Strategic Planning in Education in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the implementation of strategic planning within the K-12 schools of Turkey, beginning in 2010. In Turkey, the concept of strategic planning is often misunderstood and as a result, a large number of practical problems have arisen. Thus, strategic plans which were prepared and implemented in schools have not been realistic, functional or practical. Furthermore, educators throughout Turkey have become very skeptical of strategic planning. For successful implementation of the strategic planning process, it has been suggested that educators analyze and examine the values of the organization, the functional and situational plans, as well as the establishment of an effective communication network among school stakeholders. Furthermore, it is essential that the leadership/management of the school strategic planning engages the support of stakeholders' awareness in this process. In addition, it is suggested that the creation of a conceptual foundation for strategic planning, including awareness, stakeholder participation and promotion of the strategic planning process should occur. It is also suggested that schools collaborate with other schools and universities to share ideas and support for planning.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalization, the concept of strategic planning has become very important for organizational success in education. Mintzberg (1994) defines strategic planning as a "formalized procedure to produce articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decision" (p. 12). Strategic planning is critical in terms of minimizing the uncertainty of future and to provide sustainable competitive advantages (Demir & Yılmaz, 2010). It can assist an organization in helping to plan for the future (Güçlü, 2003). The importance of strategic planning stems from a focus on the concepts of mission, vision and identifying developmental directions for the organization. It helps the organization adapt to a changing environment, thinking systematically, and encouraging effective management and administrative efficiency. As a result, it is possible through strategic planning to evaluate opportunities and threats, determine the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, concentrate their attention on the vital issues and challenges faced by the organization (Gürer, 2006; Altan, Kerman, Aktel & Öztop, 2013).

STRATEGIC PLANNING IS LAW

In Turkey, preparing strategic plan in public organizations became compulsory with Development Plans and "Public Financial Management and Control Law" in 2003. The purpose of this law was to require public administrations (Kamu Mali Yönetimi ve Kontrol Kanunu, 2003) to
- create the mission and vision within the framework of development plans, programs, the related laws and the basic principles which they adopt;
- determine strategic goals and measurable objectives;
- measure performance in accordance to the predetermined indicators and the monitor the process of preparing strategic plans in a cooperative manner.

In order for public administrations to provide the desired level and quality services, they must have their budgets and projects aligned to their strategic plan, which includes annual goals, objectives and performance indicators (Kamu Mali Yönetimi ve Kontrol Kanunu, 2003). Furthermore, the *Strategic Planning Workbook for Public and Non-profit Organizations*, developed by the secretariat of State Planning Organization, was put into effect in 2010, the same year that strategic planning was implemented in all elementary and secondary schools in Turkey (Altınkurt, 2010).

RECENT STUDIES ON STRATEGIC PLANNING IN EDUCATION

During the past two decades, there has been much research and discussion regarding strategic planning for educational organizations in Turkey (Ağaoğlu, Şimşek, & Altınkurt, 2006; Altınkurt, 2010; Altınkurt & Bali, 2009; Arabacı, 2002, 2005; Arslan & Altınışık, 2013; Çalık, 2003; Erdem,

2006; Ereş, 2004; Güçlü, 2003; Işık & Aypay, 2004; Kabadayı, 1999; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2004, 2008; Memduhoğlu & Uçar, 2012; Özgan, Baş, & Sabancı, 2011; Türk, Yalçın & Ünsal, 2006).

Özgan, Baş, and Sabancı (2011) discussed in their study the objectives of strategic plans for schools to include physical needs, academic achievement and social events. They claimed that strategic plans should aim at improving academic success at school by helping students to prepare for university examinations. The authors concluded that the school's strategic plans should contain objectives and strategies in support of students' social, mental, and physical development.

Altınkurt (2010) stressed the importance of dissemination of strategic planning information. He highlighted in his research that staff of Provincial Directorate of National Education of Kütahya and school administrators generally had positive attitudes towards strategic planning. However, many stakeholders of strategic planning were holding negative attitudes such as distrust and resistance. He claimed that distrust and resistance to strategic planning implementations mainly stem from lack of information about the strategic planning process.

In their research, Arslan and Altınışık (2013) examined the strategic plans of the 32 primary schools in Van Province, using document analysis technique. The researchers found that the strategic plans of many schools were identical or similar. Schools were found copying from one another to complete the state required components of educational strategic planning.

