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The Current Status of Social Studies Education in Turkey

Türkiye’ de Sosyal Bilgiler Eğitiminin Son Durumu

This article aims to portray and discuss the current status of social studies education in Turkey in terms of both K-8 and pre-service teacher education levels. The article starts with a brief history about the Turkish social studies education followed by the recent curriculum reform movements in Turkey. Then, the curriculum changes and the reform movements in pre-service social studies teacher education are discussed by analyzing the related literature.

The discussion indicates the dominance of standardized test in the Turkish educational system, teachers’ lack of knowledge and experience, and the limited resources to apply the new curriculum are the major issues for K-8 social studies education. In addition, the quality of social studies teacher education and teacher educators also is another issue that must be addressed. In conclusion, it is agreed by many scholars and educators the reform movements were rushed and the new reforms were applied without perfect planning.

Bu makalenin amacı Türkiye’ de sosyal bilgiler eğitimin son durumunun ilköğretim seviyesi ve eğitim fakülteleri açısından bir değerlendirmesinin yapılmasıdır. Makalede Türkiye’ deki sosyal bilgiler eğitiminin kısa bir tarihesinin verilmesinin ardından son zamanlarda yapılan program değişiklikleri tartışılmaktadır. Bu nedenle, ilgili alanyazın taranmış ve yeni ilköğretim sosyal bilgiler programında yapılan değişiklikler ile sosyal bilgiler öğretmenliği bölümlerinin yeniden yapılandırılması konuları tartışılmıştır. Bu tartışmalar göstermiştir ki Türk eğitim sisteminin merkezi sınav sistemlerine dayalı olması, öğretmenlerin yeni sosyal bilgiler programını uygulamaya yeterince hazır olmamaları, ders öğretim materyali ve kaynak yetersizliği yeni programın uygulanması ile ilgili ortaya çıkan sorunlardır. Ayrıca sosyal bilgiler öğretmenliği bölümlerinin değerlendirilmesi ve niteliklerinin artırılması gerektiği de ortaya çıkmıştır. Son olarak söylemek gerekir ki bir çok eğitimci ve akademisyen yeni programın uygulanmasına yeterince planlama ve denemeler yapılmadan hızla geçildiği görüşünde birleşmektedir.

Keywords:

Turkish Social Studies Education; Teacher Education; Curriculum Reform in Turkey; Turkish Social Studies Textbooks; Constructivism.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Türkiye’ de Sosyal Bilgiler Eğitimi; Öğretmen Eğitimi; Türkiye’ de Eğitim Programı Reformları; Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Kitapları; Oluşturmacılık.

1. Introduction

Social studies [Sosyal Bilgiler] as an interdisciplinary course first was taken place in the elementary education program at the end of 1960’s in Turkey (Öztürk 2009). Later it also became a part of middle school program starting 1970-71 school year (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007; Semenderoğlu, Gülersoy 2005). This course was a combination of history, geography, and civic (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007). Although social studies stayed in the elementary and middle school program as an interdisciplinary course since then, it was suspended for a while in the middle school. In 1985, middle school social studies courses were abolished and converted to discipline based courses entitled “National History” [Milli Tarih], “National Geography” [Milli Coğrafya], and “Citizenship” [Vatandaşlık Bilgisi] (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007). This situation was lasted in 1998 when the curriculum reform movements were begun in Turkey. In this period compulsory educa-

tion increased from five to eight years for all Turkish citizens in order to rise up the quality of the education and to catch up with educational levels of the developed nations. As a result of these movements, integrated social studies courses were reinstated in the middle school (Öztürk 2009) and a new curriculum was developed for these courses (see Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [Ministry of National Education –Curriculum Division] [TTKB] 2009b; 2009c).

Social studies courses are taught in the elementary and middle schools from the fourth through the seventh grades in Turkey. According to the current curriculum, social studies education is an interdisciplinary field (TTKB 2009b; 2009c). Thus, the subjects of social studies include history, geography, economy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, law, and civic education (TTKB 2009b; 2009c). This interdisciplinary notion of the social studies education is established in the curriculum as a result of the modeling the guidelines of National Council for Social Studies [NCSS] (1994) in the United States. As stated in the curriculum, the purpose of the social studies is to prepare Turkish citizens who embrace Atatürk’s principles and revolutions, understand the Turkish history and culture, grasps democratic values, respect human rights, care about environment, know about his/her rights and responsibilities as a citizen, and think critically and creatively in order to make



informed decisions (TTKB 2009b; 2009c). Atatürk is the founder of the Modern Turkish Republic which is established in 1923. Atatürk did fundamental changes in the educational system in these years along with various reforms and revolutions in other fields. All religious formal teaching were abolished, education was secularized, nationalized and democratized in this period (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007). Atatürk personally took a part in the educational reform and he was called "the principal" as he was the principal of all teachers in Turkey. He even dictated a citizenship education textbook with his adopted daughter Professor Afet İnan in 1929-30 (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007).

