



Original Article

International Journal of Educational Research and Technology

P-ISSN 0976-4089; E-ISSN 2277-1557

IJERT: Volume 6 [4] December 2015: 18-23

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ISO 9001: 2008 Certified Organization

Website: www.soeagra.com/ijert.html

Impacts of Philosophical Currents on Turkish Education System

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a description of Turkish national education system, an overview of impacts of philosophical currents on Turkish educational system and relations between philosophical currents and Turkish educational system. This study is based on documentary scanning method. Philosophical currents such as idealism, realism, naturalism, pragmatism and materialism have had impacts on Turkish educational system. However, their impact has been minor, which might lead to the assumption that Turkish educational system is not fundamentally based any particular philosophy. Turkish educational system is based rather on politics and ideologies. Some principles of idealism, realism, naturalism and materialism have had impacts on Turkish educational system.

Keywords: Education, Philosophy of education, Philosophical currents, Turkish Educational System.

Received 12.08.2015

Revised 24.08.2015

Accepted 02.11.2015

How to cite this article: Dzhamilya Kucuk. Impacts of Philosophical Currents on Turkish Education System. Inter. J. Edu. Res. Technol. 6[4] 2015; 18-23. DOI: 10.15515/ijert.0976-4089.6.4.1823

INTRODUCTION

The impact of philosophy is evident in all fields of science. A historical account of scientific methods will show the prevailing one is analytic approach. Foundations of analytical philosophy founded upon ontology and dialectics of thesis-antithesis –synthesis that underlies social dialectic materialism.

The birthplace of philosophy as we know today is commonly noted as ancient Greece. We may assume that Aristotle, in his philosophical works, also attempts to account for his abandoning Plato's school. In Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics we see that both truth and friendship are valuable, as in Plato, though the former is superior to friendship.

In order to understand educational institutions and processes an analysis of school and classroom interactions (between teacher and teacher, teacher and student, student-student) is crucial since education is the sum of activities of these actors. Several results, models and even typologies may be achieved by specifying individual interactions free of conflict and discomfort (Kaygısız, 2012).

Education generally defined as a phenomenon encompassing all activities having an impact on interactions between individuals and processes concerning these interactions. Philosophy, on the other hand, is the activity of producing concepts. Actions of human beings are governed by their thoughts and concepts determine thoughts. Concepts are mental abstractions of objective reality. A philosophical system is a system of concepts. An individual acquires and exploits concepts and makes decisions in accordance with these concepts throughout educational activities. (Üstün et al. 2002: 98).

Speculative function of philosophy of education is based on analyses, evaluations and pre-syntheses of existing concepts. Philosophy of education utilizes these concepts to create new hypotheses. This function of philosophy of education includes activities of 'What' 'Why' and 'How'. Speculation is not a threatening approach. On the contrary, a healthy speculation is affective and it occurs in well-structured framework. One always speculates within a framework utilising various intellectual tools. Speculation, if not dogmatized, is a disciplined activity. Mental activities out of the domain of meaningful thoughts are not speculations but groundless designs of imagination (Büyükdüvenci, 2012).

The definition of education varies. This originates from the variety of different philosophical approaches. For instance, idealism defines education as a continuous conscious/unconscious struggle to reach God. Realism defines it as process through which new generations are prepared for society by transfer of cultural heritage. Naturalism asserts that education is assisting an individual in improving and manifesting his natural development. Marxism's definition of education is based on individual's power of manipulation and exploitation of nature (Kaygısız, 2012).

Despite the domination of modern approaches and analytical methods philosophies influence is still influential. This influence is particularly manifested in philosophy of education due to its subject matter. The most important elements of an educational organization are teachers, administrators and caretakers. Educating and training teachers, administrators and caretakers in conformity with the adopted philosophy of education contributes to effective and dynamic functioning of the system (Kaygısız, 1997). In addition, philosophies of education must be utilised in illustrating concepts that shape education, challenges and in expounding ideas and principles (Kocabaş A. 2008). This paper offers an account of the impacts of educational philosophies on Turkish educational system.

