC documents, (4) the ground for the new teacher training project is explained as follows: “In the education faculties, the mission of science and fundamental research is of secondary importance because of these faculties’ inappropriate structure. In addition, since the missions of the involved institutions (HEC and MNE) are not clearly described, the problem has become much more serious and complicated.” Briefly, according to HEC, which is one of the directly related and authorized institutions, the uncertainty and arguments about this issue are still continuing. Therefore, while there is teacher surplus in many branches of teaching due to their inappropriate structuring and lack of planning, there is a considerably high demand for teachers especially in primary education both in the first and the second levels (5+3). However, HEC seems to have forgotten that education faculties have been included within its body since 1982 and it is responsible for this situation. (5)

In conclusion, HEC, by reconstructing the teacher training system in 1998, aimed at both increasing the quality of teacher training and overcoming the problems of employment. However, considering the

current situation, it is not possible to say that the problem has been solved. At this point, it will be useful to narrow down the topic to discuss the problem with respect to its more concrete aspects and thus shed light on the current situation. Therefore, the problem of Turkish teacher education will be examined with respect to the general problems mentioned above. As a result, we will both have the opportunity to examine the new teacher training model more closely and witness how the characteristic features of Turkish teacher education are reflected in the programs.

What The Reconstruction of Education Faculties Brought

According to the HEC project which required the reconstruction of the education faculties and which was put into practice in 1998, Turkish teacher education is established as an independent department. As a result, it is proposed that this department – which will train teachers to work only in the second level of primary education- will serve as a minor branch for the departments of teaching the first level in primary education, foreign languages, fine arts, physical education, education of disabled children, computer and instructional technologies education, educational sciences, and teaching science and social sciences in secondary education.

On the other hand, according to the same project documents, it is stated that some difficulties will be encountered in the application process because there are not enough instructors in many education faculties. In fact, this is an appropriate confession because the issue of teacher training is still one of the most important items in the agenda of Turkish public at present. An important part of this argument is about the exclusion of education faculties from the system of teacher training for secondary education branches (physics, chemistry, mathematics, literature, etc.). In other words, according to the model in practice,

education faculties train teachers only for the primary education and the secondary education branch teachers are trained by the non-thesis graduate programs which are attended by the graduates of the faculties other than the education faculty. This situation decreases the role of education faculties in teacher training (1).

Another dimension of the argument is related with the problem of the quality of teacher training. Turkish teacher education which consists of an important part of the problem is of strategic importance because this department has to provide an additional service for all of the other departments. Therefore, its situation is special and of higher priority. In addition, according to the new arrangement, the minor branch of the graduates of Turkish teacher training departments is teaching social sciences.

In the light of this information, it will be useful to analyze the Turkish teacher education department and the graduate programs which are determined by HEC and applied in all education faculties in a compulsory manner because of the centralist and hierarchical understanding of public administration in Turkey. Therefore, Table 1 presents the Turkish teacher training undergraduate program for it characterizes the current situation.

As it is well known, the common belief about teacher training is that this field's vocational courses consist of world knowledge and pedagogical formation. Table 1 indicates that the program is composed of 142 credits. Only a 10-credit part of this total number is allocated for elective courses. In other words, almost the entire program is composed of compulsory courses. It can be said that this situation will standardize teacher training to a great extent and will hinder professional creativity. In addition, it is not possible to claim that a program whose 96 % -quite a high ratio- is composed of compulsory courses can meet the expectations and requirements

of students.

On the other hand, it is observed that in the program only 33 credits are allocated for pedagogical formation courses, while 75 credits are allocated for vocational courses and 14 credits are allocated for world knowledge courses. In this distribution, disproportion between the ratios confirms that vocational knowledge and pedagogical formation courses have an advantageous position in teacher training. However, to what extent those courses match the contents and processes of teacher training is open to discussion. As a matter of fact, the exclusion of courses such as educational psychology, philosophy of education, educational sociology, educational management which have strategic importance in teacher training is a serious deficiency. A similar case exists for the world knowledge courses as well.