In early grades (grades 1-3) there is another course called life studies [Hayat Bilgisi] (see TTKB 2009a). Unlike social studies course, this course has been part of the elementary education program since the establishment of the Modern Turkish Republic. Although the life studies course always has been part of the elementary education program in Turkey, the curriculum of this course has been changed many times (Semenderoğlu, Gülersoy 2005; Şahin 2009). According to the current curriculum, the purposes of this course are to prepare the individuals for their lives, help them improve their personal skills to be better people, and to create base knowledge and skills for science and social studies courses. At the high school level (Grades 9-12) some of social studies subjects including history, geography, sociology, psychology, and philosophy become discipline-based courses and taught independently from each other. Thus, no interdisciplinary social studies course is taught at this level.

2. Curriculum Reform Movements

In the last decade, there have been curriculum reform movements in Turkey. The curriculum reforms for K-12 education were done under the authority of the curriculum division (Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [TTKB]) of the Ministry of National Education. This division is the only authority to change and / or approve a new curriculum in Turkey and it consists of 15 members including a president. The members generally are selected among the experienced teachers, principals and superintendents. The process of preparing a new curriculum starts with forming a curriculum development commission for the each individual subject. TTKB select the commission members among university professors, teachers and other educational experts and after each commission finish its work, the new curriculum is approved by the TTKB.

The reform movements initially started in 1997 when the compulsory education increased from five to eight years for all Turkish citizens which also increased the teacher shortage to a greater extent at that time. According to Ministry of National Education (MEB İstatistik 2002) statistics, although more than 188.000 teachers were hired between 1997 and

2001, there were still almost 120.000 more teachers needed at that time. The teacher shortage is still an issue in Turkey. The current figures show that there are 585.000 teachers work in the public schools and 133.000 more teachers are needed (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2010).

In this period, social studies courses were reinstated in the middle school program; new curriculum was developed for these courses by the curriculum division of the Ministry of National Education; teacher education programs reorganized; and social studies teacher education programs were established within the faculties of education (Açıkalın, Savaşçı-Açıkalın 2010; Öztürk 2005). In the meantime, Turkey has been accepted as a nominee country for the European Union and the process of screening the developments and the negotiations have begun (Aksit 2007). One of the screening chapters was "education and culture" and Turkey needed to expedite reforming process in education like many other areas. Accordingly, comprehensive curriculum reform movements restarted in these years encompassing all school subjects from the elementary through high school and even teacher education programs. First, elementary and middle school curricula were developed in 2005 and the new four-year high school curriculum is still being developed (Aksit 2007). Second, teacher education programs also were restructured in 2006 to make them compatible with the elementary and middle school program (k-8).

Thus, it seems that the curriculum reform movements have started due to various internal factors and -as stated by number of scholars- the EU membership process of Turkey (Akınoğlu 2008a; 2008b; Aksit 2007; Şahin 2009). In the last decades there have been developments in politics, science, technology, human right that highly influence the family values and society in Turkey (TTKB 2010). These developments are considered to expand the idea that Turkey is modeling the Western nations and eager to reach their democratic and economic norms. Thus, EU membership process has provided an opportunity for Turkey to reach European educational norms and increase quality of education. Likewise TTKB (2010) accept the result of the international educational projects such as PISA and TIMSS and educational trends and developments in the developed countries as references to reach the educational norms of EU.

