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The Legalization Process of 4+4+4 in the Narratives of the Primary School Teachers in Yozgat City Center in Turkey*

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ABSTRACT

As well as the significant changes in the history of Turkish educational system, 4+4+4 is another comprehensive step. It has been appraised by some educationalists as a controversial school reform. On the one hand it has raised the compulsory education from 8 years to 12, on the other hand, it intermitted the 8 year compulsory education via dividing it into 4+4+4. This study aims to highlight the narratives of primary school teachers about the legalization process of 4+4+4 coded as 6287 in 2012-2013 semester in Yozgat city center. It is known that there appeared certain discussions on this change in media during its legalization proces. It was discussed with its educational, political and social concerns. However, as the real agents of educational system, teachers' opinions either did not come insight or were not taken into account by the authorized millieu. From this point of view this paper first encapsulates what the basic issues of these discussions briefly and then the ideas of primary school teachers about the change. The method of the study is oral history methodology, in other words, to analyze the narratives of twenty primary schools' teachers. Before making contact with the teachers, a legal permission was taken from the local governor of Yozgat city so as to interview with the voulnteer teachers. Then different primary schools in Yozgat city center were visited and appointments from teachers were taken and then the interviews were made real in the following days. With these interviews, the opinions of primary school teachers who are the real operators of education were partially determined.

Keywords: 4+4+4, primary school teachers, narratives, curriculum.

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Türkiye Yozgat Merkezdeki İlkokul Öğretmenlerinin 4+4+4'ün Yasallaşma Süreci ile İlgili Anlatıları

ÖZ

Bu çalışma 2012-2013 eğitim öğretim yılında Yozgat merkezde ilkokul öğretmenlerin 4+4+4 olarak bilinen 6287 yasanın yasalaşma süreci ile ilgili anlatılarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yasallaşma esnasında kamuoyu ve medyada bu değişiklik üzerine bazı tartışmaların olduğu bilinmektedir. Bu tartışmalar eğitsel, siyasi ve toplumsal endişeler çerçevesinde gerçekleşti. Yasallaşma sürecinde 4+4+4 ile ilgili pek çok tartışma kamuoyunun gündemini meşgül etti. Eğitimle ilgili kamuoyunun büyük kesimini ilgilendiren böyle bir değişikliğe ilişkin tartışmaların hem kısa sürede hem de kısır bir içerik çerçevesinde gerçekleştiğini ileri sürmek yanlış olmaz. Bu tartışmalar daha çok siyasi ve ideolojik kaygılar çerçevesinde gerçekleşirken işin eğitim ile ilgili boyutu büyük ölçüde gözardı edildi. O süreçte eğitim sisteminin gerçek unsurları olan öğretmenlerin görüşleri ya ortaya çıkmadı ya da yetkili çevreler tarafından hiç dikkate alınmadı. Bu noktadan hareketle, bu çalışma öncelikle 4+4+4'ün yasallaşma süreci ile ilgili ilkokul öğretmenlerinin görüşlerini kapsamaktadır. Bu görüşlerin ortaya çıkarılması eğitim ve öğretim faaliyetlerinin önemli bir kesimini oluşturan ve bu faaliyetlerin gerçek uygulayıcıları olan öğretmenlerin ne düşündüklerini bilmek açısından önemlidir. Çalışmanın yöntemi sözlü tarih yöntemidir, başka bir ifadeyle yirmi tane ilkokul öğretmeninin anlatılarını analiz etmeye dayalıdır. Öğretmenlerle bağlantı kurmadan önce, gönüllü öğretmenlerle görüşmeleri gerçekleştirmek için Yozgat Valiliği'nden izin alındı. Sonra Yozgat merkezdeki bazı ilkokullar ziyaret edilerek öğretmenlerden randevu alındı ve devamında görüşmeler gerçekleştirildi. Bu görüşmelerle, eğitim öğretimin gerçek uygulayıcıları olan ilkokul öğretmenlerinin değişiklik süreci ile ilgili düşünceleri kısmen saptanmaya çalışıldı.

Anahtar Sözcükler: 4+4+4, ilkokul öğretmenleri, anlatılar, müfredat.

