



The Views of Preservice Teachers on the Comparison of the Turkish Education System and the Inter-grade Transition Systems of Some Countries

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to determine the views and approaches of preservice teachers on the comparison of the Turkish education system and the inter-grade transition systems of other countries. In the study using qualitative research methods and techniques, the preservice teachers were asked to present their views and suggestions on the comparison of the Turkish education system and the inter-grade transition systems of other countries. The data were collected via documentation technique. Education systems of five countries were introduced to the preservice teachers and they tried to interpret and explain these conditions in the light of the theoretical knowledge they learned in the course of comparative education. The documents were used as data documents of the study. As a result of the study, the inter-grade transition systems of the countries were compared and some suggestions were made concerning the Turkish education system.

INTRODUCTION

Comparative education is a study area which helps to identify the similarities and differences between two or more education systems of different cultures and countries, explains phenomena that appear to be similar, and offers proposals for the ways of training people (Türkoglu 1985; Tatli and Adigüzel 2012).

There are numerous studies on comparative education in the literature (Arnove 1980; Hans 2012; Bray et al. 2014; Holmes 2018; Güngör and Göksu 2013). Comparative education embraces the systems of education in a broad framework and thus, removes missing and wrong associations related to the systems with the knowledge and interpretations it offers. In addition, it is shown that educational problems are not so peculiar to any country by means of valid and reliable knowledge concerning other systems of education. Comparative education also examines and offers standards that are used for education applications. By this way, it becomes possible to understand many terms such as “continued education” “the handicapped”, “the gifted”, “compulsory education”, evaluate the lessons in schools and have information about the standards used by other countries concerning matters such as school year and teacher’s quality. Knowledge acquired through comparative edu-

cation also forms a basis for producing general theories in a broader framework. For example, if the studies conducted in the United States suggest that a child’s order of birth in the family is associated with her/his school success, this finding may help the trainer to develop newer and more general theories. In other words, comparative education is of prime importance in terms of improving and enriching educational sciences. Theoretical and practical studies conducted within the scope of educational sciences can be put into a more effective framework with the knowledge provided by comparative education (Erdogan 2003).

Two approaches in comparative education can be discussed. The first of these approaches is the one-to-one comparison of the education systems of two countries in terms of certain criterion. For example, in the comparison of the education system of the country A and the education system of the country B in terms of purpose and policy, administrative structuring and administration-process; firstly the purpose and policy of the education system of the country A are compared one-to-one with the purpose and policy of the education system of the country B. Then, the same comparison is made one-to-one according to the other two criteria. On the other hand, the second approach includes an integrated evaluation of the education systems

of the countries A and B first and then a comparison of these systems in terms of the criterion of purpose and policy, administrative structuring and administration-process. In other words, firstly the purpose and policy, administrative structuring and administration-process of the education system of the country A are described. Then, the education system of the country B is described according to the same three criteria. Finally, the two systems are compared according to these criteria (Balci 2009).

Objective of the Study

The second approach was adopted in this study. In this context, after analyzing the education systems of Turkey and the specified countries in detail, it was asked to compare and interpret the inter-grade transition systems in the education systems of the related countries. Considering from this point of view; the aim of this study was to determine the views of preservice teachers on the comparison of the Turkish education system and the inter-grade transition education systems of other countries.

METHODOLOGY

Study Model

In this study, methods and techniques of case study, which is among qualitative research approaches, were used (Yildirim and Simsek 2011). For that purpose, the student views on differences in the inter-grade transition systems of the countries were analyzed (Silverman 1998).

Data Collection

The documentation technique, which is included in document and record analysis method, was used as data collection tool (Ekiz 2003). Also known as document analysis; this method is one of the major data collection tools of historical and biographical researches and uses written documents, voice records, photos, electronic files and videos, which include information about the phenomena that are intended to be investigated as data sources. Lincoln and Guba (1985) usually gave written materials such as personal diaries, letters, memories, travel notes and biographies as examples to documents (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Apart from them; field

notes, formal records, policies, student compositions, homework, technical documents, meeting minutes, plans, leaflets, advertisements, year-books, and newspapers are also among data sources used in the documentation technique (Cohen et al. 2007). These documents can be used not only as data sources alone, but also for the purpose of providing additional information to other qualitative methods (such as interview, observation) and increasing the reliability. As documents contain rich and enormous data, they are considerably effective in describing the phenomenon, which is the subject of the study, from all aspects. Besides, documents are useful for detecting personal views and emotions which cannot be obtained in other ways and examining how the conditions develop in the course of time in long-term studies (Cohen et al. 2007).

