

Examining the Programs of Political Parties in terms of the Structure of the Turkish National Education System

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Abstract

Education systems are largely shaped by the policies of political parties. Political parties try to express their policies regarding the structure and functioning of the education system through party programs. As in all countries, policies regarding the education system have an important place in party programs in Turkey. The aim of this study is to examine the programs of political parties in Turkey in terms of the structure of the Turkish National Education System; the aim is to present their views on “Pre-School Education”, “Primary Education”, “General Secondary Education”, “Vocational Technical Secondary Education”, “Higher Education” and “Non-Formal Education-Adult Education-Continuous Education”. In this context, it is important to express the similarities in the objectives of the political parties regarding the structure of the Turkish Education System. In this study, the qualitative research method was used. The data of the research were collected through document analysis. The study population consisted of all the political parties in The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT). The sample of the study consists of five political parties selected according to the criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. These political parties can be listed as follows according to the number of members: 1. Justice and Development Party (JDP), 2. Republican People's Party (RPP) 3. Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) 4. National Movement Party (NMP) 5. Good Party (GP). The data sources of the study are the party programs of political parties. The documents regarding the party programs were taken from the official websites of the parties. In the context of suitability for the purpose of the study, the documents were analyzed by the content analysis method. The findings of the research are given without adding the researcher's comment, according to the themes and codes created. According to the findings, there are quite a lot of statements about the structure of the Turkish National Education System in the programs of political parties. As a result of the analysis, it has been determined that there are many similarities in the programs of the five parties, although there are many differences in the objectives of the parties regarding the structure of the Turkish Education System.

Keywords: Political Parties, Party Programs, Education, The Turkish National Education System

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Introduction

Political parties are indispensable elements of democracies. The construction and maintenance of democracies depends on political parties. “Strong political parties are essential to open, competitive democratic politics, particularly in emerging democracies” (Johnston, 2005). The primary role of political parties is to set the political agenda and policies. It is in this process of representing the opinions of citizens and acting as the agencies of people’s political participation that political parties perform the role of intermediaries, facilitating the relationship between citizens and institutions of the states (Chandra, 2021). According to Kurniadi (2019), the political parties as the drivers of the upholding of democracy are means for citizens to participate in the process of managing the state.

Political parties are critical institutions through which citizens organize themselves to participate in public life, among which they choose at elections, and through which elected officials cooperate to build and maintain the coalitions that are the hallmark of democratic politics. They are vital to the realization of representative democracy (European Commission For Democracy Through Law [ECfDTL], 2020). Political parties are organizations that mediate between citizens, civil society and the state (Veljanovska, 2021). According to Özbudun (Esen, 2012), political parties are political communities with a permanent and stable organization that aim to seize and control the government mechanism by gaining the support of the public. The majority of people living in democratic countries around the world believe that political parties are necessary (Holmberg, 2003).

According to the law on political parties (Prime Ministry, 1983), in accordance with the Constitution and laws; they are institutions with legal personality, which aim to reach the level of contemporary civilization in a democratic state and social order by ensuring the formation of national will through their works and open propaganda in line with the views determined in their statutes and programs, through the elections of the president, deputies and local administrations, and which are organized to operate throughout the country.

The first regulation regarding political parties in the Republic of Turkey took place in the 1961 Constitution. As in every country, political parties in the Republic of Turkey derive their power from the people. Therefore, political parties are very sensitive to the needs and demands of the people. One of the most important issues for the public is undoubtedly education. Political parties have to produce policies to meet the needs and demands of the people regarding education. These policies are of great importance in terms of the functioning of the state, the socio-economic development of the country, science, technology, and manpower education.

Benjamin Franklin famously noted that “an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest” (Rauh, Kirchner & Kappe, 2011). In contemporary societies, information plays a primary

role in human activities. (Tataj & Kola, 2021). In fact, a country's endowment with human capital is an important source of economic prosperity. (Rauh, Kirchner & Kappe, 2011). For these reasons, investing in human resources is a must, and education policies play a key role in this process. In this context educational policies must be adapted to the new needs that arise in society as a result of economic, technological, and social developments. (Tataj & Kola, 2021). Education policies have long been understood as the putative domain of the nation state. Sociologists and political scientists, beginning with Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and John Stuart Mill, recognized that national educational systems arose as part of the apparatus of modern government in the Western world. The discursive and organizational structures of educational policy have importantly and rather steadily shifted to a global level in recent decades (Mundy, Green, Lingard & Verger, 2016).

