

Secularization Process in the History of Turkish Education

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ABSTRACT The education based upon the mores in the Turkish communities of the Middle Asia started to become institutionalized –so to speak schools were established- with the adoption of Islam in the times of Karahanlilar. At this time the basic mission of the education was perceived as preparing the individual to the other World. Although there occasionally were astronomy, philosophy, mathematics and other worldly courses in the Turkish history, no significant development took place with regards to the secularization of the education. In the renovation period started with Tanzimat Act, reason for the Empire's regression against the West by continuously losing land was considered to be the insufficient education. Accordingly, courses like history, geography and mathematics were added to curriculum in the so-called modern schools despite all resistance. Schools giving education with modern teaching methods and techniques were bound to Maarif Vekaleti (Ministry of Education); while others that gave religious education were bound to Efkar veseriye Vekaleti (Ministry of Islamic Law and Pious Foundations), which led to a duality in the education system. Dual practice based on the rules of two different worlds resulted in ongoing disputes between ministries as well as quarrels with occasional winners. This unpleasant situation came to an end with Unification of Education in the republican period, ensuring that the Ministry of Education had all the administration and inspection authority. However; 1982 Constitution's impositions obliging religious courses in schools for every citizen, increasing number of Imam-Hatip (Imam-Preacher) schools more than imam needs of the country and occasional attempts of giving the inspection of Quran courses to the Department of Religious Affairs indicate that the secularization process of education has not been completed yet.

INTRODUCTION

Being a social institution, education should be harmonious and consistent with social, economical and political structures of a society. The main mission of education, in line with the values of the society, is to raise the qualified human capital that will ensure the economic development of the country and citizens who are faithful to its political structure. Thus, it should be underlined that a society's educational development process is in harmony with and quite parallel to the social, political and economical development processes of that society.

Secularism is briefly known as separation of religious and governmental issues in a state. However, according to Güvenç, secularism is not limited to that separation. Separation of religious and governmental issues is just a political result. Secularism in philosophy, education and fine arts requires sovereignty of wisdom rather than faith,

thought rather than Islamic theology and science rather than the holy book. The epigram of "The real guide in life is science" points into this way. Our daily activities should be performed in the light of the laws and rules that can change in accordance with time and situation; not with unchangeable religious laws (Güvenç 1990).

According to Arat secularism is; 1) the prerequisite of modernization and becoming democratic, 2) the indispensable ambience of religious peace and equal rights for people who have different faith, 3) the autonomy of science, philosophy and arts (Arat 1990).

The development of the secular framework takes its roots from the freedom of thought. This is not only an indestructible right of the individual and its nature but also the assurance of one's protection from potential misunderstandings of their actions. As Arsel points out, "what makes a human is not the existence of the mind alone, but its functioning in a free manner and its ability to guide the man's life" (Arsel 1977). Freedom of thought is to be able to say what one thinks and is the freedom of seeing the phenomenon out of the commonly accepted rules (Russell 1972; Soysal 1968).

Secularism can only be achieved and turned into a life philosophy and a life style when individuals have "secular attitude". Without reaching any

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developments in the direction of being a “world citizen”, adoption of secularism as a political and legal principle has no importance and meaning (San 1990). Despite its roots are leaning to Ottomans’ last period, secularization and globalization process of Turkish society found its real meaning at the movement of “secular society” which was started by Mustafa Kemal² (Aycan 2005).

Just as pointed out by Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, who said “the real guide in life is science”, the main target should be to raise new republican generations who can think independently; has ability to critique and ask questions; has high production potential in science, philosophy, arts and economy; is away from superstitions with “free mind, free conscience, free knowledge³”. This aim can only be achieved by secularization of the education.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to emphasize the fact that secularization of the education is the natural necessity of development, change and modernization in social life by shedding a light on the secularization process of Turkish education from a historical perspective. For that purpose, relevant documents within the context of the social, political and economical progress are going to be analyzed.

SECULARIZATION PROCESS IN HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS

Education Based On the Mores at Old Turks

As it is impossible to separate social life from education, fundamentals of social life at old Turks should be reviewed. Old Turkish communities, who made the Middle Asia their fatherland, consisted of warriors and nomads -all horsemen- that fed herds. When interpreting the education of these times, we should take into account that hunting, collecting and handcrafting were the life style and the way of earning life.

Education in the old Turks was based on mores. The son should resemble the father and the daughter should resemble the mother. A good boy was called “ataç” (father took the duty of training his son) and a good girl was called “anaç” (mother took the duty of training her daughter) (Ögel 1971). Children started to learn riding a horse by riding sheep, hunting by hitting birds and mice with arrows. Thus, all these were necessities of a social life based on mores.