Study Group

Many pre-service teachers benefit from various trainings and courses of non-formal education within the scope of protocols and cooperation made between public education centers and faculties. It was paid attention to select students who were able to make comparison among education systems of the countries having language competencies in particular among these preservice teachers. The participants consisted of 10 voluntary fourth-year students who were studying in Faculty of Education Department of English Teaching in the Autumn Term of the Academic Year of 2017-2018, took the comparative education course, and were selected via convenience sampling method, being one of purposeful sampling methods.

Data Analysis

During the practice studies of the comparative education course, each student examined the education systems of five countries (Germany, United States, England, Japan, South Korea) and made a presentation about the comparison of the inter-grade transition systems and the Turkish education system in the classroom. The following processes were followed in the comparative education course: 1. Examining and evaluating the inter-grade transition systems in the education systems of five countries, 2. Comparing the inter-grade transition systems of the countries examined with the Turkish education

system, 3. Finally, determining, discussing, interpreting, and evaluating good examples and applications which could be transferred from the education systems of the examined countries to the Turkish education system.

FINDINGS

The Comparison of the Turkish System of Education and Inter-grade Transition Systems of some Countries

The views of the preservice teachers concerning the comparison of Turkish education system and the inter-grade transition systems in education systems of some countries were as follows (Table 1):

“I think the most remarkable part of the comparison of countries is inter-grade transition exams that are held in England. All primary, secondary and high school students in England are subjected to an exam at the end of each educational grade in order to pass to the next grade. They gain right to pass to the next grade according to their marks. In our system of education, on the other hand, students take only one exam at the end of secondary school and set their destiny of education. It may not always be sufficient and proper to measure an 8-year education with only one exam. Taking that as an example, we can improve our exam

system. We can at least hold more exams like the previous SBS (placement test) and thus, create a more accurate evaluation system.” (Preservice Teacher 1)

“The Turkish education system is currently teacher-based and gradually prepares students to the exam simply because students will encounter an exam in every stage of their lives. This condition has begun to prevent students from socializing. We see a similar situation in other countries; for example, students in Japan also have to take high school and university entrance exams, but these exams are less significant factors in determining life compared to Turkey. Thus, they have fewer impacts on students. Because in Turkey’s conditions, if a student fails an exam, her/his personal and academic progress interrupts until he/she passes the exam. In some situations, we may even encounter students who think that life is over. This situation is different in Japan, because there are one or several alternatives preventing Japanese students from facing the same situation in Turkey to a certain extent. To get the solution; I believe that it is necessary to change completely the exam system in Turkey. Instead of an exam-oriented system, an ability-oriented system should be written. However, this is not possible in the short term. Ability-oriented systems are available in Turkey to an extent. Universities prepare aptitude-oriented exams

Table 1. Views of preservice teachers on the comparison of the Turkish system of education and inter-grade transition systems of some countries

Themes	UK	Japan	Germany	South Korea	USA	Turkey
1. There is an evaluation system at the end of each grade. (PT 1, PT 2, PT 7, PT 9)	✓	✓				
2. Inter-grade transition is carried out with general and large scaled exams. (PT 1, PT 2, PT 3, PT 4, PT 8)			✓			✓
3. Address-based placement is available. (PT 10)	✓				✓	✓
4. Social skill education is in the foreground rather than theoretical knowledge. (PT 7)	✓	✓				(Partially)
5. Guidance is made according to art/occupational education and talents. (PT 8)	✓	✓	✓			(Partially)
6. Moral development education starts at young ages and is prioritized. (PT 3, PT 6)		✓				
7. Success rate in literacy and success tests is very high and these matters are taken into consideration in education. (PT 9)				✓		
8. A Discipline and success- oriented sense of education is adopted. (PT 9)				✓		
9. Compulsory education comprises 9 to 12 years. (PT 5, PT 6, PT 8, PT 10)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. There is a local sense of education. (PT 5, PT 6, PT 7)	✓	✓	✓			(Centralist)

in fields like music and painting. I believe that this needs to be improved.” (Preservice Teacher 2)

“Students in Turkey prepare for exams as from very young ages. There are even students who prepare to the future by solving tests in the third grade. On the other hand, the first 6 years in Japan are dedicated to individual moral education. Their system is based on respect and merit. In order to have a sense of team work as from young ages, students are even made clean the toilets. As the Turkish family structure is not appropriate for that, the system can be applied mildly. Students can clean the classroom and the board or take the trashcan out.” (Preservice Teacher 3)