Political parties are regarded as agents of political socialization. Political socialisation is a process in which people are familiarised with the political culture, political norms and values of their country and these virtues are transferred from one generation to another generation. Public opinion-making is primarily a democratic function of political parties (Chandra, 2021). Party programs have an important effect on these functions. Educational policies are generally perceived as a part of political socialization in the field of education and political science. Political parties integrate different ideas or concerns of general public into a political project, and campaign them in order to check the feedback from the majority (Sirivunnabood, 2016). Party programs are effective in these campaigns.

Turkey has an education system structure that is both relatively large and highly centralized, encompassing more than 1 million teachers and 18 million students in 2018/19 (OECD, 2020). Therefore, as in every country, the education system is of great importance for both the state and society in Turkey. Being aware of this situation, political parties attach great importance to the Turkish Education System and create their education policies accordingly.

Making education policies is considered as one of the main steps for the development of the country (Tataj & Kola, 2021). For over a century, Turkish political parties have reflected both the profound changes and the underlying continuity in the country's political history (Heper & Landau, 2016). This situation has affected the policies of political parties regarding the Turkish Education System.

According to Durkheim (1968), the determination and application of education policies are considered as an important step in society's development (Eren, 2020). It is accepted that party programs directly reflect the processes of determining and implementing policies regarding education.

The programs of political parties are official political documents and are valuable resources in examining the policy priorities and preferences of the parties. There is a historical and universal relationship between politics and education (Varış, 1998). Political parties, which assume the

As seen in Table 4, the number of statements related to General Secondary Education is 27. These statements are included in the parties' programs as follows:

Justice and Development Party

Apart from the religious culture and ethics courses in Primary and *Secondary Education*, elective religion courses will be provided depending on the consent of the parents.

The current practice produces results that are unfair and reduce students' motivation. The distortions of this practice will be addressed first, and equal opportunity will be provided to all *High School* and equivalent school graduates in the university entrance exams.

Republican People's Party

It will be ensured that the religious culture and moral knowledge course given in Primary and *Secondary Education* institutions is given with a curriculum suitable for the purpose stipulated by the Constitution.

In order for the Primary and *High School* System to reach the targeted level of success, the economic, technological and educational support needed will be primarily provided by the state, and the public and private resources transferred to education will be used in the most efficient way in line with the National Education Policies.

Every *High School* student will learn at least one foreign language. Qualified education will be provided to those who have graduated from *Academic* or Vocational *High Schools*, at a level that will enable them to know at least one foreign language well.

Student Selection Exam (SSE) will be abolished: Students who want to attend Higher Education institutions after *Academic High School* will have the right to go directly to Higher Education according to the results of the exams to be held within the scope of *High School* success and Talent Assessment and Evaluation System. The "Abilities Assessment and Evaluation System" exams, which will be held during the 2-year *High School* education period and students will be given the right to participate 4 times, will have two options as "Thinking, Problem Solving, Language Skills Exam" (PSLSE) and "Field Preference Exam" (FPE).

Students will be directed to Colleges and Universities at the *High School* stage within the framework of the total and department quotas to be determined by the universities under the coordination of the Council of Higher Education.

Students will be directed to the 2-year *Academic High School* or Vocational High School based on the results of A General Assessment Exam to be held at the end of the 10th grade and on the basis of success scoring.

It will be ensured that *Academic* or Vocational *High School* Education is provided in a qualified and effective manner.

2-year Multi-Program *Academic High Schools* will be the bridge for the transition to Higher Education: At the end of the 10-year Basic Education, students who will turn to Multi-Program *Academic High Schools* in line with the results of the General Evaluation Exam, with special attention to Turkish teaching, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Information and Information Technologies, Foreign Language, Art and Sports. They will continue their education within the framework of the programs they prefer by choosing among fields.

Imam-Preacher Training will be organized within the framework of the need for the number of religious officials.

People's Democratic Party

Our party, which adopts as a basic principle that the education system should be scientific, democratic, egalitarian and libertarian, and that Primary and *Secondary Education* should also be made compulsory, advocates that transitions at all levels of the education system be exam-free.

It struggles to overcome all the obstacles that restrict the freedom of expression and association of young students in *High Schools* and universities by democratizing universities.

Nationalist Movement Party

Our main goal is to increase the duration of compulsory Basic Education by expanding Pre-school Education, to include *Secondary Education* within the scope of compulsory education by creating the necessary physical infrastructure and manpower capacity, and to direct students to areas suitable for their abilities by making effective guidance at all levels of education.