INTRODUCTION

There have always been significant changes in the history of Turkish educational system. Some of them have been comprehensive and influential on educational system in the long run. The Law of Unification of Education, on the 3rd of March, 1924, the Law of Basic National Education coded as 1739 on the 14th of June, 1973 and the change resulting in increasing compulsory education from 5 years to 8 on 18th of August, 1997 are some these changes and can be taken into consideration as cornerstones of Turkish educational system (Sakaoğlu, 2003, p. 291). Increasing compulsory education from 5 years to 8 has been a bone of contention for a long time in Turkish educational system. The Turkish Ministry of Education has planned and mentioned several times to incerease the compulsory education from 5 years to 8 years since 1946. It was first planned in the 8th National Councel of Education on 10th December of 1946 by uniting elementary and middle (secondary) schools. The next attempt was declared in 1973. Despite these attempts this need was only realized in 1997. (Güven, 2012, Sakaoğlu, 2003).

As well as the above mentioned developments in Turkish educational system, 4+4+4 is another comprehensive step and as Güven (2012) recently mentions it has been appraised by some educationalists as a controversial school reform. On the one hand it has raised the compulsory education from 8 years to 12, on the other hand, it intermitted the 8 year compulsory education via dividing it into 4+4 (Güven, 2012:556) and dropped the starting age of children to primary school from 72 months to 60/66. As 4+4+4 change increased the age of the conpulsory education both 'upwards' and 'downwards' without putting a great emphasis on pre-school education, it reminds us the term "process of institutionalisation of childhood" as Alan Prout (2003:16) famously indicates in one of his studies as well.

The 4+4+4 change particularlly the starting age of children to primary school was a bone of contention among various parts of the society on account of different political way of thinking and educational concerns. The pervasive side of these changes indicated above since the foundation of the Turkish Republic is that they have been in an recursive cycle as these changes have been formed mostly with the political concerns rather than taking into account the conditions of the stakeholders of the educational system i.e, educationalists, academicians, school directors, teachers, childrens' parents. The focul point of the discussions was that the government was trying to intermit the 8 year compulsory education to put the educational system into a religious perspective and constitute the junior high school of religious schools (Prayer-preachers High Schools). Besides, they believed that with this change there would be age gap between the students when childern begin school at the age 5 and as a result of this certain problems would appear not only for the children but also for the teachers and the parents. Moreover, some assert that 60/66 months children would have problem as they would not be physically and mentally mature enough to cope with the first grade curriculum (Aras, 2012).

Unlike these statements, the governement's assertion was to extend compulsory education from 8 years to 12 years and remove aggrieved part of the society due to the changes led by the 28 February, 1997 (Güven, 2012). I believe and comprehend how significantly the political interests play roles in the formation of policy of

education in the long run but in Turkey, we have always come across so many immediate changes about education that it is not easy to grasp to what extent they have shaped our educational system positively. Unless we let these changes grow their fruit, we will probally not have better and sensible interpretations about them. We have to constitute long standing projects via allowing almost all participants of education during the decison-making process in order not to waste our future generations (Sağlam, 2012).

As it has been a sort of tradition to take European countries as reference in Turkish educational reforms since the Ottoman modernization and as well as the historical attempt to be a part of European continent, a candidate of being a member of European Union for a long time, it is staminal to have a look to the starting age of children to primary school in European countries. This age changes from one country to another. To illustrate, while in Germeny, France, Belgium, Italy, Austria and Irland children have to begin school when they are six, in Sweden, Finland and Estonia they have to began school while they are seven. There is no problem with at what age the children start their compulsory education; however, in most of these countries pre-school education is widespread and compulsory. That makes a quite big difference it is because when they begin school they are homogenous in terms of their adaptation to school with their educational and cultural baggage. Increasing the compulsory education from 8 years to 12 seems to be an advantage as only a few countries like Belgium and Hungary have such a long period of compulsory education. Nevertheless, with 4+4+4 bill, the first 8 compulsory years is intermitted and the children do not have to go to the secondary and high school, they can continue their education by following the open secondary and high school. This may lead to the dicrease in the number of girls attending to school (Büyükcan, T. and Karakaş, 2012:12).