Like other disciplines, life studies and social studies curricula have also been restructured second time in less than ten years period. In fact, this process has not finished yet and the social studies curriculum is still being updated and revised. In this paper, the last updated versions of the life studies (grade 1-3) (see TTKB 2009a) and the social studies curriculum (grades 4-7) (see TTKB 2009b) will be discussed. As a result of the reform, social studies became an interdisciplinary field which is difficult to draw its border. Accordingly



nine learning themes were introduced and all teaching units were organized thematically rather than focusing on only one subject such as history or geography (Akınoğlu 2008b; Safran 2004; TTKB 2010). These nine learning themes are (a) individual and society, (b) culture and heritage, (c) people, places, and environments, (d) power, governance, and society, (e) time continuity, and change, (f) production, consumption and distribution, (g) science technology, and society, and (h) global connections. All teaching units within the curricula from grades 4 through 7 are organized according to these learning themes. Through the reforming process life studies courses (grade 1-3) were also reorganized second time. Life studies is also an interdisciplinary course and designed with the purpose of preparing students to create base knowledge and skills for science and social studies courses (TTKB 2009a). Thus, the content of this course include not only various social sciences such as history, geography and environment but also science disciplines such as earth sciences, astronomy, physics and chemistry. Of course these disciplines were presented in their very basic forms within the three learning themes. These learning themes are "individual", "society", and "environment". There are also three teaching units organized according to the learning themes and the units are repeated in every year with different contents. The units are entitled "my school excitement", "my unique home", and "yesterday - today - tomorrow".

As a result of the reform movements major changes were done within the life studies and social studies curricula in Turkey. These changes are very clearly presented in both curricula (TTKB 2009a; 2009b; 2009c) and discussed by many scholars in the field. In the next section of the article these changes will be discussed.

3. The Major Shifts and Changes with the Curricula

3.1. The teaching philosophy of the curricula has shifted from the behaviorist to the constructivist pedagogy.

These reform movements have done a major shift with the philosophy of the curricula (see TTKB 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010). This shift has been acknowledged by many scholars in the field (Demirel 2009; Dinç, Doğan 2010; Kabapınar 2009; Safran 2004; Semenderoğlu, Gülersoy 2005; Şahin 2009; Şimşek, 2009; Tarman, Acun 2010). The main reason of this shift can be explained by the effort to increase the quality of education in Turkey and follow the educational trends and developments in the developed countries to reach the educational norms of European Union (see TTKB 2010). Unlike the former ones, the new curricula mostly focus on the constructivist theory. Constructivist learning theory is based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner (Brooks, Brooks 1999; Fosnot 1996; Hendry

1996; Prawat, Floden 1994). According to this theory, prior knowledge of the learners and their interpretation of this knowledge have significant influence on the students' learning (Hendry 1996). Since every individual may learn and construct knowledge in various ways, each may develop "unique" realities based on prior knowledge and experiences which are highly influenced by the personal and cultural background of a person (Fosnot 1996; Hendry 1996). This notion of constructivism has significant influence on shifting classroom practices from the traditional transmission model to a more complex and interactive model in which students are actively engaged in learning process to construct their own realities and truths (Prawat, Floden 1994). Thus, organization of the units, teaching activities and evaluation strategies in the curricula are constructed based on this theory. The student-based teaching and assessment methods are included in the curricula (Safran 2004; TTKB 2010). Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making skills and the social and individual values cited in the curricula also support the constructivist tone of the curricula (Demirel 2009)

3.2. The curricula have become interdisciplinary and integrated, and the content is presented in thematic units rather than discipline based units.

Unlike the former curricula the new life studies and social studies curricula have become more interdisciplinary and integrated (see TTKB 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010). There were some periods when social studies were taught as separate courses such as history, geography and citizenship and/or human rights (Çayır, Gürkaynak 2007). Even if social studies was an integrated course in the former curricula, each unit focused only on single subject (Semenderoğlu, Gülersoy 2005). Nevertheless, the latest innovations in the curricula ensure that each thematic unit to be a mixture of various subjects such as history, geography, economy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, law, civic and even science subjects for the life studies course (Kabapınar 2009; Safran 2004; Semenderoğlu, Gülersoy 2005; Şahin 2009; Şimşek, 2009).

3.3. The curricula focus on skills and values

The other novelty of the new curricula is the special emphasis given to skills and values (see TTKB 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010), which is discussed by many scholars in the field (Akınoğlu 2008b; Demirel 2009; Kabapınar 2009; Safran 2004; Şahin 2009; Şimşek, 2009). According to the new curricula, being able to use the knowledge through skills is much more important than acquiring the knowledge itself. Thus students must be taught how to use knowledge by applying various skills. There are 15 major skills for social studies and 14 major skills for the life studies course. These major skills also have various sub-skills in both



curricula. While the presented skills in the curricula are slightly different for life studies and social studies courses, most of the skills are the same or very similar. Nevertheless, researching, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, and empathy are the noteworthy skills in these curricula. Similarly, there are 20 values for social studies and 17 values for the life studies course in the curricula. Peace, tolerance, hospitality, respect, love, and patriotism are among the values in the both curricula.