The share of Vocational Education, which increases employability, in *Secondary Education* will be increased.

Secondary Education; it will have a structure that is based on the type of program, allows horizontal and vertical transitions, and provides an effective transition to the university system with modern guidance and guidance services.

Good Party

Basic Education, mainly *High School* and Vocational Education curriculum, is based on examination, observation and experimentation; it will be reshaped with a transformation in which sports, arts and cultural activities aiming to increase the spiritual and physical development of students are more involved, prompting free thinking, taking into account individual differences and transitions between programs.

Statements regarding “Non-Formal Education, Adult Education, Continuing Education” are more or less included in the programs of other political parties, apart from JDP and PDP. This general result shows that political parties have different education policies regarding the general structure of the Turkish Education System and education stages.

According to all these results, it has been determined that the statements about the structure and educational stages of the Turkish Education System are included in the programs of all political parties. Büyükboyacı also expresses this result in his study (2015). However, when the party programs are ranked in terms of including statements, the GP is in the first place; RPP in second place; third place is JDP; NMP ranks fourth and PDP fifth. In this case, the fact that the ruling party is in third place is an issue that draws attention. Toprakçı and Güngör (2014) found it interesting that the ruling party ranked third in their studies in terms of including the concepts embodying the education policies.

When the programs of the parties were evaluated in the context of the similarities in the objectives of the Turkish Education System, the following results were obtained:

All political parties focus on Pre-school Education, "encouragement, dissemination, making it compulsory and increasing the number of institutions". This result coincides with the result of Tok's (2012) study, which stated that "all parties should include Pre-school Education within the scope of compulsory education", although there are more or less differences. Berber (2001) also states in his study that all parties attach importance to Pre-school Education and try to systematize it. According to Bulut and Güven (2010), all political parties whose programs were examined aim to increase compulsory education. However, Usta (2015) stated in his study that "the education policies of political parties contain some contradictions" and gave the following example: "While it was stated that Pre-school Education would be compulsory in RPP program, on the other hand, it was stated that working mothers would be given priority".

Except for PDP, the subject that all political parties focus on regarding Vocational and Technical Secondary Education is “giving emphasis to Vocational Education, increasing its quality and developing its programs”. In the program of PDP, there is no statement about Vocational and Technical Secondary Education. In the study conducted by TEDMEM (2018), it was stated that PDP does not have any policy regarding Vocational and Technical Secondary Education.

In terms of the objectives of Non-Formal Education, Adult Education and Continuing Education, similarities were found only in the programs of NMP and GP.

The fact that the political parties have no similarities in terms of the objectives of Primary Education, General Secondary Education and Higher Education shows that the education policies

regarding the Turkish Education System are different from each other. Korkmaz (2018), Berber and Aslan (2017) also found in their studies that there are differences in the policies of the parties regarding the realization of education. In fact, they stated that these differences between the parties were also reflected in the grading of education. Tok (2012) also found similar differences in his study. Toprakçı and Güngör (2014), in their study, concluded that, in addition to the differences in the comparisons they made about the party programs in terms of the concepts embodying the education policies, they committed to make similar arrangements on some issues. However, as Toprakçı and Güngör (2014), Bulut and Güven (2010) stated in their studies, political parties are committed to making some changes, regulations and practices in many areas. In his study, Yılmaz (2007) stated that the fact that almost all of the political parties included education and training in their programs, starting from the single-party period in Turkey to the present, is one of the indicators of how important the education issue is for the political institution. However, at the conclusion of their study, Bulut and Güven (2010) stated that there are many regulations that the political parties whose party programs are examined are required to make and how these are carried out is far from consistent. Gürsoy and Balcı-Karaboğa (2015), Erol and Çetin (2020) have stated in their studies that the factors that determine their political ideologies and identities are effective in the similarities or differences in the views of political parties on education.

Depending on the results of the research, the following recommendations can be made:

Political parties should include education policies in their party programs to cover the general structure of the Turkish Education System and all education stages.

Political parties should refrain from including education policies in their programs regarding the structure of the Turkish Education System and the existing practices related to the educational stages in this structure.

Political parties should adopt an expression style that is far from populist and ideological approaches while determining their policies regarding the education system.

Political parties should review their own party programs, taking into account policy documents such as development plans, government programs and national education councils.

Since political parties will implement practices that will affect the whole society when they come to power, they should include education policies that will ensure broad consensus in their party programs.

It is important for political parties to determine their education policies by taking into account the technological, social and cultural changes in the world and the developments in Turkey's European Union harmonization process.

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