Işık and Aypay (2004) examined three public school's problems associated with the strategic planning. They concluded that problems arising from strategic planning can be categorized as theoretical issue, human resource, time management, judicial problems and financial concerns. Strategic planning was seen as a legal requirement and managerial practice rather than planning application to solve the school problems. Staff in charge of strategic planning was not well prepared. The time allotted for the development of the strategic planning process was ineffectively utilized. Hierarchical structure and bureaucracy of the organization were barriers for strategic planning activities. Additionally, insufficient amount of dollars was budgeted for strategic planning activities. The authors identified theoretical issue as the most significant blockage to successful implementation of strategic plans and complimented the strategic planning team members for being enthusiastic and willing to participate.

Memduhoğlu and Uçar (2012) studied strategic planning of elementary and secondary schools in Turkey. They found that that institutional structure of schools was not supportive of effective strategic planning implementation. A lack of participation and understanding of the planning process by the school stakeholders resulted in ineffective plan implementation.

In addition, there was little support of strategic planning by teachers and school administrators. They did not believe strategic planning was necessary for schools the mission of which the current strategic planning applications did not serve. Also, divergence of teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding strategic planning existed. The authors also found that when preparing strategic plans, conditions of schools and their environments were often not taken into consideration. Schools' strengths and weaknesses were not examined critically; identified threats were ignored; sufficient time was not allocated to the plan development; and there was not enough specialist support for strategic planning (Memduhoğlu & Uçar, 2012).

The findings of the study also showed that elementary and secondary school principals did not have a good understanding of the aims and concepts of strategic planning. Professional training with increased financial support would certainly help the implementation of strategic plans. Administrators' professional training was also supported by Yaşamak Gülşen (2013) who concluded that practitioners must be well educated and supported during all phases of the planning process.

Çalık (2003) summarized the reasons of strategic planning failure as follows:
- Administrators were not knowledgeable of strategic planning.
- Administrators' confidence on strategic planning was weak.
- Voluntary participation to strategic planning process was insufficient.

- Top management and school environment did not adequately support strategic planning.
- Teachers were too busy to appropriately implement strategic planning.
- Adequate financial support and other forms of support were lacking.
- Supervisors did not provide guidance on strategic planning.
- Schools failed to establish cooperation with universities.
- Top management failed to make commitment to schools.
- Sufficient motivation and rewarding were lacking.
- Staff was losing interest in strategic planning because of lack of communication and work condition burnout.

Ayrancı (2013) studied school administrators' knowledge of strategic planning. He concluded that more than half of K-12 school administrators had sufficient knowledge of strategic planning, and acknowledged that strategic planning was necessary and helpful in determination of resources and needs. About half of the administrators received in-service training about strategic planning and about half of them received some kind of training. A similar study was conducted by Türk and Ünsal (2009) who recognized that about half of the senior managers of ministry of education had adequate knowledge about strategic planning.

Dökmeci (2010) concluded that, according to teachers and managers, the problems encountered in the strategic planning process were that the process was seen as drudgery, excessive paperwork, ignoring the current status of the school, lacking support of qualified instructors, and absence of participatory decision. However, the researcher found that when strategic planning was successful, it had a positive impact on schools, including improvements in teaching and learning, enhanced physical conditions of the school, better use of human, financial and technology resources, and more involvement of parents in the education of their children. In addition, the relationship between teachers and administrators could be enhanced as well.

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Strategic planning is compulsory in elementary and secondary schools in Turkey. However, such planning process is resisted in Turkey because it increases workload of teachers and administrators. Therefore, the support and enthusiasm for strategic planning is lacking. It can be concluded that strategic planning implementation in K-12 schools has not been effective thus far. Since strategic planning is not yet fully understood by school leaders and teachers, a large number of problems arise, leading to less than successful results (Ayrancı, 2013; Çalık, 2003; Dökmeci, 2010; Türk & Ünsal, 2009).

Implementation of the strategic planning process requires a thorough analysis of the values in the organization, functional and situational plans and establishment of an effective communication network among school stakeholders. Furthermore, education leaders need to make strategic planning a priority, and support all stakeholders in gaining an understanding of this process. In addition, the creation of the necessary structure for strategic planning, school environment awareness, promotion of successful work and volunteer participation to the strategic planning process should be encouraged. Collaboration among schools, universities and the government needs to be well established to ensure support for the strategic planning and implementation process for schools in Turkey (Çalık, 2003).

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