3.4. Alternative measurement and evaluation methods are introduced in the curricula

The new curricula include various measurement and evaluation methods other than the traditional evaluation methods (see TTKB 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010). Former curricula focused mostly on written exams with open-ended questions and/or multiple choice tests. Nevertheless, the new curricula introduce various measurement and evaluation methods that support the constructivist pedagogy. The curricula are designed based on students to work on various types projects that may require research, observation, presentation, drama, painting, and/or other types of activities. Thus, it is crucial to evaluate students' performance throughout the learning process rather than giving them a multiple choice test or an open-ended exam. Therefore, alternative assessment methods such as portfolio, oral or poster presentation, self and peer evaluation, rubric, and drama are encouraged to be used frequently in the curricula (Safran 2004).

3.5. Global perspective has influence on the social studies curriculum.

Global perspective (Hicks 2003; Kirkwood 2001) has gained more importance in the world and it has influences on the Turkish social studies curriculum to some extent (Açıkalın 2010; Akınoğlu 2008b; see also TTKB 2009b; 2009c) As stated above, one of the new learning themes in the current social studies curriculum is the global connections. This learning theme covers different instructional units that focus on global connections and issues in the social studies curriculum. According to the current curriculum (TTKB 2009b; 2009c), as the world become more interconnected due to the fast developments in science and technology, it is imperative for students to understand these economic, politic, and cultural connections among the nations. Thus, there is one unit focuses on global connections for each year from grades four through seven. The units are named "My Far Away Friends (grade 4)", "Our World (grade 5)", "Our Country and the World (grade 6)", and "Bridges between Countries (grade 7)". These units focus on some aspects of global perspective such as comprehension and appreciation of cultures, the world as interrelated system, and the global issues (see Açıkalın 2010; Akınoğlu 2008b).

4. Criticisms about the Reforms

The current reform movement in social studies education is supposed to shift the pedagogy from a behaviorist to a constructivist one which explains the interdisciplinary curricula with focus on global perspective, skills and values, and alternative assessment methods. On the other hand, there have been serious criticisms about this reform by many scholars (Aksit 2007; Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Alanı Profesörler Kurulu [The Committee of Teacher Education and Curriculum Professors] [EPPK] 2006; Esen 2007) including the author of the article and non-governmental organizations (Eğitim-Sen 2005).

The most important concern about the reform movements has been raised by Eğitim-Sen (2005), a leading left wing teacher union which has approximately 110.000 members (Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı [Ministry of Labor and Social Security] 2010). This union published an initial report about the elementary education curriculum reform in 2005. According to the report (Eğitim-Sen 2005), the constructivist pedagogy, which is the leading pedagogy in the curriculum, does not match up with the standardized tests which dominate the educational system in Turkey. As stated above, alternative assessment methods such as portfolio, oral or poster presentation, self and peer evaluation, rubric, and drama are used in the both curricula frequently in order to evaluate students' performance throughout the learning process. The results of these types of assessments only affect the students' grades within the school. However, a regular student has to take standardized tests many times at different grade levels in order to succeed in the educational system. For instance, at the end of the middle school (8th grade) a student has to take a standardized test which is held once a year in order to be decided to the high school which the student is going to be attending. A fellow Turkish high school student has to take another exam at the end of high school which is called the university entrance exam. Even a university graduate in most cases has to take a kind of standardized test in order to get a job or to apply for the postgraduate education. Therefore, it is clear that the educational system in Turkey is heavily dominated by the standardized tests; however, a constructivist social studies education requires the contradictory. This situation creates a dilemma for the students and their parents. On the one hand, they have to work on social studies projects to obtain good grades, on the other hand "these projects are not going to help them to pass the upcoming standardized test". Yes, this is what I recently have been hearing from many students including mine and even from parents. I also have heard many stories that parents did their kids' projects and let them study for the upcoming high school entrance exam. Similarly, Aksit (2007) points out Turkish parents are mostly concerned about



their kids' success in the national standardized test. This situation clearly indicates that there is a serious problem with the consistency of the curricula and the mainstream assessment system in Turkey. It seems that the policymaker has to make a choice between the constructivist pedagogy and the mainstream assessment system.