Now that it has been almost more that a year since the implementation of 4+4+4, there have been some studies dealing with concerns of some and the outcomes of this change in general. For instance, Güven's *the 4+4+4 School Reform Bill and the Fatih Project: is it a Reform?* presents a historical background of Turkish Primary School Education and details his own concerns about the change. Also, P. Ünal's *Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin 4+4+4 Uygulamasına Yönelik Görüşleri* is one of significant studies performed on 4+4+4 reform. It reveals the necessity of the relationship between the success of educational reform and teachers' undrstanding and application of educational reform. There appear the teachers' opinions about 4+4+4 (P. Ünal, 2013). Despite the fact that the issue's importance has weakened in media and to some extent in academic discussions, it still seems to be an atractive issue for the academic studies. I hope this study will probably give more chance to raise the voice of the teachers who are the real agents of the educational activities in the educational system as a whole.

The content of the study has been reconstructed on the basis of transcripts of the primary school teachers' narratives about the legalization process of 4+4+4. When we pay attention to the the narratives teachers teaching in primary schools in Yozgat city center, we are able to come out with some ideas deriven from their narratives shaped during the process of legalization of 4+4+4. As the real agent of education they especially focus on how their ideas, those of the academitians, public and the

conditions of the schools have been ignored by the policy makers of education while actualizing 4+4+4. Thus, their narratives about this ignorance and their demand in this respect to be met comprise the core of the paper.

METHOD

The method of this study is oral history methodology which is a method of collecting, preserving, and amnd interpreting historical information through recorded interviews with people, communities and participants in past events and ways of life (Oral history, 2005). Oral history is primarily an interdiscilinary method which is the area of intersection for sogiologists, anropologists, historians, those studying in literature, culture, education (Thompson, 2006:23). Each of these disciplines has contributed vital insights into the art of interviewing and enriched the methods used by the researchers (Russell, 2013). It has a unique power as it helps us to reach the experiences of masses whose voices have been hidden and living on the margin of power relations (Thompson, 2006:28). In other words, it allows the voices of those that have been partially or totally ignored, marginalizsed or silenced within particular contexts to be heard (Haynes, 2013, Tan, 1998). This leads to the democratization of the nature of history and the development of the historical consciousness (Grele, 1991). The oral sources of ordinary people have a great importance in understanding history as a whole hence it is the methodology to make sense of past (Caunce, 1994). This making sense of past is more about the meaning of the past events than the events themselves (Portelli, 1998).

Teachers as a great part of the society as well as that of the educational system have vital ideas reflecting what they had thought and how their views shaped about the legalization process of 4+4+4. It is because they are not simply the objects of an educational system but are seen as active agents of it. I had intervies with 20 male and female teachers working at primary schools in Yozgat city center and asked them what their ideas had been during the legalization of 4+4+4. Once the interviews were carried out, they were decoded by keeping their originality and used in the text where necessary. During these interviews as active agents they were feeling heard, valued and also being treated as responsible citizens. That is what oral history methodology leads to. It opens its ears to the voices of those who have been excluded from the dominant way of making social and educational sciences such as, history, history of education, sociology, sociology of education etc.,

FINDINGS

The Narratives of Teachers about the Legislation Process of 4+4+4

No matter whether the teachers were supporting the change or not 16 teachers (80%) I interviewed with revealed their opinions about the legislation process and indicated that it was an immediate decision taken and applied without considering the infrastructures of the schools, the competencies of the teachers for the new curricula and the possible problems teachers would confront with. The question of

starting age of children to school also had occupied the minds of the teachers. These are some of the teachers' narratives they recount.

a) 4+4+4: An Immediate Taken Decision

Almost all the teachers I had interviews with claim that 4+4+4 was a an immediately taken decision. Their narratives display that they were not content with the process of such a significant change that influences a great part of the society. Some of them claim that the process of how to form and shape 4+4+4 took place in a short time. To illustrate, Gülay Narin reveals her ideas as:

> *"It changed suddenly. There was no infrastructure of it. It happened all of a sudden. We were thinking of educating the 5th grade next year and then graduate the children and were expected to educate the 1st grade."*

Orkun Özgen's narrative also supports the previous one and displays there would appear some problems it is because of ignoring the necessity of doing longlasting researches and hearkening the discussions and criticims of the related stakeholders of such a vital issue, such as the teachers themselves.