“While the high school exit exam, Abitur (oral+written) in Germany is horribly difficult, the presence of multiple-choice questions such as YGS-LYS in Turkey is more relieving. To me, another advantage of the Turkish education system is that English education begins as of the second grade in Turkey and the sixth grade in Japan. On the other hand, children in Japan are more equipped because they are trained in campus-like schools as of primary school; whereas, in Turkey, primary school is too limited and insufficient.” (Preservice Teacher 4)

“Preschool education is not compulsory in Germany and Turkey and while this education is free in Turkey, it is paid in Germany. The duration of compulsory education is twelve years (4+4+4) in Turkey and ten years in Germany. In contradistinction to Turkey, students are not given marks within the first two years of primary school in Germany. The school where the student would go after primary school is notified with a Letter of Reference in Germany. If parents are dissatisfied with that condition, they can raise an objection and take an acceptance exam. In Germany, higher education consists of two-year college and at least four-year undergraduate education; whereas in our country, undergraduate education takes four years. The sense of education is local in Germany and centralist in Turkey. As a consequence, all the differences in Germany from Turkey take them to success.” (Preservice Teacher 5)

“In the Japanese system of education, on the other hand, the duration of compulsory education is nine years (6+3). The duration of education which is 180 weekdays in Turkey is 240 weekdays in Japan, mainly because part-

time education is provided on Saturdays. While there are at least two employees in every school in Turkey, there is no employee in Japan. Japan has a local sense of administration just like Germany. Foreign language lessons begin in the second grade in Turkey and seventh grade in Japan. Education budget is one and a half times greater than military expenditures. Moral education begins as of the first grade in Japan. That’s how it should be in our country, as well. A great part of compulsory education should focus on moral education rather than exams.” (Preservice Teacher 6)

“When considering the English education system, it is seen that education is in the hands of local units, as in Germany. The duration of compulsory education in England is eleven years and the duration of course hours is forty hours, as in Turkey. We see that education aims for a social change. An exam is held at the end of every stage. Professional orientation begins at the ages of 7-11 years in junior school. In Turkey, children older than 72 weeks start school, whereas in England, there are different ages and criteria of acceptance for every school. That’s how it should be in Turkey.” (Preservice Teacher 7)

“When considering the German education system, it is seen that the duration of compulsory education is 12 (4+5+3) years. Children are obliged to start school at 6 years. Students are not given marks in the first and second grade in junior school and drama courses are provided in some states. These courses are among example applications for students’ learning by doing and experiencing and developing empathy skills. Additionally, in some states, there are courses enabling students to select and play any instrument. That’s how it should be in Turkey. Such courses can be added and applied. Also, a student who graduates from a conservatoire or a music school can teach as a teacher. In teacher training, on the other hand, assignments are made by states. Individuals who aim to become a teacher need to have the abitur. They take an exam after receiving both theoretical and practical courses for four years. Those who succeed receive a two-year internship training. At the end of that training, they take oral, written and occupational experience exams again and get assigned. In our country, on the other hand, people get assigned and start to work only after taking the KPSS (pub-

lic personnel selection examination).” (Preservice Teacher 8)

“Considering the South Korean system of education, it is seen that students who attach a great importance to education spend 14 hours a day in school and literally run to success. Indeed, the concept of education is extremely disciplined and strict not only in South Korea, but also in the large part of the Far East. Among these countries, South Korea is undoubtedly the most successful country on the edge. Their exams require quite a different and more extensive information sophistication compared to familiar exams such as TEOG, YGS and KPSS and can be intensely tiring and wearing. I don’t think students can cope with such a system in our country. However, it is not possible to state that this strict and difficult system of education is unsuccessful, because the rate of literacy in South Korea has reached 100 percent. In addition, South Korea is among the leading countries in international comparative success tests. However, this success certainly comes at a price. Students in South Korea are under a tremendous and cruel pressure to succeed. Especially families never accept any excuse for failure.” (Preservice Teacher 9)

