INTE 2014

Education policies during Ataturk period
Birsen UNAL *

Selcuk University, Ataturk Principles and Revolution History Department, Konya, Turkey

Abstract

Within the years of World War I, national struggle period begins after the occupations in Ottoman Empire and considering those years, some points can be highlighted as important factors that help preparing the necessary environment. Since Atatürk was the leader of National struggle, he was able to make necessary adjustments during those hard years and the foundation period of Turkish Republic. One of those arrangements (reforms) was in the field of education.

As education system in Ottoman Empire was away from nationalism and was generally under the influence of religion, it was incomplete in terms of quality and quantity. For this reason, Atatürk presented a contemporary and national system which meets the needs of the state and the public.

In this study, we will examine the process how education was rescued from the property of not meeting the needs of the state and became national and modern. We will discuss Atatürk's nationalism idea reflected on the innovations in the field of education.

We will witness the rapid development of our nation's modernization period thanks to the nationalization of education.

Key Words: Education, Education Policy, Ataturk Period

Introduction

In the late periods of Ottoman State reform movements and Western opinion entered in our society necessary importance was not given to education and teaching and education consciousness was not achieved.

The social function of education is to provide development and sustainability of societies by raising qualified persons with scientific methods. It is possible to transfer cultural accumulations via education by building drastic,
steady bridges between generations. Not realizing this event has become one of the greatest factors leading to the state’s collapse (Aslan1989).

The traditional education which could not fulfill the needs of era and society, blocked every types of developments closing its door to scientific mindset as well. In this regard, the education and teaching methods obstruct creativity, its working method only based on rote learning kept students from having constructive and creative characteristics (Özodaşık 1999).

**Atatürk’s Opinions About Education**

The fundamentals Atatürk determined on education appeared during his own educational life. Atatürk stated that truths of education must be based on scientific fundamentals getting rid of superstitions on every occasion.

“The aim of education, the basics of education, the quality of education are great. If the followed way is a wrong one on this issue and this way drives nation into breakdown, does the crime belong to the leading ones rather than the wretched public who is virtuous, good-tempered, unselfish, follows the way and trusts in persons responsible for them (Koçer 1981)”

Atatürk himself experienced various and opposite education methods in his student life, observed how these affected students and young persons and also saw what results the traditional education methods performed over centuries gave. The methods which he saw to be applied in schools, are as follows:

- methods partly based on freedom as well as oppressive methods
- partly active, rational, experimental, effective methods as well as passive, mobile and rote learning methods.

After his experiences, observations and studies, Atatürk made one of the most important identifications in Turkish education history. This was associated with the education-teaching methods. “I am of opinion that education and discipline methods followed until now are the most important factor in our nation’s regression history. (Akyüz 1995)”

Every time Atatürk suggested that there was a common illiteracy in society, release and development would be possible when destroying this and spreading science, education in society. According to him, the fault in lack of information is not the public’s, results from the old methods applied without understanding Turkish characteristics, and these ones cause the public remained lack of information.

To be an independent state in changing world conditions for a Turkish society, it is necessary to step in great and radical, social change and improvement with all parts including city-dwellers, peasants, intellectual, illiterate ones, women and men for a Turkish society. Atatürk wanted to adapt this social change into the modern civilization without breaking language, religion, traditions and history and to make it as a creative power in order to live for the Turkish society as an independent state (Koçer 1992). We can understand this from his words: “Gentlemen, the most realistic guides, the real guiding principles are education, science for everything, for materiality, for morality, for success in the world. Except for education, science it is a blindness, illiteracy, error to search for guides (Yağcı 2007)”

Atatürk believed that education must contain practical, useful information. He determined the main goal of education was to create an information society. And in this respect, he realized the education work.

“The keystone of our education is to destroy lack of information. If it is not destroyed, we are in the same place. If we want to have a real escape, firstly we must destroy this, lack of information with all our strength, all our ambitions (Akkutay 2006).”

**Education Policies Performed in Atatürk’s Period**

Atatürk did not wait for an appropriate time in order to make his opinions about education come true. Even he took many steps for education in the worst conditions to catch time, to have a modern civilization. Within the years of the Independence War he tried to achieve it in every occasion.