Another important concern is about readiness of the teachers to apply the current curricula. According to the current reports, teachers are not ready to apply the constructivist pedagogy in their teaching (Aksit 2007; Eğitim-Sen 2005; EPPK 2006; Tarman, Acun 2010). The majority of the in-service teachers were trained based on teacher-centered model, and they are not able to apply the constructivist student-centered pedagogy easily in their classroom (Aksit 2007). In-service teacher training was not also as effective as it should have been. Teachers were only trained for five days before the implementation of the new curricula. Aksit (2007) points out "following the initial training, a concern voiced widely by the universities and some NGOs is that teachers will continue to need effective ongoing professional support at the school level." (p.134). According to Eğitim-Sen's (2005) report this situation may influence student success in a negative way which may put pressure on teachers and school administrators by the parents. In addition, The Committee of Teacher Education and Curriculum Professors (EPPK 2006) points out the importance of the having teachers trained through in-service teacher education programs before applying the curriculum. According to EPPK (2006), not only the teachers but also school administrators must learn every aspects of the new curriculum in order to fruitfully apply it and convey its purpose to the student success. Unfortunately, none of these have been done so far, at least in an effective way.

The availability of essential resources (Aksit 2007; Dinç, Doğan 2010; Eğitim-Sen 2005; Tarman, Acun, 2010) for teacher to apply the new curriculum is another concern that directly connected to the former concern. Most teachers have not been trained based on student-centered constructivist pedagogy in their pre-service education; they have not grasped the essence of the curriculum in their in-service education; and above all that there is a lack of resources and guides for them to apply the new curriculum. This lacking in part is caused by the curriculum itself. As Demirel (2009) indicates although there are various noteworthy values in the curricula, there are not much explanations and activities given about how to teach these values in the curriculum. Similarly, there is not much information about how to teach the skills cited in the curriculum. Therefore, there is clearly a lack of guidance within the curriculum. In addition, it must be noted that the both curricula are interdisciplinary and teachers may need different sorts of resources

from various field to be prepared for their instructions. There is a lack of quality teaching resources to use in the instruction and this is another issue that must be addressed. Likewise, Esen (2007) who studied on 13 textbooks from different field (ABC, Turkish, Life Studies, and Social Studies) criticized the new textbooks published based on the current curriculum reform. While Esen (2007) acknowledges that the current focus of the new curriculum on the human rights and democracy is a very important development, she finds out that there are excessive similarities between the old text books and the new ones in terms of the function of transmitting the sexist stereotypes. She concluded that "the text books in Turkey, on one hand, inculcate nationalist ideology and militarist culture, on the other hand, enhance sexism and guarantees the social control to be imposed on the new generations."

On the other hand, the current social studies curriculum has become more global perspective oriented to keep up with EU membership process and endorse the interaction between the Turkish nations and other nations on the world (Akınoğlu 2008b; Aksit 2007). While most of the essential themes of global education are represented in the curriculum, they are not articulated adequately (Açıkalın 2010). There are not much explanations and /or examples of activities to apply global perspective in the classroom. According to Esen (2007), universal values that reflect global perspective such as peace, democracy, human rights, women's rights, children's rights, equality and freedom are reflected as values that are peculiar to Turkish nation in the curriculum. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that empathy is cited as a skill in the curriculum for the first time (Kabapınar 2009) and this might be considered an improvement for infusing global perspective. However, the curriculum lacks of presenting commonly accepted global issues such as international conflicts, wars, terrorism, human trafficking, global warming, and other environmental issues and it does not provide an environment that nourish multiple perspective which is considered one of the essential aspects of the global perspective (Açıkalın 2010). It seems that there is much need to be done to improve the role of global education in the Turkish social studies curriculum.

Overall, there are several concerns about the new curricula. These concerns might be caused in part by modeling other countries' social studies curricula. It is very clear that the new social studies curriculum is almost a duplication of the social studies curriculum written by NCSS (1994) in the United States (Akınoğlu 2008b; Eğitim-Sen 2005; EPPK 2006; Şimşek 2009). Of course, there is nothing wrong with modeling other curricula and using experiences and examples from other countries in the process of preparing a new curriculum. However, if a curriculum is being successfully



