Decentralization of the Turkish Education System: Will School Autonomy Matter?

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Education Reform Initiative
Founders of the Education Reform Initiative

Founders: 8-13 years
- Mother and Child Foundation (12)
- Aydınlı Doğan Foundation (10)
- Sabancı University (13)
- Open Society Foundation (first 5 years)

4-9 years
- ENKA Foundation (8)
- İstanbul Bilgi University (6)
- Kadir Has Foundation (8)
- MV Holding (7)
- Vehbi Koç Foundation (9)
- Yapı Merkezi Construction Co. (8)

1-5 years
- Borusan Kocabıyık Foundation (5)
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- Mehmet Zorlu Foundation (5)
- The Marmara Collection (5)
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Turkey’s 2023 Goals and What Has to be Done in Education

• Increase enrollment rate in pre-school, primary and secondary education to 100%.
• Improve the quality of vocational education.
• Implement a national policy of foreign language education.
• Digitalize the whole education infrastructure and materials.
• Decrease gender disparities in education.
• Decrease student-teacher ratio to 20-to-1.
• Increase the quality of teacher training.
• Improve education management by implementing national standards and quality framework.
• Make human capital the main driver of economic development and technological advancement.
• Prepare students to university in a more flexible education system.
Political Importance of Education in Turkey

• Sam Kaplan in his book *The Pedagogical State* points out: “Education, childhood, and child development have become tropes with which whole variety of social and political imaginaries are woven in Turkey.” (Stanford University Press, 2006).

• Its role in nation building since the Republic
  – A vast and highly centralized bureaucracy was created (850,000)

• MoNE versus ministry of education?
• Education as a vehicle of upward economic and social mobility
• Occupied a central role for the unity of the nation
• Groups at issue with republican secular reforms use tried to capture the education system: religion, ethnicity.
Decentralization and Education

Process of delegating or devolving educational authority and responsibility from the central government to regions, provinces, districts, schools and school communities.

PS: More than 20 definitions of decentralization in public policy literature
Multidimensionality of Education Governance: School Autonomy in Main Fields of Education

OECD Average

- Organisation of instruction
- Personnel Management
- Planning and Structures
- Resource Management

Graph showing school, local municipal, regional, and central or state organisational structures with varying degrees of autonomy.
Decentralization and Performance

• OECD (2010) data: prevalence of school autonomy in defining and elaborating curricula and assessment relates positively to the performance of school systems, even after accounting for national income.

• Yet, the relation between school autonomy in resource allocation and personnel management and school performance differ by country.

• Too much preoccupation at schools with all details of the budget and resource allocation, setting salaries, and allocations may overburden/distract school managers.

• Yet, within countries where schools are held to account for their results through posting achievement data publicly, schools that enjoy greater autonomy in resource allocation tend to do better than those with less autonomy.
Decentralization and Equality

• One problem with certain forms of decentralization: Increasing inequality between provinces, districts, and schools. Especially, if they are left to their own financially and completely dependent on the local tax base and local arrangements.

• In the U.S., “Decentralization was wonderful for the initial diffusion of high schools; but it created geographic inequality.” (Lawrance Katz, quoted in NewYorkTimes, 2013)

• In Turkey: Centralization was useful in increasing access to basic education, enrollment and aiding nation-building, but fails to meet demands of the knowledge society centered on human capital development, participation and democratic recognition of local needs.
Evolving Approach to Accountability

• Conventional accountability: Focus on processes and teaching environments (inspectorates)

• Broader accountability: Focus on outcomes, student achievement and well-being.