There was a rate of 7% of literate persons in our country during the Independence War when the struggle for independence was given. This rate was 10% for men, 4% for women. Only 15% of the persons knowing how to read knew how to write. About 90% of the population studies in villages and there were not any schools and teachers in villages more than 90%. Almost all the peasant population did not know how to read and write. Throughout the
country there were 1241 students in 23 high schools and 2558 students in 20 vocational technical (secondary-high school) schools. Even though there were 18,000 madrasah students registered, only 10% of them (1,800) kept on their learning. Some applications in madrasah caused misuse by the students and families. The ones registered in madrasah did their jobs such as klutziness, greengrocer, butchery, etc. but they do not go to madrasah. Because they were not conscripted, did not give any taxes as long as they were registered in madrasah (Adem 2006).

------ The lowness in the percentage of the people who can read and write, making use of the missings in education, and the fact that the country was struggling in war accelerated Atatürk to make attempts. Moreover, Atatürk gave more importance in education and educators in order to convince the people in Anatolia for independence war and to encourage the Ankara government to be with him. In the hard periods of the war Atatürk was interested in the situations of teachers who could not take their salary, wrote to the Education Authorities and provinces. He organized Anatolian teachers, made an opening speech of the meeting in an Education Congress held for them (Ergun 1997).

In that congress Atatürk himself made a call for teachers and educators for the release of Turkish nation, laid emphasis on their duties.

Even though there were not any opportunities to put the decisions made in the congress into effect due to the war, this congress had a significant and meaningful place in Turkish education history.

Educational reforms were started with the new arrangement of the system and renewal process of the system was analyzed by scientists. Analyses involved dimensions such as schools, school systems, teaching programs, teacher training, staff policies and new-establishment of the ministry organization.

Atatürk adapted education as an attractive power, a locomotive in total development of Turkish nation. “It is such an education that makes a nation live as a free, independent, glorious and noble society, or that drives into slavery and poverty.” With this word, Atatürk indicated that the main objective of education was to protect Turkey’s national presence, future.

"Our great case is strengthen our presence as the most civilized nation with the best welfare.

This is a dynamical ideal of the great Turkish nation with drastic revolutions in opinions but not only in institutions. To achieve this ideal in the shortest time, we must follow opinions and movements all together. In this attempt success is only possible with a legal plan and working in a rationalist way. Therefore, not leaving even one citizen who does not know reading-writing; bringing technical staff required by all development wars and new roof of the country: creating persons and institutions that can understand, tell and convey the ideology of country cases between generations; hereby presenting these important principles in the shortest time are the great and serious duties and responsibilities undertaken by the Ministry of National Education. Always keeping my distinguishing principals active in minds of Turkish youth and conscience of Turkish nation is a mainly duty which belongs to our universities and schools (Par- Önen 1987).”

Atatürk's understanding of national education has the aim of creating and developing a teaching staff that lets our nation have a modern civilization in the shortest, the most correct and the largest way (Gürses 1994).

Atatürk took his most important step of the national education towards his opinions that is the establishment of Law on Unification of Education. Thus, a national education away from religious effects and bilateral applications was established.

Madrasahs were closed. After madrasahs were closed, imam hatip (religious) schools were opened. Instead of Madrasah Süleymaniye, a School of Theology was set up in Istanbul Ottoman University.

Military high schools were converted to high schools. Education became obligatory for female and male children. Under the Constitution of Turkish Republic dated 1924, the provision (article 87) ‘the primary school in education became obligatory and free in state schools for all Turkish people’ was included (Ergun 1997).

The Third Heyet-i İlimiye (Education Committee) meeting held in 1926 made contributions to perform educational mobilization of Republic with scientific methods (Yücel 1994).

One of the vital factors the New Turkish State protects is our culture. Atatürk stated that our culture has its own characteristics and aspects like the others. It is necessary to understand these values concerning the Turkish nation well and to raise defense consciousness against every kinds of opposing views.
Atatürk crowned our national culture with education. He believed that only education makes National Culture possible have a level of modern civilization. In his speech;

“Education which lets a nation live as a free, independent, glorious, noble and great society or leaves it in slavery and poverty.” saying he emphasized that our armies’ victory will be sustainable with education, culture and civilization.

The Law Concerning the Educational Organization was put into effect on April 3, 1926. Thus, both organization relating to education was encouraged and teaching was pledged as a profession, the Board of Education and Discipline was created as a board of experts in the Ministry of National Education. With the same law, the “Public Discipline Bureau” was established as a provincial, public education unit (Karaküütük 2006).

The regulation issued for public classes, public conferences in 1927 gave the function for equipping the ones who could not have any education, fell behind or could not have any learning stage they want due to various reasons with basic citizenship information a Republic citizen must know, strengthening national culture and ideal to the Public Classes. 64.302 citizens benefited from 3304 public classes opened in the 1927-1928 academic year (Geray 1978).