In a nomad, warrior and herd feeding community, the practical development of the skills for utilization of meat, milk, butter and skin and the production of tools and equipments came as natural in a master-apprentice relationship so that the skills could be turned into behaviors. It should also be indicated that weaving carpets, which is called as “step art”, and mining art (production of pots, guns, gold embroidery as ornaments) were learned in the master-apprentice relationship (Akyüz 1985).

“Public religion” and “government religion” were separated at old Turks. In public religion, it was Shaman⁴ who constituted the relation between people and god. That is why this religion was called Shamanism. Government religion, on the other hand, was a system of beliefs that explains the reason of existence of the government and legitimates the power of khan. In government religion the emperor was head pastor. “Shaman” or “kam”, (also meant soothsayer, magician, poet, clerk and teacher) was a leader to the community and, in a sense, was serving as a mass educator (Inan 1972).

Schooling Process in Education

First schooling process began with Turks’ adoption of Islam during the times of Karahanlılar.⁵ Education had an original motive by blending Turk-Islam cultural values, rooting the steps of the Middle Asia. Education based on the mores started to institutionalize (schoolise) schooling by the influence of Islam. Madrasahs⁶ were opened just close to mosques to teach Islamic culture and religious rules (Kanad, 1963). In short, with adoption of Islam, Turks entered into an era where religious and state matters were conducted together in a “semi-theocratic” social order.

It should be accepted that neither in the era of Karahanlılar nor of Seljuks, education had conservative motives. Statesmen of those times were appreciated and esteemed scholars and artists. It is told that Melikshah of Anatolian Seljuks ordered Sandali – a famous scholar of his time- to his presence. Sandali refuses this invitation. His answer with the reason of his not visiting the shah was impressive: “I don’t visit you because I want you to be the best of the emperors and I don’t want to be the worst of scholars. The best emperor visits the scholars; the worst scholar is the one who is a flatterer” (Turan 1969).

In the times of Seljuks⁷, there were schools called “Küttap” next to the mosques. In these schools students took the education of Quran and religion as well as reading and writing. Madrasahs of the time were institutions of formal education. Informal education had the structure of institutional education as well. Scholars’ houses, libraries and madrasahs were informal education places in which people were taught Quran, rules and principles of religion. On the other hand, Akhism⁸ tradition was giving a kind of informal education on profession. This tradesmen’s guild consisted of small scaled tradesmen, masters, qualified workmen and apprentices and was providing on the job training at a very young age with basic principles of honesty and care in professions.

Religious Content in Education Increased with Ottomans

In the foundation and progress eras of Ottomans, with the impact of Seljuks, there was a more modern view of education compared to the following years. For example, there is supplementary evidence that natural sciences like medicine, mathematics and astronomy were taught in Fatih and Süleymaniye Madrasahs. However, these constructive progresses on positive sciences did not continue. In pause and recession eras, education on positive sciences left its place to religious courses (Koçer 1987).

Compared to Seljuks, Ottomans had more intensive religious content in education. In order to interpret the education style better, we should take a look at the curriculum of Sibyan schools which can be thought as the primary schools of the time.

Table 1: Courses in Sibyan schools

<i>Arabic alphabet (reading)</i>	<i>Writing</i>
Recitation	Reading Poetry
Principles of Islam	Basic Arithmetic
	Operations

Looking at the chart above, it can be said that education in Ottomans was aiming to give children the skill of Quran’s true pronunciation and to teach them the basic four arithmetic operations for practicality (Basgöz and Wilson 1968). “Kara Cümle” (basic arithmetic operations) was the unique “worldly” course and was taught just in Istanbul Sibyan schools, not in the provinces.

According to Koçer, education in Ottomans⁹ had religion as the centre of gravity. The main purpose was to prepare future generations to the next world, not to equip them with worldly knowledge (Koçer 1987).

In Ottomans, education was based on rote memorization. Observation and research were not encouraged. Students were memorizing their lessons by repeating loudly and showing their knowledge by kneeling down in front of the teacher (Unat 1964). Discipline was acquired by beating of the students.