• Increasingly, schools across the OECD are having to account to a range of bodies (education ministries, local councils), and also to the wider community, parents and education partners through accreditation and quality assurance processes.
Lesson From Finland

Finland’s Education Reforms in the early 1980s, by

- Significantly improving teacher education/training via rigorous academic standards
- Increasing teachers’ salaries
- Dismantling central regulations (i.e. giving autonomy to teachers/schools) on the organization of instruction (textbook selection, exams)
- Replacing oppressive school inspections with outcome oriented accountability measures
- Monitoring school performance by selected sample, instead of massive exams for all students

A. Ripley, 2013

The Smartest Kids in the World, and How They Got that Way
Centralization of the Education System in Turkey
PISA Scores as an Indicator of System Performance
Distribution of All Education Decisions by Decision-Making Location
Turkey and OECD

- OECD average
- Turkey

Central
State
Provincial/regional
Sub-regional
Local
School

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70
A Reminder

• Private schools account for **4.0 percent** of all students in Turkey in pre-university education.

• Of all schools in Turkey only **10.8** percent are private.
Turkish Education System

• Among OECD, Turkey has the most centralized and top-heavy system, leaving no room for local innovation and initiatives by schools.

• Very inefficient resource allocation (funding) mechanism in which schools have no power.

• Politically, the system is geared to impart an ideology that emphasizes a reverence for the state versus the individual, and learning by rote at the expense of critical thinking

• Dissatisfaction from a variety of social groups on the basis of cultural rights and bilingual education
Distribution of Decisions in Organization of Instruction

OECD average  Turkey

School: TED, 34
Local: OECD, 8; Turkey, 2
Regional: OECD, 5; Turkey, 3
Central or state: OECD, 1; Turkey, 3

OECD average compared to Turkey in decision-making processes.
Distribution of Decisions in Personnel Management

- School
- Local
- Regional
- Central or state

OECD average vs. Turkey
Distribution of Decisions in Planning and Structures

OECD average  Turkey

- School
- Local
- Regional
- Central or state
Distribution of Decisions in Resource Management (Funding)

- OECD average
- Turkey

Bar chart showing distribution of decisions in resource management funding:
- School: OECD average and Turkey are similar, around 30%.
- Local: OECD average is slightly higher than Turkey, around 25%.
- Regional: OECD average is very low, around 5%, while Turkey is much higher, around 55%.
- Central or state: OECD average is around 30%, while Turkey is slightly lower, around 25%.
Resource Management
Financial Flows in Turkish Education Governance

**SALARIES**
Central government Ministry of National Education

**EDUCATION EXPENSES**
Central government Ministry of National Education + Local governments

**CURRENT EXPENDITURES OF SCHOOLS**
Central government Ministry of National Education + Local governments Province Special Adm.

- Teaching staff
- Provincal directorates of MoNE
- Current expenditures of schools
  - “Donations”, Informal Fees
  - Schools
Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Resources and Personnel Management

Schools needs to have more autonomy and discretion in allocating resources for education, and to some extent, in personnel management.
Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Organization of Instruction

More autonomy to schools and teachers in choosing textbooks, education material is evidently needed. The new transition to upper secondary education exam system could be

- **A window of opportunity**: performance expectations from schools and teachers can be translated into demands to empower schools

- **An obstacle**: central exams students will take each semester may force teachers to prioritize exams over learning, and decrease teacher autonomy/initiative in instruction.
Areas of Decentralization in Turkey: Restructuring of the MONE Central Organization in 2011

Window of Opportunity:

• Recent restructuring of the MONE’s central administration (reduction in the number of directorates, consolidating of some directories and divisions, creation of a new cadre of education specialists) could be a step towards a more efficiently operating central apparatus, with better planning, monitoring and implementation capacity in a more decentralized setting.
Turkey’s Education Decentralization Has To Target Increasing Quality and Democracy in Managing and Delivering Education

• A New Division of Labour Among the Central Administration (MoNE), Local Branches of the MoNE, Municipalities, Local Development Agencies, and Schools Have to be Devised
  • School Autonomy Needs to be Increased

• A New Political Culture of Education Has to be Instilled: Nation building versus quality and civics? Consensus???

• A New Resource Management Mechanism Needs to be Developed

• The obvious: Resources Devoted to Education at National and Local Levels Have to Increase
Need for Quality Assurance

- However, it maybe difficult given the inertia of the existing system and political problems.
- Pilot projects?
- An independent quality review agency.
- Independent accreditation.
- Should not have any organizational links with MONE.