> "*We did not have any opinions. It was partially sudden and eunexpected. We were not asked about what sort of things we would face, what problems could be. When implementing a new thing, the opinions of those who put it in practice should be taken." Unfortunatelly, since they were not taken, it caused problems."* Emre yıldız (16): *There haven't happened any changes in our opinion. What interested us was about how it was going to be applied. It was an untimely and unplanned 4+4+4.*

Moreover, Beyhan Taş puts his ideas as *It was an immediately taken decision thus I do not think it will have much contribution to the education.*

> *"When 4+4+4 began to be on the agenda, like all educationists I was in a curiosity. I thought about what kind of result it was going to give. I followed the written and visiual media for many days, I listened to the experts, followed all the open sessions on TV and joined their ideas with mine. As a result of this I haven't been content with the results." In my opinion Turkey was not ready for 4+4+4 change. Such a decision was to be discussed by educational experts, universities' instructors. Nonetheless, unfortunatelly it was not." 99 percent of the experts I listened and read claimed that 4+4+4 was not appropriate with its present form.* Tülay Yıldırım: *"I did not look at it positivly. I guessed that there would be shortcomings when I first heard it and it has happened as I guessed before."*

Furthermore, it is understood from the narratives of some teachers that they had not had much idea about the change. One of the teachers, Mehmet Baymak I interviewed with puts his opinion as:

"*When 4+4+4 came on agenda, it was what we did no expect, we did not know its content exactly and so we didn't know what we were going to come across. Of course we had some thoughts like what and how it was going to be. We had some concerns. Despite our previous gains and experiences, we had the concern of facing with a different method."*

Zeki Ayyıldız who backs up the change reveals that;

"*It is of course a profound change. Our prior knowledge about it was what we had heard from the media. During the seminer period we were informed by the experts determined by the Ministry of Education. Implementation of it immediately was a surprise for us. I did not have educational practices about it but we had only prior knowledge of it."*

b) A Decision without Considering the Infrastructures of the Schools and the System itself

The teachers also mentions the shortcomings of the change regarding the lack of infrastructures of schools that can not meet the needs of new curricula formed accordingly. Beyhan Taş emphasizes the necessity of infrastructures of the schools and that of teachers' competencies.

"I can say that for this, there ought to have been infrastructural works first. Definitelly the infrastructures of schools, physical positions and environments of them have to be prepared. While the teachers are educated they are to be educated according to the new curricula. They called and took us for a week period of seminer, they had and presented great ideas; however, unfortunatelly, their implementation in schools in Turkey seem to be poor as the decisions are taken from the top, our ideas are not taken at all."

Zeki Yıldız finds the chage as a positive development; nevertheless, he specifies how significantly we need to develop the infrastructures of the schools as well.

"*Separating primary school from the secondary school is a right decision and positive on our side but the buildings have to be separated as well. Particularlly the physical environment for 60/66 months children must be made ready. The stairs, toilets and their sinks ought to be prepared according the small age groups. The stairs are too high for them. The physical conditions ought to be reconsidered. Feasibility researches have to be done. Despite the fact that this is what they had been supposed to be serious about, they must have missed its necessity and were found unprepared unfortunatelly. I definitely sustain the program though.*"

The term infrastructure does not only refers to the physical conditions of the schools, it also comprises all the elements of education, such as, the number of the teachers to meet the needs of number of the classes. They began to think about what was going to happen to their working places. They had concerns that they would have to be appointed to different schools in the rural areas due to the increase in the number of teachers working in elementary schools in the city center in general.

According to the First Term Evaluation of 4+4+4 by Eğitim Sen (2013) with 4+4+4 change about 30.000 primary school teachers will have no classrooms (being out of permament staff) and may have to change their schools which are going to affect them negativelly.

Among twenty teachers, 3 teachers had this concern and mentioned their opinions related. For instance, Halim Danacı recounts that with 4+4+4 change many primary school teachers would have no classrooms to teach.

