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Restructuring studies of teacher education in recent years in Turkey

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Abstract

Improvement of teacher quality is at the focal point of reform studies of education systems. Especially in the recent years PISA test organised by OECD and its results bring up the issue of rethinking about education of teachers in many countries. As in many European countries also in Turkey, initial teacher education is at higher education level. Regardless of the school levels, teacher education has been carried out at the higher education level since 1974 it is a norm in Turkey.

In Turkish higher education system with the new arrangement in 1981 all higher education institutions are gathered under the umbrella of universities. In this context, teacher education institutions under Ministry of National Education (MoNE) then affiliated to the universities. In the following years that teacher education affiliated to universities new arrangements have been done. The most comprehensive one is the arrangement of 1997. This arrangement determined current teacher education model in Turkey and with this model, secondary education programmes became masters' degree programmes (5 years) and concurrent model transferred to consecutive model. By the same arrangement an emphasis put to subject matter methodology and practice at the schools and a committee founded, ÖYMK (National Committee of Teacher Education) by participation of all stakeholders.

By updating studies performed between the years 2006-2008 especially pre-primary education and primary education (1-8th grades) programmes were revised and secondary education programmes in teacher education were shifted to concurrent model.

These new arrangements have mainly focused on model and education programmes. However, research findings in Turkey about teacher education mostly draw attention to quality of the academic staff, over courseload of academic staff, physical infrastructure (classroom, laboratory etc.), inadequacy of information technologies and instructional equipments. So improvement of the quality of teacher education requires a good monitoring and evaluation system, not only model and education programmes but also improvement of the quality of academic staff, physical and technological infrastructure, practical conditions at the schools and taking other series of measures.

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1. Introduction

“Teacher” is the focal point of reform studies for development of education systems. Main slogan in improvement of European education systems has been “high quality teacher education for high quality education and training” (TNTEE, 2000). Structural changes in higher education systems, changes in the teaching profession, structural changes and curriculum changes in the primary and secondary education, changing role of the teacher, international developments and trends, changes in evaluation and quality are emphasized to justify the changes in teacher education (TNTEE, 2000: 2-20).

EU teacher education model and systems have a highly heterogeneous nature. In this context, some characteristics about teacher education in European countries can be summarised as follows (TNTEE, 2000: 93-97; EC / Eurydice, 2005: 185-195):

- Prospective teachers education, regardless of the school level, it is mostly at the higher education level (in universities or in higher education institutions)
- Generally teacher education executes in two categories as general education- subject studies and professional (pedagogic) training components.
- Teacher education executes in various models. The most common models are; concurrent model and consecutive model.

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- Time allocated for pedagogical component of teacher education in comparison to the total time of teacher education varies according to the education models, education levels and countries. According to this; ratio of pedagogical component of education is between, in pre-school education % 30-50, primary education %13-70, high school level %14-30.
- Minimum duration for teacher education is 3 years. This duration is 5 years or more in some countries (France, Germany, Spain).

When we review developments and trends in the last fifty years, milestones of teacher education in Turkey can be listed as below (Kavak, Aydın and Altun, 2007: 69-71):

- As in most European countries also in Turkey initial teacher education is taken at higher education level (EC / Eurydice, 2005:185). The regardless of the level at which since 1974 it is a norm that teacher education is executed at higher education level.
- Teacher education for pre-school education and primary education (including lower secondary schools before 1997) function executed by the institutions under MONE until 1982 (higher education institutions excluding universities) These institutions applied concurrent model.
- In Turkish higher education system with the reform performed in 1981 all higher education institutions were affiliated to universities. As a result of this reform teacher education institutions under MoNE were also affiliated to the universities.
- After teacher education affiliated to universities the most comprehensive restructuring study was performed in 1997. It is followed by revision works done between the years 2006-2008.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study basically will seek for an answer to the question, “what are the changes foreseen by the new arrangements done in teacher education field in the recent years?”. Specific questions relevant to this main purpose are as follows:

- What types of changes were foreseen in restructuring studies performed in 1997 in terms of teacher education model, length of education and degrees, education programmes, cooperation and coordination in teacher education and faculty-school cooperation?
- What type of changes are foreseen in education programmes (curricula) and length of education within the revision studies performed between the years 2006-2008

3. Method

The study is based on document review The basic documents to be examined are administrative and the legislative regulations and decrees put in practice by MoNE and the Council of Higher Education (CHE).

4. Findings

The results related to the study are examined under two sub-titles. At first, the restructuring studies in 1997 and later the findings related to the last revision between 2006-2008 will be presented.

4.1 Restructuring in Teacher Education (1997)

After 15 years since the teacher education function was assigned to the universities, the CHE has executed a comprehensive arrangements in accordance with a series of studies carried out in the scope of MoNE Development Project – Initial Teacher Education Component. The basic aim of the project is to increase the quality of teacher education for primary and secondary schools. Primary rationale of the new regulations were based on recognition of some inadequacies of education faculties in the last fifteen years such as wrong structuring , diverging from the basic goals and incapability of providing teacher demand both in quality and quantity (YÖK, 1998a :14).

With this restructuring; modifications and reformations have been put forth in the extent of teacher education models, curricula, length of education, collaboration with schools , relations of science-literature faculty / education faculty etc.. The present model and system of teacher education in Turkey has largely been determined by the restructuring realized in 1997. The model formed as result of 1997 restructuring, curricula and related institutions and processes can be summarised as follows:

4.1.1. Teacher education model, length of education and degrees

The previous model for the prospective teachers of pre-school and primary education (1-8th grades) was entirely preserved. According to this education period for both grades is 4 years. At the end of this period the graduates receive bachelor degree. Education process was designed as ‘Concurrent Model’.