PERENNIALISM

This school of philosophy can be traced back to Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. Late proponents are R. Maynard Hutching, J. Adler, M. V. Doren, S.Buchanan and R. Livingstone et al. It relies on classical realism and idealism and has its roots in theological ideas of Middle Ages and antiquities. Aquinas fused scholastic ideas with Aristotelian ideas and re-expressed them in his theology. Perennialism today is based on modernized versions of these ideas. (Weber, 1991; 164-170). Idealistic approach in education is based on ethical objectives and normative principles and is transcendental. Education within this school is an instrument of ethics and politics (Cevizci, 2011). Realism's objective, on the other hand, is to enable transfer of cultural between generations and to raise knowledgeable and happy individuals in harmony with social-life. Enabling conformity to society and nature and equipping individual knowledge and skills to compete with nature are the foundations of desirable behaviours (Ocak, 2004). Principles of perennialism are as follows (Erişen, 2012):

1. Education should be based on universal values since the nature of man, morals and values are universal.
2. The most prominent quality of man is reason. Accordingly, educational activities should focus on improving reasoning powers of individuals.
3. Education's objective should be raising individuals with high moralities.
4. School is not identical to real life. It is an environment where individuals become ready for life. Fundamental objective of schools is an effective transfer of culture.
5. Students should be equipped with temporal and spiritual knowledge. Permanent knowledge should be prioritized over temporary knowledge.
6. Vocational education should be conducted by professionals and businesses.
7. Curriculums should prioritize subjects such as language, history, mathematics, natural sciences, philosophy and logics.

ESSENTIALISM

Essentialism began in 1930s and some major adherents are W. Bagley.T. Biriggs, L. Kandel ve. H.H. Horne. Essentialism encompasses Realistic and Idealistic ideas. This movement sees individual as a cultural being. Education should be founded on the heritage of knowledge and skills. It asserts that individuals do not have a priori innate ideas. Knowledge is a posteriori and attainment of true knowledge is generally induction. School's function is to transfer this knowledge to students. (Hançerlioğlu, 1989:133-135). Principles of essentialism are as follows (Erişen, 2012):

1. Human beings are social in nature and he is void of any knowledge at birth.
2. Fundamental functions of education are preserving major components of culture, transferring of culture and enabling social conformity.
3. Priority of educational activities is internalization of subjects. Fundamental knowledge accumulated throughout history is greater than student's individual experiences. History, mathematics, sciences and languages must be prioritized in curriculums.
4. Learning requires students to be studious and involves challenges. Accordingly, students must be trained for self-discipline. Learning is under supervision of teachers, which requires intellectual proficiency.
5. Traditional mental discipline theories must be facilitated at schools. Problem solving skills are not applicable in all subjects. Abstract thinking, exercise solving and memorization must be in order to develop general concepts and comprehend life as a whole.

PROGRESSIVISM

Progressivism is based on pragmatism and is considered its application in in education. This movement began with, C.S. Peirce and developed further and made popular by W. James and J. Dewey. In some aspects this movements can be traced back to Protagoras (Hançerlioğlu, 1978: 233;55-56).

Implementation of pragmatist theories in education is the foundation of progressivism. Pragmatists believe that change is the driving force of reality. Accordingly, education must be progressive. Educators are expected to deliver new policies according to changes (Fidan & Erden, Quoted in Çelik, 1987:128). The most prominent adherent of Pragmatism is John Dewey. In his philosophy the role and nature of knowledge is the key. The influence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is significant in Dewey's theories. Darwin's theory asserts that human mind is a product of evolution developed for survival in a competitive environment. This led Dewey to assert that thoughts are not inherently good but they are practical tools that enable adaptation to natural world where species fight for survival (Büyükdüvenci, 1994).

Since change is at the centre of Pragmatist philosophy, it rejects teacher-centred traditional theories. Major principles of Progressivism are as follows (Erişen, 2012):

1. The references of educational activities are students' individual interests and needs. Education must be student-centred. Teachers do not dominate the process. They are expected to be guides.
2. Schools are real-life environments. Life requires re-construction and re-interpretation of experiences, which is based on learning. Accordingly, schools must foster critical thinking and problem solving skills.
3. Knowledge must be practical.
4. Students must be active participants in an environment that fosters co-operation, research, critical thinking and problem solving skills.
5. Education must be democratic. Democracy offers freedom of interactivity between ideas and individuals. Progress is dependent on democracy.