> *"When it came on the agenda, we thought many of our teacher friends were going to have no class. There was no infrastructure. 4+4+4 was implemented under these circumstances. The aim was to seperate the big students and the small ones, primary and secondry schools. However, it did not happen. It caused a disorder/chaos."*

Additionally, what Yasin Dağ Yazgan reveals is about what is going to happen to them when they do not have classrooms to teach.

> *"We didn't think there would be any change in terms of transfering our knowledge to the students. The difficulty that came to our mind was that since the number of the classes was going to drop, we would have to change our schools. After a 11 year of working in villages I have just come from a village to the city center. I had a concern that I would have to go to the villages again because of not being on the permanent staff list my present school."*

c) The Concerns About the Starting Age of Children to Primary School

Since there appeared discussions about children age starting primary school and it was about to drop to 60/66 months, the teachers also had concerns about the starting age of children to the primary school. These concerns are more about the students who did not attend to the pre-school education.

> Soner Öz: "*At the beginning we got afraid as it was a radical change, a fundamental change. We got worried due to dropping down the age group. Before, the children were coming at the age of seven so their physical and mental level was better. What interested us in 4+4+4 at first was the the drop of the age group. It was going to be difficult to deal with the children who did not atttend to pre-school education."*

> Yeşim Çevik: *"Obviously when I heard that the children who were born in 2007 starting school, I ciriticized it. Due to their age, there would be problems with the small students."*

Additionally, in 1983, during the Özal Government whose Ministry of Education was Vehbi Dinçerler, a regulation which paved the children way to start primary school when they were 6 years old was executed. After a year of testing it, the Ministry of Education had to step back because of the negative outcomes (the observed problems about childrens' adaptation to school as it is mentioned above in one of the narratives) of a yearly implemetation (Güven: 2012). Lütfi Dere takes our

attention to this implemetation taken placein 1983, during which the students were expected to start school at the age of 6.

> "*Like the time of Vehbi Dinçerler, the six year of children began first grade years ago. It was implemented for a year and there appeared so many problems. The children had slept and wanted heir parents and cried during the lesson. It was implemented for a year and then it was given up. We thought with our friends that it would happen again. We thought since their age was low, we would have the problem of communicating with them and also they would sleep during the lesson and we would have to take them to the toilet. We also thought that as their hands' muscles are not strong enough because of their low age, we would have problem*."

Despite the fact that some teachers (about four) find 4+4+4 as an important change in Turkish educational system and support it they still can not keep them away from signifying their concerns about the change. For example, Fatih Çaycı indicates as;

> *"We have been used to 5+3 culture for more than thirty years. In sipite of the fact that the last decision 4+4+4 taken by our government about education is a European style educational system, it is not completely compatible with our tradion (educational tradition). Nonetheless, I had our views that it would be 5+3 that was our old tradion. Even though with the new implementation, the load of the students has dropped which is much better, 5+3 would have been more appropriate."*

CONCLUSIONS

When we examine the narratives of primary school teachers about the 4+4+4, we are able to derive some prominent inferences. To begin with, almost all of the teachers who I had interviews with believe that such a comprehensive change took place in a short time created uncertainities in their minds in terms of the possible difficulties in relation with the shortcomings of the new system. They did not have much accurate views about the coming new system. When they started to hear about the change somehow they began to have some concerns which probably would be the causes of certain problems they may encounter during the following semester.

Then, they claim that as the change happened all of a sudden, the infrastructures of the educational system totally, particularly those of the schools were ignored by the educational policy makers. Furthermore, no one from the top of the education, the determining ones, did care both the teachers' views and the discussions reflecting avowedly the shortcomings of the newly planned change. What they do recommend is to open and have a discussion platform provided by the policy makers to those who feel and are stakeholders of the education; the teachers, school directors, academicians, politicians etc., In addition to these, they state that when they heard about the change they did have concerns about the starting age of children for primary schools. This concern was based on the low level of the schooling number of children who were expected to attend to pre-school education.

Lastly, the leading point to be mentioned here is that in spite of the fact that the educational changes are certainly formed and performed by the policy makers with their social perceptions and political interests it is still a prerequisite to hark the voices and educational experiences of the people, particularly the teachers, being the real owner and operators of the curricula in the classrooms at schools and central to the educational reforming process. It is seen that their ideas are to be taken into consideration and explored during the decision- making process of the changes by the politicians.

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