In order to see how religion was the major content of education in Ottoman schools, we should take a look at the summary of 1824 firman (imperial decree) which was published in the time of Mahmut II to make primary education obligatory:

“All Muslims should learn their religion first, and then go towards worldly issues. However, many people, just like they have become ignorant because of their parents, do not remember that it is the God who supplies all we need –the all-beneficent – and they make their children leave the school at the age of 5 or 6 so that they will become apprentices in the pursuit of money. Therefore, children remain ignorant with no intention to have an education. This sin should certainly be upon the parents and they will be held responsible in the afterlife. That is why most people are unaware of his religion. This may cause God’s help to stop and even a severe punishment from him... Nobody should force his children to leave school and to become an apprentice before they get a proper education of Islam. Children mature enough to become an apprentice will be examined by Kadý (Muslim judge) of Istanbul, Eyüp or Galata, and will get a sealed document of permission. Masters and artisans will not accept apprentices that do not have such a document...” (Akyüz 1982).

Mahmut II ascended to throne in the collapse time to make some reforms. As a part of these reforms, 1824 firman (imperial decree) was published to make primary education obligatory in Istanbul. This firman shows the theocratic structure of Ottoman education system very well.

Tanzimat Era (Secularization Efforts in Education)

The Ottomans began some reform actions after a series of military defeat and land losses in Europe.

These reform actions showed its impact firstly on modernization of the army and naturally on education. Influence of French education system was clearly observable in this time. Reform acts, beginning with Tanzimat Firman (imperial decree)¹⁰ of 1839 showed its impact on education with the firman of 1845 which was published by Sultan Abdülmecit. According to this ferman (Akyüz 1982):

1. People's ignorance should be ceased and they should be educated.
2. Education and vocational education should be taken up.
3. Education should be worldly, as well as appropriate for religion.
4. Schools should be opened in every possible place of the country.

With Tanzimat movement, schools were opened at every place of the country. Worldly courses such as history, geography, mathematics were added to religious courses. Important innovations were made in education and class equipments such as blackboard, chalk and map were introduced to students. Moreover, education was separated into grades (sibyan schools, iptidaiyes, rütiyes, idadis, sultanis) and beating was forbidden. For the first time vocational schools, other than madrasahs were opened to train teachers (Berker 1945).

According to Ciritli, these renovations have brought the society on the verge of a contemporary lifestyle. The students which had been sitting on the ground besides hodja have started to sit on the wooden bedsteads. Consequently, hodja was able to take off his gown, wear trousers and started to deliver stand-up lectures while walking around his students (Ciritli 1946). Such schools supporting renovations were widely called as "Sunny Schools" by the public. (Binbasieglu 2006).

The reflection of the reforms of Tanzimat on education, which enabled introduction of worldly courses into the curriculum, should be considered as an important milestone on the way to secular education.

The First Secular Schools: Usul-i Cedide Schools (Modern Primary Schools)

With Tanzimat, courses of sibyan schools were changed and innovations in methods and techniques of education took place. However, teachers of these schools and people were resisting against the reforms. Modernization of education was ending up in failure.

In order to break the resistance, in 1869, General Education Regulations divided sibyan schools into two parts: "Umumi" (general) – related to Maarif Nezareti (Ministry of Education) and "hususî" (special) – related to Efkâf-ı Hümayun (Ministry of Pious Foundations). Even though "sibyan schools" as a term was used in general for all primary education institutions in Regulations, people used to differentiate these sibyan schools like "İptidai Mektep" (Primary School) and "Usul-i Cedide" (School of new methods). Thus, the new regulation bound sibyan schools of religious education to Efkâf-ı Hümayun Nezareti; and other sibyan schools with modern educational methods to Maarif Vekaleti under the name of Usul-i Cedide (School of new methods). So, a duality was introduced which triggered important developments in our history of education.

Usul-i Cedide Schools should be evaluated as the first steps of the secularization process of education. Atatürk's teacher Şemsi Efendi, too, was one of the passionate defenders of Usul-i Cedide Schools. In the curriculum of these schools, there were history, geography, Ottoman grammar, kiraat (reading), mathematics and grammar lessons as well as religion lessons.

In 1878, Abdülhamit II abrogated 1876 constitution. This action resulted in increase in quantity of schools all around the country, but caused decrease in educational quality. History and geography lessons were removed from curriculum and religion lessons were inserted instead (Unat 1964).

In the course of time, common sense overwhelmed and worldly lessons such as history and geography were added to curriculums. Table 2

Table 2: Curriculum for primary schools in Istanbul and small towns in 1892

Lessons	1. Class	2. Class	3. Class
Arabic Alphabet			
(reading and writing)	12	-	-
Holly Book (Quran)	12	6	5
Recitation	-	2	2
Islamic Principles	2	3	2
Ethics	-	2	3
Ottoman Accuancy	-	-	2
Grammar	3	3	2
Reading	3	2	1
Ottoman History	-	-	2
Ottoman Geography	-	2	2
Calculation	1	2	2
Calligraphy	1	2	2

shows the lessons suggested by Talimat (directions) of 1892 for primary schools in Istanbul and small towns (Akyüz 1985).

