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Creating new pathways: citizenship education in Turkey

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Background

Turkey has a population of 72 million, about 30% of which (21 million) is under the age of fourteen. There are now more than ten million children receiving compulsory primary education in some 35,000 primary schools (public and private) with 375,500 teachers (Ministry of National Education, 2002). Secondary education is not compulsory, and there are some 1.5 million students, nearly 37% of the age range, in about 2,637 general high schools with 72,609 teachers. About 820,000 students go to vocational and technical high schools (about 23% of the age range) in 3,428 schools, with 68,176 teachers (Ministry of National Education, 2002). The opportunities for quality tertiary education are limited, giving the system a competitive nature. For example, last year, 1.9 million students sat a national examination for 400,000 places available in the universities, vocational schools and the Open University.

The Ministry of National Education (MONE) is responsible for the provision of primary and secondary education. The ministry has recently initiated a curriculum renewal process, altering the whole philosophy, including its content, methodology and assessment system, significantly. The change in philosophy will change the nature of citizenship education in Turkey.

All curricula one way or another, implicitly or explicitly, include citizenship education at various levels, local, national, and/or global. Citizenship education is manifested in the educational philosophies of a curriculum, and it begins with school ethos; whether the school culture, for example, favours control or empowerment, a single viewpoint or multiple perspectives, centralisation or decentralisation. Whatever the orientation is, it is cascaded throughout the school community. Also, various courses or strands may explicitly or implicitly promote cultural and multi-cultural awareness. There may be some courses and strands that are specifically designed to develop such skills and some others may have strands which directly or indirectly further develop them. In addition to the ethos and courses, the approach to teaching is also an important variable in the equation. Typically it mirrors the expectations of an individual living a particular society, for example, whether the individuals are expected to accept teacher authority and sit back to note down what is transmitted, or to get involved in a democratic learning environment for the collaborative development of cognitive, affective and social skills.

Current curriculum and citizenship

The education system in Turkey is unified and highly centralised, being the most centralised educational system of any Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member state (Fretwell and Wheeler, 2001). In the national curriculum, there is a large content to be covered within each subject area, restricting the choices the schools or teachers may have. At each grade level, there is too much emphasis on transmission. Teachers, the sole authority in the classroom, are seen as the major source of information. The cognitive range of stated objectives is considered to be narrow in scope, and many are at the level of recall. Therefore, in most cases, lessons are mainly

teacher-centred and content-driven, not leaving much room for student involvement, initiation and development. Additionally, traditional assessment methods are used in general, multiple-choice being a popular type. There are no effective mechanisms in place to monitor student progress, and to give feedback. The national examinations used for selection create a heavy backlash effect on teaching and learning.

While the nature of the current curriculum as a whole implicitly shapes the learners through ethos and instructional strategies, some courses and strands in the curriculum explicitly develop love of country, national independence, unity, and civil, political and social rights and responsibilities, mainly with some emphasis on multicultural awareness:

Life Skills (grades 1 to 3)	History (9 and 10)
Social Studies (grades 4 to 5)	Religion and Ethics (grades 4 to 11)
Social Studies (grades 6-7)	Geography (grade 9)
Civics (grades 7 to 8)	National Security (grade 10)
	History of Turkish Republic (8 and 11)

The new curriculum and citizenship

To address the curricular issues, the MONE has been working with a group of subject area experts and teacher educators from various universities and a group of school teachers since 2003 to change the curriculum drastically in the areas of science, mathematics, social studies and Turkish. Currently, the MONE is piloting the first five-year curriculum, re-designing the grades 6 to 8 curricula to pilot, and intending to develop a four-year high school curriculum.

The main intention is to shift the emphasis from memorising knowledge to constructing knowledge, leading to the employment of student-centred teaching strategies. It is believed that such change is facilitated through thematically, cognitively and emotionally engaging content. It is also the intention of the curriculum developers to align the curriculum horizontally across subject areas, and this is to be achieved by eight core skills: critical thinking, problem solving, doing research, creative thinking, assertiveness, communication, using information technology, and oral and written expression in Turkish. Additionally, performance-based assessment is to be incorporated into the education system to allow for the assessment of student centred constructivist strategies. Finally, new teaching competencies that are being re-written in the form of core and subject-specific competencies are to be adopted. The competencies are meant to enhance the direction of the change, and to set targets for pre-service and in-service teachers.

This curriculum renewal process will definitely increase the impact of citizenship education through its constructivist outlook. Additionally, the new shape of the citizenship-related courses will further help develop citizenship values: the new Life Skills courses (grades 1-3), that are currently being piloted, for example, are no longer narrow in scope, presenting various concepts in isolation. They are all now thematically arranged with emphasis on life skills, personal qualities, and inter-disciplinary sub-themes. They include love of country, love of humanity, national independence, and using sources responsibly. Among the skills being developed are creative thinking, communication, inquiry and research, problem solving, decision making, using

instructional technology, and group work. Development of such personal qualities as self-esteem, confidence, honesty, patience, tolerance, truthfulness, respect, and love of country is also intended.

As regards Social Studies courses (grades 4-5), which are also being piloted, basic principles of the new curriculum in relation to content, delivery and assessment are very similar to those of the Life Skills courses. The content is thematically arranged, and the methodology is student-centred, allowing room for the development of cognitive skills and for performance-based formative assessment. The courses are not limited to the formation of individual and social or national identity only: links are also made to some global matters. Although the current 4th grade puts emphasis on geographical and historical characteristics within the immediate environment of students, the new grade 4 curriculum starts with individual identity, moving on to cultural heritage, local environment, social organisations, civilisations and to global viewpoints. The new grade 5 curriculum follows a similar pattern, touching upon the rights of individuals, cultural heritage, and globalisation. Among the values promoted in both 4th and 5th grade curricula are honesty, ethics, responsibility, sovereignty, tolerance, hospitality and respect.