applied within the country it is originated, it is not necessarily it will be fruitful in another country (EPPK 2006). There are various differences between Turkey and the United States in terms of the educational dynamics. First of all, the United States has a very decentralized and flexible educational system whereas Turkey has an over centralized and strict educational system. According to The World Bank report, Turkey has one of the most centralized educational systems in the world (Fretwell, Wheeler 2001). Although there have been attempts by the Turkish government to decentralize the educational system, it has not succeed to date (Aksit 2007). In this sense, NCSS (1994) curriculum is merely a guideline for the social studies teachers and educators in different states that follow different curriculums. Thus, when NCSS (1994) curriculum is adapted in Turkey, it is likely to see some issues are raised. Turkish social studies teachers might be struggling with flexible nature of the curriculum, as they are used to apply a stricter curriculum with a clearer instruction. The thematic nature of the curriculum is also another puzzling area for the Turkish teachers because they are used to teach mostly discipline and content based units rather than focusing on skills and values.

Finally, it is agreed by many scholars and educators the reform movements were rushed and the new curricula were not piloted adequately in a proper way (Aksit 2007; EPPK 2006). Aksit (2007) points out the criticisms about the piloting process and he states that "... including teacher and student feedback, and the modifications made based on the feedback, were never reported and discussed in an open forum. Instead, the schools were sent textbooks for the new curriculum, and asked to use them right away." (p.134). In addition, the lack of involvement of students, teachers, parents and educators (Aksit 2007; EPPK 2006; Eğitim-Sen 2005) with the reform process are seen as the other weaknesses of the reform movement.

5. Pre-service Social Studies Teacher Education and the Reform Movements

Pre-service social studies teacher education in Turkey is a four-year undergraduate program and students are accepted to the program based on their scores on the national university entrance exam. Teacher education reform took a start simultaneously with the reform movements in the K-12 education which began at the end of the 1990's. Teacher education reform movements were begun due to teacher shortage in this period (Açıkalın, Savaşçı-Açıkalın 2010; Öztürk 2005) and the low quality in teacher education (Öztürk 2005). Thus, the reform movements have focused on opening new faculties of education in Turkish universities, curriculum development for teacher education programs, and recruiting qualified teacher educators.

As a result, the numbers of the faculties of education in Turkey are doubled in the last two decades. According to the Higher Educational Council's recent report (Kavak, Aydın, Akbaba-Altun 2007), the number of faculties of education in state universities increased from 32 in 1992 to 64 in 2006. In addition, teacher education programs re-structured in this period according to the elementary education (k-8) curriculum reforms. Thus, elementary science, elementary math education, and social studies education departments were established in 1998 within the faculties of education in the Turkish universities (Öztürk 2005). Before then, social studies courses (6th -8th grades) had been taught by high school history or geography teachers; and science courses (6th -8th grades) had been taught by high school physics, chemistry, or biology teachers. Thus, it must be noted that this reform aimed to prepare teachers who were familiar with the development of middle school students and it was expected to increase the quality of middle school education (Öztürk 2005).

There were major revisions in the curricula of teacher education programs as well within this period. The teacher education curriculum for each department was standardized and all faculties of education began to follow the same curriculum with the exception of elective courses (Öztürk 2005). The curriculum for each program was written from the beginning in order to make it compatible with the new K-8 curricula. This curriculum development aimed to update and improve the quality of the teacher education in Turkey (Grossman, Onkol, Sands 2007). The last revision in the social studies teacher education curriculum was in 2006. According to the current version, the curriculum includes social science courses (such as history, geography, anthropology, sociology), education and method courses (i.e. introduction to educational sciences, social studies method, instructional technology and material development, classroom management), field experiences, and few elective courses. The program is 156 credits including 16 elective credits.

In addition there were attempts to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education by recruiting highly qualified teacher educators in this period. More than 70 research assistant were sent abroad (mostly to U.S.A and European Countries) to study for their doctoral degrees in education by means of the World Bank funded national education development project [NEDP] (Öztürk 2005). The Ministry of National Education also started a project in 2000 and funded more than two hundreds young educators to study abroad in the field of education. Today most of these funded students are returned home and working in several faculties of education as teaching staffs and researchers in the Turkish universities.

While there have been reform movements to improve the quality of teacher education in the Turkish universities, there have been some criticisms about



these attempts. In one of the recent article Grossman et al. (2007) investigated the effectiveness of the NEDP. The study was conducted on 170 teacher educators from 54 faculties of education in Turkey. Regrettably the finding of the study is not promising. Half of the participants believed that these projects "without any value" or "somewhat less than valuable". Majority of the participants (83 %) indicated that NEDP did not meet its overall goals.