Worldly Lessons Increased in II. Mesrutiyet¹¹ Era

In 1908, Mesrutiyet II was declared and 1876 Constitution came into force again. In these years the belief that empire's salvation was in the hands of teachers and education became widespread and this belief was followed by reforms in education. Obligation to attend primary school was added to laws with the law "Tedrisat-i Yptidaiye Kanun-ı Muvakkat-i" in 1913. Also, primary schools (iptidaiye) and junior high schools (rüstiye) were united, 3-year-primary education was increased to six years, opening of nursery schools were put in the laws and worldly lessons in curriculums were supported with lessons such as drawing, physical education and music for the first time (Akyüz 1985).

Although Tedrisat-i Yptidaiye Kanun-i Muvakkat-i was temporary, some articles of this law were in force for long years, even in Republic period. Primary education was decided to be given for six years. Primary education took the name "Mekteb-i Iptidai Umumiye" and was divided into three grades of two years each, which are Devre-i Iptidaiye (First grade), Devre-i Vasatiye (Second Grade) and Devre-i Aliye (Third Grade). Weekly curriculum for model primary schools (Numune Mekatib-i) of the year 1914 can be seen in table 3.

1869 Public Education Regulation paved the way to Dual Practice in Education

Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi (*Public Education Regulation*) of 1869, related sibyan schools with religious education content to Efkâf-ı Hümayun Nezareti (Ministry of Pious Foundations) and others with more modern education (Usul-i Cedide) to Maarif Vekâleti (Ministry of Education). It is no surprise that this duality caused dispute between two Ministries of Education about preparing curricula and allocation of resources.

According to Dogan, (One of The Former Presidents of The Department of Religious Affairs), modern and secular educational institutions (referring to Mekteb-i Cedides) gained power and became widespread after the times of Mahmut II and Tanzimat. (Doğan 1990)

Inactive and degenerated Madrasahs existed together with new modern science and education institutions for almost a hundred years. The co-existence of two different education forms, without any similarities, not only couldn't help to establish the desired development and modernization of the society but also made madrasahs even more degenerated. Atatürk well observed the reasons that prevented development and modernization of the society back in Ottoman times, and he figured out what the prior role of education should be.

Secular and Democratic Educational System Was Established with the Foundation of Turkish Republic

Turkish Republic was established on 29 October 1923. In 1928, the clause, which stated that the religion of the government was "Islam", was taken out of the constitution. Thus, a secular democratic government structure was established. More explicitly, it was stipulated by the Constitution that the government order was secular so that the freedom of religion, science and the freedom of thought were protected. Religious Culture and Ethics lesson was no longer mandatory but elective.

With a series of legislative measures upon decadence of Ottoman Empire and foundation of Turkish Republic, Atatürk's way of secular thinking has started to dominate the state organization. This was a significant milestone not only for Turkey but also for all Islamic societies (Karasar 1981).

Utmost importance was attached to education in the republican era. The opinions and suggestions of the great philosopher John Dewey, who came to Turkey in 1924 and submitted a report on Turkish National Education, can be summarized as follows:

"Applying compulsory education without taking into account the interests and needs of peasants and farmers will lead to social damage and dangerous outcomes. Such a situation will not only result in the failure of young generations in different occupations but also will detach them from the rural life. Turkey's development is very much related to agricultural reform. The major challenge for the Turkish education is opening of schools in harmony with rural life..." (John Dewey 1952).

Dewey's opinions had significant impact on the history of Turkish education in the sense that they paved the way to the raising of teachers for rural schools.

Table 3: Curriculum of Numune Mekteb-i Iptidaiye

Lessons	First Grade		Second Grade		Third grade	
	1. cl.	2. cl.	1. cl.	2. cl.	1. cl.	2. cl.
Arabic Alphabet	6	3	-	-	-	-
Quran and Religious	1	1	3	3	2	2
Morale and Ethics	3	2	1	1	1	1
Grammar	-	1	1	1	1	1
Reading						
(memorizing, recitation, historical plays)	4	4	2	2	2	2
Writing	-	-	1	1	1	1
Butgets	-	1	2	1	1	1
Composition	-	1	2	2	2	2
History	-	1	2	2	2	2
Geography	-	1	1	2	2	2
Calculation	4	2	2	2	2	2
Geometry	-	-	1	1	1	1
Materials Lessons and Agriculture	5	2	2	2	2	2
Handworks	4	2	2	2	2	2
Drawing	1	1	1	1	1	1
Physical Education, Health and Military Practice		1	1	1	1	1
Play time	At every recess and among walks.					
Target	In physical education lessons.					
Music	1	1	1	1	1	1
French	-	6	6	6	6	6
Total	30	30	30	30	30	30

(Mekatib-i Iptidaiye Curriculum, 1914).