“One of the most controversial topics in the Turkish system of education used to be 4+4+4. The United States also uses this system which obliges 12 years. Another controversial topic is the determination of criteria to be used for going to high school with the motto, “best school is the one that is closest to home”. We see that this model is also applied in the United States and England. I think this application has many advantages from a lot of aspects. It is an applicable method both economically and with regards to student safety. If we stress the importance of Turkish society for the concept of family; it may not be wrong to state that parents fall all over their children a lot. Thus, parents yearn for sending their children to good schools for a good education. However, these schools can be far away, which may pose a problem for both children and parents. Therefore, it is good for students to be close to school. What should actually be discussed here is adoption of this system in haste without a proper infrastructure. Considering in general rather than specifically; adopting another system without preparing an infrastructure is the greatest factor for the failure and constant alteration of

outcomes. For example, school levels can be adjusted better or schools accessible to everyone can be established.” (Preservice Teacher 10)

When analyzing descriptively the views of the preservice teachers concerning the comparison of Turkish education system and the inter-grade transition systems in education systems of some countries, the participants mentioned about similarities and differences between applications in the other countries and application in Turkish education system. When it comes to the inter-grade transition system, it was observed that the participants assessed the application in Turkey based on exam systems in general and pointed out orientation and guidance applications based on talents and skills in the other countries rather than transfer exams.

DISCUSSION

The study and comparisons have showed that there are still structural disorders between the grades. There used to be serious problems in transition from secondary education to higher education and now this stress is also experienced in transition to high schools. Today high schools are no more educational institutions preparing students to life and occupation; they prepare students to only an upper level of education. Even vocational high schools have been transformed into such institutions with open admission. An equality of opportunity is tried to be provided in education; however, every new regulation in the system deepens the inequality of opportunity even further (Ergün 2014).

Thus, according to Ekinçi (2014) the Ministry of National Education should develop policies to remove the quality and equality problem in the system and reduce the difference of success between schools. Considering that students will have an exam anxiety; it is required to abandon the exam-based system in transition to secondary education and higher education, develop a transition system that students can prefer according to their interests and demands and also review the exam number and inter-session period which are considered as factors increasing the exam anxiety of students.

Considering all these; it is primarily required to provide the equality of opportunity in education. Some students in Turkey have better possibilities than others and thus, benefit from more

quality educational services. Especially the differences between school types should be reduced in terms of financial possibilities provided to students. The sense of educational administration should be altered. A centralist and strict sense of administration should be replaced by a flexible sense of administration authorizing and empowering local governments. Exams aimed at evaluating students should not be based on memorization. They should develop creativity and critical thinking. University programs providing teaching education should be made more qualified and applications encouraging the profession of teaching should be developed. Also in the comparisons by Baskan et al. (2006) it is stressed that technical and academic dimensions of teacher training system of the process of selecting students for faculties of education in Turkey should be reviewed; courses in teaching programs should concentrate mainly on the dimensions of general culture, professional teaching knowledge and school practices and should be subjected to practice exams where they can perform practically at the end of the process; and professional exams should be held to measure the field information of preservice teachers concerning every branch before getting assigned in the profession. In the study by Güngör and Göksu (2013) it is emphasized that educational financing in Turkey is not sufficient and there are differences between the countries in general. In this respect, in order to fulfil all these proposals, the amount of educational expenditures should be increased substantially.

CONCLUSION

Education is one of the most important factors that need a special attention for a country to develop and exceed the level of contemporary civilization. A properly planned and established system of education can facilitate progress and success. In order to achieve this, we can choose applications that can be adapted from the education systems of different countries into our own culture and education system, if necessary. As a consequence, as long as Turkey adapts differences from other countries into its own system of education in accordance with its social and cultural structure, as well as its education budget and process, it can obtain more productive and successful results.

The exam system which mainly highlights students' academic achievement seems to be far from giving them an opportunity to develop from all aspects. Necessary precautions should be taken to prevent lessons outside the core curriculum in schools from remaining in the background. Investigating the reasons for students not to continue school from all aspects and especially removing the academic anxiety of students by school administrators and teachers will be effective in succeeding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the scope of the study, following recommendation can be listed; first equal opportunity should be provided in the education. Especially differences between school types in terms of financial possibilities offered to students should be decreased. The sense of education administration should be changed. Instead of a centralist and strict management understanding, a flexible management understanding that gives authorization and assignment to local governments, as well should be adopted. Education programs and the contents of the textbooks should be arranged based on the country needs and individual differences of students and they should be based on practices instead of memorization. The exams made for evaluating students should aim at creativity and critical thinking. University programs providing the teacher training should be qualified and the encouraging applications for teaching profession should be developed. Most importantly, amount of educational costs should be absolutely increased.

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