Despite these projects the quality of professors at faculties of education is not at desired level. According to The World Bank's report, professors at faculties of education in the Turkish universities tend to be less well-qualified than other university teaching staffs (Fretwell, Wheeler 2001). A recent study by Açıkalın and Savaşçı-Açıkalın (2010) also points out some reservation about the quality of teaching staff at faculties of education in the Turkish universities. The study, conducted on 191 teaching staffs from selected faculties of education, showed that the majority -almost two-third- of the faculty members in elementary, science, and social studies education departments have discipline based degrees such as physic, chemistry, history or geography. Another important finding of the study was about the research degree levels of the faculty members. The study indicated that 22 % of the participants do not have doctoral degrees. They only have masters or even undergraduate degrees. Ironically, faculty members who have a doctoral degree in elementary education, science education, and social studies education fields also constitute 22 % of the total participants (Açıkalın, Savaşçı-Açıkalın 2010). Thus, it is clear that there is lack of faculty members who are specialized in educational fields within these departments.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, there have been reform movements in social studies education from the elementary to the teacher education level in the last two decades. In general, these movements aimed to improve the quality of education and to make the Turkish educational system compatible with educational systems of EU countries.

However, major issues have been raised about the effectiveness of these reforms. In this article, these issues are discussed in terms of social studies education at both K-8 and pre-service teacher education levels. As discussed above, the dominance of standardized test in the Turkish educational system, teachers' lack of knowledge and experience, and the limited resources to apply the new curriculum are the major issues for K-8 social studies education. On the other hand, the rapid increases in the faculties of education in a short period of time and the newly established social studies education departments have made it very difficult to find well qualified teaching staffs for these departments. It seems that there are very serious issues in the current social studies education in Turkey.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the reform movement was rushed and the new curricula were applied without adequate preparation. Thus, in order to improve the quality of social studies education in Turkey, the issues mentioned above must be addressed. In-service social studies teachers must be trained about how to apply the new curricula immediately. More guidance and resources must be provided for teachers to apply the curricula more effectively. Of course the other issues may require more time and major policy and fundamental changes in the Turkish educational system. For instance, solving the discrepancy between the constructivist pedagogy -the foundational theory behind the new curriculum- and standardized test system in Turkey requires thorough analysis of the current situation and various research studies on this issue. In addition, recruiting well qualified teacher educators requires long run projects, extensive funding and well planning which take much time. Thus, there is much work need to be done by the all stakeholders, scholars, and the policymakers to solve these issues.

As a final word, this article is merely a description and discussion of the current situation of social studies education in Turkey. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the experiences throughout the reform movements discussed in the article may provide valuable information, ideas, and insight for other educators and educational policymakers on the world.

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Social Studies Textbooks (in Turkish)

İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Kitabı: 6. Sınıf [Elementary Social Studies Textbook: Grade 6]. Ankara: A Yayınları
Website: <http://ayayinlari.com/index.php>
E-mail: ayayinlari@ayayinlari.com.tr

İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Kitabı: 6. Sınıf [Elementary Social Studies Textbook: Grade 6]. İstanbul: Altın Kitaplar
Website: <http://www.altinkitaplar.com.tr/>
E-mail: info@altinkitaplar.com.tr

İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Kitabı: 7. Sınıf [Elementary Social Studies Textbook: Grade 7]. Ankara: Milli Eğitim



Bakanlıđı Yayınları [Ministry of National Education Publication]

Website: <http://yayim.meb.gov.tr/>

İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Kitabı: 5. Sınıf [Elementary Social Studies Textbook: Grade 5]. Ankara: Koza Yayınları.

Website: <http://www.kozayayin.com.tr/>

E-mail: bilgi@kozayayin.com.tr Bu mail adresi spam botlara karşı korumalıdır, görebilmek için Javascript açık olmalıdır

Related Websites in Turkey about Social Studies Education

Anadolu University Social Studies Education
(http://www.anadolu.edu.tr/akademik/fak_egt/sosyal-bilgogrtprg/eindex.htm) 12.12. 2010.

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List of Abbreviations

EPPK: Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Alanı Profesörler Kurulu [The Committee of Teacher Education and Curriculum Professors]

MEB: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry on National Education]

NCSS: National Council for the Social Studies (USA)

NEDP: National Education Development Project

TTKB: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [Ministry of National Education –Curriculum Division]