Reflection of this duality in Ottoman education system on Republic period is Unification of Education Law. The law came into force in March 3, 1924 and united all education institutions under the control of Ministry of Education. It ceased the duality of education between religious madrasahs and sibyan schools and modern “rüstiye”, “idadi”, “sultani” and “iptidai” schools. Unification of Education Law put the following rules into effect:

Article 1. All science and education institutes are united.

Article 2. All madrasahs and schools managed by seriyeiye ve Efkâf Vekâleti (Ministry of Islamic Law and Pious Foundations) or private foundations are related to Ministry of Education.

Article 3. The financial source of seriyeiye ve Efkâf Vekâleti (Ministry of Islamic Law and Pious Foundations) will be transferred to education budget.

Article 4. Ministry of Education will open a school of theology in Darülfünun (university) to raise high religion specialists and other schools to raise imams and preachers.

With Unification of Education Law of March 3, 1924 madrasahs were closed and administration of all educational institutions was given to Ministry of Education. Thus, school-madrasah

duality was ceased and religious education institutions were aimed to be modernized.

However, efforts for giving secular education, or in other words becoming “worldly” through education, still continue today. 1982 Constitution made religion lessons -once elective- obligatory. It has been observed that the number of theocratic education institutions has increased (7 Imam-Hatip (imam-preacher) Schools in 1951 reached a total of 384 in 1989) and interpretation disputes have been observed between positive science lessons and religion lessons in high schools (Arat 1990). For example, it has been suggested that Durkheim, Comte, Voltaire, Darwin and Freud have harmful ideas for young brains in recent years. This may be an explanation of why philosophy has been made elective. Also, religion lesson teachers have been attending vacant classes of English, History and Geography. Moreover, despite the Unification of Education Law, which is still in practice, it has been demanded that management of Quran courses should be transferred to the Department of Religious Affairs (Çelenk 2003).

CONCLUSION

The transition of Turkish education from a religion-based understanding into a science-

based one has required a long and burdensome process. This process has also evolved in parallel to the democratization process in the Turkish history.

Education that was based on mores in societies of Turks in the Middle Asia began to schoolise with adoption of Islam in the times of Karahanlılar. In Turkish societies -as in all Islam societies-, the main purpose of the schools, which were opened next to the mosques, was considered to prepare the individuals to after-life. In Turkish history, it is seen that lessons like astronomy, philosophy and mathematics occasionally took place in the education of madrasahs. However, no significant progress for secularization of education had happened.

In the renovation period started with Tanzimat movement, the reason for the regression of the empire was considered to be insufficient education. As a result, worldly lessons such as history, geography and mathematics took place in curriculums of modern schools of Usul-i Cedide against all resistance. This caused a duality in education system of Ottomans. In Ottoman history, ministries of these two different worlds always came against each other and overwhelmed one another from time to time. This unpleasant situation came to an end with Tevhid-i Tedrisat Law (Unification of Education Law), by transferring administration of all education institutions to the control of Ministry of Education. It can be fairly stated that the education of that era was formulated in the light of the famous epigram by Great Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic: "The real guide in life is science".

However; obligation of religious lessons for every citizen with 1982 Constitution, enormous increase in the number of Imam-Hatip (imam-preacher) schools and occasional demand of giving the control of Quran courses to the Department of Religious Affairs indicate that secularization process of Turkish education has not been completed yet.

SUGGESTION

In order to reach the modern civilization level which was set as a target by Atatürk, modernization and secularization of the education should be completely achieved. Consequently, Tevhid-i Tedrisat Law (Unification of Education Law) should be applied without any exception.

NOTES

1. Atatürk's epigram
2. Atatürk
3. Atatürk's epigram
4. Shaman is a religious man like saint in Christianity
5. An old Turkish State
6. Madrasahs, are the higher education institution of the time
7. An old Turkish State
8. Akhism: An organized brotherhood in Anatolia related to trade guilds.
9. Turkish Emperorship
10. Tanzimat Ferman: Political reforms made in the Ottoman State in 1839.
11. Mesrutiyet: Constitutional monarchy.

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