At the beginning of the year 1928, the transition attempts to the Latin letters started step by step. TBMM enacted the law of usage of international numbers. Atatürk laid stress on the importance of Latin letters in his speeches.

On November 1, 1928, the writing law was accepted in the first discussion of the third term of TBMM. The nation welcomed this law well. This was a desire for having a new, easy writing, learning reading-writing and saving themselves from illiteracy.

On November 3, 1928, it came into effect. The old writing could be used until June 1930 at the latest (Ergun 1996).

With the enactment of new letters, national schools were established before the head teacher ‘Atatürk’on November 24, 1928. National schools were opened for the nation to read and write New Turkish letters easily and let a vast majority of people be literate (Geray 1978).

Between the 1927-28 academic year the Village Teaching Schools were opened. As the other schools were for 5 years, this school was for 3 years. The ones who graduated from this school, were given a home and a garden near the school in the village.

On April 10, 1929 the students were sent abroad owing to the state to raising high-qualified human power necessary for our country. Many numbers of students were taken to Germany, France and other European countries to train teachers in sciences of foreign language, history, geography, mathematics, art, music and physical education, as well as engineers in technical fields (Karagözoglu 1994).

On February 19, 1932 the Public Houses were established to spread revolutions, enroot them, develop public in terms of social, cultural aspects. The houses were opened by CHP. The establishment basics were determined by CHP. Also, its managers were chosen by CHP. The public houses work in nine branches held for public classes, courses, bookshelves, publication, peasantry, language and writing, history and museum, social aid, sports, presentation, game, fine arts (Karaküütük 2006).

On April 12, 1931 Turkish Historical Society was established and on July 12, 1932 Turkish Language Society was established in order to make researches about Turkish history and language and to carry out the scientific projects accordingly (karagözoglu, 1994).

In 1934 Atatürk suggested that intelligent sergeants be appointed as “educators” in villages after being subjected to short-term courses (Koçer 1967). This application started in 1936. 80 young persons from the Mürvet Plain villages in Ankara, who did their military services, were included in this Course for Educators during 8 months. The educators trained for villages were always controlled by the Minister and Auditors. The course books and programs were prepared for the Courses of Educators, on June 11, 1937 ‘the Law of Village Educators’ was passed. According to this law, educators would be trained for guiding villagers in agricultural works as well as education and teaching in villages incapable for their total population. These training courses of village educators were opened in various places until 1946, and they gave courses to 8.675 educators.

The two village teaching school was opened in Izmir Kızılçullu and Eskişehir-Mahmudiye in 1937 to train teachers for villages with high population (population more than 400). The first name of these schools was “Village Education Dormitory”. These involved the ones leaving village primary schools for 3 years, then a secondary school education of 3 years was given to the mentioned ones after completing a primary school education of 5 years. Both courses and some crafts and agricultural works were given in practice as well.
In 1938 peasant girls and women started to be taken to the department of training educators (Ergun 2006).

**Conclusion**

In Ottoman Empire, education has fulfilled all things with various reforms during the Atatürk’s period instead of the education understanding which is quantitatively limited and qualitatively incomplete, cannot respond to necessities of time and save public from illiteracy. Educational studies presented a new understanding and application. Theories and applications became more consistent.

When examining these as follows:
- With the Law of Unification on Education, education was in hand of state management
- Closing madrasah, understanding of bilateral education was removed
- Bringing foreign schools under control, state authority was presented in education
- Female-male education became obligatory
- Instead of religious courses, science-social courses were given
- Schools were opened in accordance with certain groups of ages and their numbers were increased
- Opening Schools such as Military, Vocational, Art Schools each type of educational needs was met
- Opening universities high education was provided
- Opening village institutes teacher needs were fulfilled
- With the alphabet reform, our language and education based on religion became national
- Opening Public Rooms, almost all persons from 7 to 70 learned to read and write
- Opening Public Houses, the public was informed in various fields
- Opening Turkish History Institution, our history belonging to the Ottoman State became national
- Opening Turkish Language Institution our pure Turkish was protected and became scientific language.

As understood from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s sentence ‘‘Our great case is strentghen our presence as the most civilized nation with the best welfare.’’, the New Turkish State was expected to be notable states of era protecting our national values through education. This was also succeed in. Each steps taken for education glorified our national identity and state.

**References**