There are also courses that are currently being re-designed. The new shape of Social Studies (grades 6-7), for example, will be along the lines of the new approach to curriculum that introduces thematically arranged content, focusing on student-centred methodology, multiple intelligences and higher order thinking. At present, there are some units at grade 6 raising student awareness in relation to citizenship and covering topics such as democracy, equality, political parties, national identity, rights and responsibilities, solidarity and children's rights. The rest of the level objectives and the grade 7 objectives are mainly devoted to the history of Turkey starting from the 11th century.

Regarding Civics courses (grades 7& 8), the intention is to further promote core universal and multicultural values. Some of the topics covered in these courses are

- Grade 7: Common heritage of humanity, human rights, ethics, basic rights and freedoms:
- Grade 8: State, democracy, constitution, citizenship, rights and responsibilities, national security

As far as the high school curriculum is concerned, a number of changes will be made in the citizenship education strand through a European Union (EU) funded program to strengthen Human Rights, Democracy and Citizenship Education (HRDCE). This will be in the form of design, development and implementation of a HRDCE program in line with EU standards. It will include the following:

- designing 'Democracy and Human Rights' courses for secondary education
- re-designing current civics courses at grades 7 and 8 (to be called Citizenship and Human Rights Education)
- designing a human rights strand for pre-school education, which is non-compulsory.

The program also intends to further develop HRDCE by developing and implementing training programs for teachers, by involving non-governmental organisations, and

promoting stakeholder participation, parents in particular, in school-related decision-making processes.

Other initiatives

The MONE intends to make other changes within the education system which will eventually further support the new educational philosophy and citizenship education: new teacher competencies, changes in the content of Religion and Ethics courses, a second foreign language, compulsory community work, and student representation.

To begin with, to train in-service teachers in new patterns of teaching, the ministry disseminated draft teacher competencies in the form of subject-area-specific teacher competencies, and core teacher competencies across disciplines. There are six core general competency areas across disciplines:

1. personal and professional values
2. knowledge about the characteristics of students
3. processes of teaching and learning
4. monitoring progress
5. relationships: school, parents and society
6. knowledge about the curriculum.

There are sub-categories in each area, under which competencies are listed. The competencies listed under personal and professional values, and sub-competencies under 1.3 in particular, are very much geared towards the establishment of such atmosphere:

1. 1. valuing and respecting students
1. 2. believing that all students can learn and can achieve high standards
1. 3. promoting national and global values
1. 4. appraising self
1. 5. developing oneself professionally
1. 6. keeping up-to-date with developments, and contributing to the field
1. 7. contributing to school improvement efforts
1. 8. following and meeting rules and regulations.

The sub-competencies under 1.3 are:

- plays an active role in protecting and enforcing the rights of children
- acts appropriately to promote human rights
- respects the values students bring with them
- does not discriminate between individuals on the basis of national identity or belief
- creates a democratic classroom

- supports the development of national and universal values
- designs activities promoting tolerance and diversity.
- internalises social and professional ethical values, and acts accordingly.

It is indicated explicitly that teachers are not only responsible for the personal and academic development of students through student-centred strategies but also for establishing a democratic social environment to support the ethos of the new direction.

Another initiative is the Religion and Ethics courses given from grade 4 until the end of grade 11. As far as the religious component is concerned, the major emphasis is on Islam in general, and on the practices of one of the sects in particular. There is also some reference to major religions of the world and ethical codes. It is the intention of the ministry to make some changes to the provision of religious education, allowing more room for the expression of current and other beliefs in the school curriculum. Its final shape is yet to be announced.

Yet another initiative is that the ministry now requires schools to offer second foreign language courses during primary and secondary education. This will in the long run lead to having students who are able to communicate in at least two languages, and also helping them become more and more aware of various characteristics of other cultures.

Community service is another project the MONE is planning to start as part of the new curriculum. Students will be required to complete some community work every year, and they will be made aware of different aspects of social life.

Still another initiative is student representation. To reinforce the development of new values in the curriculum, the MONE also intends to institute a representation system at school, provincial and county level.

Challenges and new pathways at a glance

The education system in Turkey is in the early stages of an enormous process of change. The current educational paradigm will soon go through a tremendous transformation, and all the internal and external stakeholders in education will be affected by the process. There will always be a discrepancy between planned and implemented curriculum but the whole endeavour is to be taken as a continuously emergent process, requiring policy makers, teachers and students, to analyse the situation at different stages to further clarify the new direction, and to assess its impact.

As far as citizenship education is concerned, the immediate challenges and new pathways arising from this effort seem to be as follows:

- school ethos need to change to create a different school community allowing more room for collaboration and joint decision-making
- the new curricular philosophy needs to be explained thoroughly to ensure teacher understanding and curriculum alignment
- new teacher competencies need to be finalised, and in-service training programs promoting student-centred methods and techniques need to be prepared to give support to the teachers

- core teacher competencies need to be emphasised for the effective implementation of underlying principles of citizenship education in all courses
- social studies teachers need to be given additional support for the effective implementation of the citizenship education strand
- pre-service teacher education programs need to incorporate the changes in teacher competencies into their programs.

The whole change is an enormous undertaking, and it would be unrealistic to expect the results of all these efforts in a short period of time. Change is a process, and it requires persistence. If implemented as planned, the new educational philosophy with its constructivist stance will further enhance national and global values, and will spawn a new generation of school administrators, teachers and students.

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