In this respect, when the distribution of the courses is examined, it is seen that almost all of the courses are about Turkish and Turkish Literature. However, university education, in line with the requirements of its structure, should be based on the concept of multi-cultural and multi-lingual programming which possesses universal characteristics. In addition, local and regional expectations should also be considered in the programs. Therefore, the program should include courses such as Contemporary World Literature, Philosophy, Contrastive Literature, English, German, and 20th century European Literature. By this way, since the Turkish teachers will get the opportunity to know a western language at a proficient level, they will be more successful in teaching the mother tongue. In addition, this will help to locate Turkish among other languages and to improve teaching Turkish. Thus, at this point, it should also be noted that the current program's 6-credit foreign language course is not enough to reach this aim.

Indeed, courses such as Contrastive Literature and Contemporary World Literature

are necessary to help to see what the situation of teaching Turkish and Turkish Literature is on a global scale. Besides, a university program is expected to possess some universal characteristics. However, in the current teacher training program, it is observed that foreign language learning is not paid adequate attention. This is because foreign language courses cover only a 6-credit part of the program and these courses are offered only in the first two semesters. This situation is also true for the social sciences teacher training program which has been determined as the minor branch. When the program is examined in this respect, it is seen that there is not any course which provides additional training on the branch other than the courses such as Introduction to Geography, History of Civilizations, Geography and Geopolitics of Countries, Turkish History and Culture, Citizenship, and Social Sciences. Only 20 credits are allocated for these courses in the 142-credit Turkish teacher training program. Therefore, with such a low amount of allocation for these courses, an efficient and fruitful minor branch training cannot be achieved. As a matter of fact, the education agreements signed with European Union with which Turkey is in the process of membership confirm this situation.

One of these projects, ERASMUS, aims that 25 % of the university students will be educated for at least one academic year in a country which is a member of this union, starting from the year 2000. However, the Turkish higher education system is still far from this goal because of its present structural problems and chronic national economic crises. Actually, none of the students enrolled in these teacher training programs could attain this opportunity of education abroad within the scope of this project so far.

Moreover, rapid scientific and technological improvements of today make people become life-long learners to improve their vocational knowledge and they ease

changing professions. (6) This situation puts the concept of life-long learning on the agenda. This concept necessitates a more flexible and functional teacher training. By this way, teachers will both have a second branch in their profession and at least know a second language. Because this situation will increase professional mobility, it will influence the quality of education positively. Most important of all, if Turkey becomes a member of the European Union, Turk teachers will be able to travel easily in the countries which are members of the union.

Is Practice Emphasized in Teacher Training?

Another change brought about by the new arrangement in teacher training is the claim that practice is emphasized over theory. (4) This situation is explained as follows in the related project documents: "Pedagogical formation courses taught in the past used to be mostly composed of theoretical information about educational sciences and used to be inadequate in terms of providing the teacher with the knowledge, skills, and viewpoints he would need as part of his profession. Therefore, new pedagogical formation courses give priority to the vocational knowledge and skills and to the real school environment, in addition to the theoretical knowledge." (7)

Indeed, in the new teacher training program, the number and period of practice courses have been increased and these courses have been made inter-related based on the principle of grading. (8) As a result, the prospective teachers first get the opportunity to improve their professional skills by doing small-scale practices (teaching by using various methods, questioning, group work, material design, testing, measurement and evaluation, attending meetings, providing students with individual help, classroom observation, etc.). In the further semesters, they can experience the profession of teaching inde-

pendently by taking on all the responsibilities for a class.

The tendency to emphasize practice over theory in teacher training is a situation being observed in many developed and developing countries of the world recently. (9) This perspective shift stems from the view that the teaching profession depends more on professional experience and skills than theoretical information. This shift also strengthens the information and experience exchange between the practice schools and the faculties and increases the quality of education. This application helps the professional maturation of the prospective teacher as well.

When the situation for the Turkish teacher training program –which was selected to give some idea about the teacher training in Turkey- is examined, it is seen that 34 of the 142 credits given in the undergraduate program are allocated for practice courses. In other words, the ratio between the theory and practice credits shows that the case is still in favor of the practice. In addition, the fact that the number of education faculties has increased rapidly and the population of the students has increased in an unplanned manner since 1998-99 academic year influences the practice program negatively. The school experience and practice teaching courses that are realized with crowded groups of students cannot reach their goals.