For the prospective of secondary (9-12th grades) education teachers previous two channels (Education Faculties and Science - Literature Faculties) were preserved, yet a new model was put in practice, length of education and degrees were increased. In this regard, the education of prospective teachers for secondary education ‘concurrent model’ leave its place to ‘consecutive model’. At this point two different practices were foreseen. These are :

- **Education Faculties (3,5 years + 1,5 year= 5 years):** The programmes for the secondary education teacher (for instance math teaching, history teaching) was increased from 4 to 5 years . The prospective teachers are taking general subject classes at first 3,5 years. In consequent 1,5 year period they are taking professional education courses in education faculties . The graduates are awarded with master’s degree.
- **Subject Faculties (science-literature faculties in general) (4 years + 1,5 year= 5 years):** New model requires the students to be awarded bachelor degree in one subject and to continue a 1,5 year master’s degree (without thesis) in education faculties. According to this, length of teacher education for the students of science – literature faculty was increased from 4 to 5,5 years.

4.1.2 New arrangements in curriculum development and teaching programmes

Important point of restructuring in education faculties are studies of ‘curriculum development’. In the scope of the programme; all the education programmes (general and professional education) have been re-arranged and new programmes have been developed in certain divisions. The major qualities of new programmes which embodies important changes compared to the previous programmes can be summarised as follows (YÖK, 1998b:5-9):

- New division and program restructuring in education faculties have become parallel to the restructuring at primary and secondary education.
- New programmes have been formed regarding the primary 6-8th grades subject teaching (science teaching, math teaching in primary education)
- The share of pedagogical (professional) courses has been increased in overall programme. According to this, its share in overall programme has been increased to a level of 26-30 % for both primary and secondary education programmes.
- In the scope of curriculum development; it has been largely focused on the subject matter methodology and teaching practice in schools not only in primary but also in secondary education level.

4.1.3. National committee of teacher education (öymk)

The milestone of the reform in teacher education system is the foundation of ÖYMK to provide the sustainability and efficiency of this reform action. The goal of this committee is to give direction to teacher education policies in cooperation with other stakeholders (MoNE, CHE and education faculties)

4.1.4. The cooperation between education faculties and practical schools

The major component of new reform is the ‘Cooperation between Education Faculty and Practice School Programme’. With this programme it is aimed to strengthen the weak sides of past practices. New reform significantly increases the time allocated for practices in teacher education programmes, and in this scope requires the teachers to experience teaching in real conditions – that is in schools.

4.1.5 Raising teaching staff

One of the major points in 1997 arrangement is to raise teaching staff abroad. In this scope two projects have been carried out. First; with the financial resources from MoNE Development Project – Initial Teacher Education Component scholarships have been provided for graduate studies and further education for improvement of academic staff abroad who work in education faculties. 91 staff benefited from graduate scholarship, 212 staff and administrators benefited from short term scholarships. Secondly; from the graduate scholarship provided within the scope of Law no 1416 , 750 of it has been allocated for the field of education faculties.

4.2 The revision of teacher education programmes (2006 - 2008)

More than 8 years of application process after the first comprehensive reform that is presented in detail in previous sections and that was realized in 1997; a series of arrangements that can be broadly expressed as the ‘updating’ of education programmes have been put into practice with the decision of CHE.

In the rational of the arrangement following subjects are discussed (YÖK, 2006: 4): It has been explained as ‘ In 8 years of application process , the adequacy of teacher education programmes in raising teachers embodying the requirements of knowledge and skills of contemporary age is under discussion .’ In addition, it is stressed that the changes in primary and secondary education curricula should be reflected to the new programmes of education faculties.

At first stage, of pre-primary and primary education programmes have been reviewed. The major changes of this arrangement can be summarised as follows (YÖK, 2006: 4-5):

- List of courses, courses descriptions, and credits of courses have been re-determined.
- A flexible arrangement has been made in the composition of education programmes; the ratios are re-arranged as general education courses (subject and subject education courses, liberal education courses) 65-80 % , professional education (pedagogics) courses 25-30 %.
- Faculties have been given the authority to determine the courses of 25 % ratio in overall credits and the opportunity of elective courses has been increased.

At the second stage, the teacher education programmes have been reviewed in regard to secondary education (9-12th grades) and some arrangements have been put into practice in extent of only professional (pedagogics) education. In this regard;

- 3,5 +1,5 years application that was been put in practice in educationf with 1997 reform has been put it end and general education and subject education courses have been decided to be executed in 5 year unity. Thus “consecutive model” has switched to “concurrent model”. From another point a switch to the model before 1997 has been realized.
- Subject faculties (faculty of science - literature in general) applications (4 + 1,5 years = 5,5 years): In this model designed for the subject faculties graduates, with the arrangement in 2008, the lenght of the masters degree program has been decreased from 1,5 year to 1 year (4 +1 year) and professional education credits have been decreased from 46 to 34.
- Professional education courses have become parallel to the new arrangement in primary education and the hours of practical courses have been decreased. It has been determined that the ratio of the professional courses become 30 % in overall program.

5. Conclusion

As apparent in study results, in Turkey there has been a series of restructurings in teacher education in the recent years. The most comprehensive one is 1997 restructuring. This restructuring has been a milestone for current teacher education model and education programmes in Turkey. When the new reforms have been analysed the focal point is the changes in the model and education programmes.

However, the researches related to the teacher education in Turkey draw attention mostly to the quality of academic staff, high courseload of staff , inadequacies of physical infrastructure (classroom, laboratory etc), instructional materials and equipments, infrastructure of knowledge technology and on student social services.

Consequently the improvement of quality of teacher education is a long term attempt; a good monitoring and evaluation system should be established and it is required to take a series of measures not only for the model and education programmes but also to increase the quality of the staff, physical and technological infrastructure, equipment and to improve practical conditions in schools.

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