Indeed, the lack of planning and disharmony observed at the national level can initially be explained by the inadequacy of HEC' s organization and coordination efforts. This is because to be able to coordinate practice teaching activities at the national level and to supervise planning and evaluation activities in the cities where the faculties are located necessitates an organization that is effective and broad in scale. Although HEC took on this mission, it could not provide effective and beneficial solutions in this direction. In this respect, it is observed that the problem of practice has

become much more serious and there exist some conflicts between the faculties and the practice schools in terms of communication and cooperation. Thus, it will be appropriate to leave the job of finding solutions for these problems to the committees in the cities and faculties. By this way, it will be easier for these parties who experience the problems themselves to find solutions that will satisfy everyone involved. Even, the initiative powers of the local organizations will increase because the missions of the central authority will be transferred to the provinces. In this respect, the actual mission of HEC –which has a centralist and hierarchical organization- is to transfer its missions and responsibilities to the faculties and MNE gradually and thus strengthen the solidarity between the institutions. In addition, faculties' offering the practice teaching and school experience courses in the primary schools, which they can establish within their own bodies for this purpose, is also a reasonable solution. (2,10)

Conclusions

In teacher training, Turkey has a significant history and background. However, because of the coordination and cooperation deficiencies experienced between the institutions involved and the lack of planning observed in public administration in general in Turkey, a permanent and radical solution for the problem could not be found. Especially, the scholarship opportunities provided by MNE for the students who selected teacher training programs to study and were admitted to the programs has increased the demand for these programs recently. (3) However, the actual reason for this increase in the demand for the teacher training programs is the serious economic problems and the unemployment problems in the country. This is because, except the teaching positions, the chance for being employed in public service has decreased considerably in recent years.

Consequently, this increased demand for the teacher training programs forces temporary and daily solutions rather than allowing finding permanent solutions which depend on scientific findings. Therefore, the number of faculties and the student quotas are being increased rapidly.

At present, there are 64 education faculties in the 77 universities all over the country. In these faculties, there are 50 students per instructor. It will be much easier to understand how high this ratio is if the fact that there are 7 students per instructor in pharmacy faculties and 8 students per instructor in economy faculties is considered. On the other hand, local organizations and universities have no say about the teacher training programs since there exists a centralist and hierarchical understanding of public administration in Turkey. In addition, selecting the prospective teachers by a nation-wide Student Selection Exam (SSE) does not match the nature of vocational education.

According to the recent educational statistics, education faculties keep the record in their hands with respect to the increase in the number of students. However, the number of instructors who possess the required professional knowledge and pedagogical formation is quite limited. Therefore, the unplanned increase in the number of students reduces the quality of education.

HEC' s new arrangement about the structure of teacher training programs does not allow the graduates of education faculties to apply to study secondary education branch teacher training programs. According to the arrangement, non-thesis graduate programs for branch teacher training can be studied by the graduates of faculties of arts and sciences, and engineering. This situation has decreased the function and importance of the education faculties.

As stated above, to what extent the courses brought about by the new arrangement are useful for an effective and fruitful

training of the teachers is open to discussion. In this respect, it is difficult to claim that the course contents match the modern and scientific improvements and the novelties introduced by these improvements.

Suggestions

1. The new single type teacher training model being implemented nation-wide in Turkey should be reexamined. In this process, local, national and international expectations should all be reflected in the programs. For this purpose, in education faculties, the number of compulsory courses should be reduced, while the number of elective courses is increased; and, these responsibilities should be given to the university presidencies.

2. Due to its nature as a vocation, teacher training should emphasize practice. Therefore, the period and credit number of theoretical courses should be reduced, while those of practice courses are increased. For this purpose, a certain amount of some theory-oriented courses such as Development and Learning, Classroom Management and Introduction to Teaching Profession should be presented in a practice-oriented fashion.

3. Non-thesis graduate programs for secondary education branch teacher training should accept the graduates of education faculties, and thus, primary education and secondary education teacher training systems should be revised and reconstructed considering their mutual interaction. For this purpose, the faculties of arts and sciences which offer undergraduate programs in mathematics, physics, chemistry, literature, etc. should be included within the body of the education faculties. By this way, a more rational use of physical and human resources will be attained as well as avoiding unnecessary duplications in teacher training.

4. In the field of teacher training, as in all fields of education, flexible and multi-directional policies should be implemented based on the international conjecture and the changing demands. For this purpose, local organizations and universities should be given the opportunity to have a say in the decisions.

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