Re-constructivism

This approach aims to reconstruct society. Function of schools is to reform societies to attain a new order and students are means to this end. Although governments agree that peace, a world state and global happiness is possible they have not been able come to an agreement on the instruments. Accordingly, education is an instrument not only for change but also for equilibrium. Change is continuous, which requires constant re-construction. Failure in re-construction leads to failure in attainment of happiness, global civilization and peace. (Varış, 1994:91-92). Like Progressivism this approach is also based on Pragmatism, adopting virtually all principles of it. Prominent principles are as follows (Erişen, 2012):

1. Objective of education is constant re-organisation of society and attainment of democracy.
2. Education is the most significant instrument of social reforms. Education is both an instrument of change and equilibrium. Schools are expected to convince societies of the necessity of reforms and teach them accordingly.
3. Education is the centre of social change and teachers are direct contributors.
4. The domain of life extends into future. Future challenges must be addressed in curriculums.
5. Discriminations of any nature should be discouraged to attain a global civilisation of tolerance, peace, love and happiness.
6. Democratic society is the ideal society. Educational systems are expected to internalise democracy and contribute to social democracy.
7. Goals and instruments of education should be re-constructed according to scientific findings.

Turkish Educational System in the Republic Era

Turkish National Education System and its major figures belong to 2nd Constitutional Era, also known simply as Constitutional Era of 1908 parliamentary system to 1918 Armistice of Mudros. (Akyüz, Y.1989: 292). The priority of the era was the reformation of Ottoman schools (*madrakah*) and expansion of curriculums. Educational journals emerged in this era, in addition to newspapers, dealt with challenges and problems of the educational system.

In the era following Turkish War of Independence the agenda of the new republic was to reconstruct the Turkish society. It was evident that the educational system prior to the Republic was not satisfactory and Turkish youth urgently needed a new system that would connect them to the rest of the world. The system was to be founded on reason and humanism. (Akyüz, Y.2008). The most prevalent view of the era was nationalism and social justice. However. "Islam and discipline based" Ottoman system was still effective. The principals of Re-constructivism depend on Pragmatism (John Dewey, Isaac Bergson, and T. Brameld). The objective of Re-constructivism is to re-organise the society and to deploy democracy, which is possible through education. To this end, findings of behavioural sciences are indispensable (Fidan; 1987: 133). Re-constructivism could answer the needs of the new Republic. Education is the primary means of social transformation (Erişen, 2012). Thus, Re-constructivism was introduced into the educational system by Atatürk and educational policy makers through Progressivism that advocated constant adaptation of educational system to changes in economic system (Bal, 1991: 66).

Ataturk's philosophy of education

In order to understand the impacts of educational philosophies on Turkish national education system one must first understand the nature of Turkish Republic. Knowledge of Ataturk's views on Ottoman and modern educational system is also crucial. Ataturk himself studied Renaissance and Enlightenment along with western philosophical movements and offered three solutions: complete independence, a national state and modernisation, two of which (independence and national state) were achieved through the establishment of Republic of Turkey. Modernisation, on the other hand, is a life-long struggle (Filiz, 2008), which is apparent in his statement following The War of Independence, "*The great struggle is just beginning!*" With his statement, *Ignorance must be eliminated. There is no other way for salvation.*" he refers to realism. (Akyüz, 1993)

Ataturk was not unaware of the inadequacy of the educational system. In his speech of 1921 at Educational Assembly Ataturk complained, "*I believe we owe the regression of our nation to the educational system of the past.*" (Akyüz, 1993, p.290). He criticized the system for being superficial and disconnected from realities of the world. Ataturk also stated that the system was chaotic due to the arbitrary modifications by ministers of educations. "*What have we gained? A group of people who know a lot... But, what do they know? Some doctrines and theories! And what do they not know? They have been unaware of their own selves and necessities of life. Thus, they have been devoured by poverty! It is due the this ominous education system that an enlightened man is the one who only knows a lot.*" (Akyüz, 1993). Ataturk's philosophy is primarily dependent on pragmatism.

Principles of Ataturk's educational philosophy are as follows. (Toker, Gökçe. A)

1-Education must be scientific. Theoretical knowledge must be supported through practice and experience. How, for instance, history, a field that is not proper for experience, should be taught? The priority is to bring about an awareness of history in students, which is possible through understanding the importance and function of history. Once a student has been provided with this awareness he is introduced to historical events. Every historical account is analysed in its particular context. In primary schools, teachers carry out this function. In the course of time students are involved in this analysis. In secondary schools, students should be ready to analyse history under supervision of their teachers. This will provide students with critical thinking abilities, which will enable them to draw conclusions from historical incidents.

2-Methods and strategies employed in education must be compatible with science and technology. Technology alone is not adequate. Teachers must be trained to make effective use of technology.

3-It is essential that major philosophical movements be introduced, which will students develop and improve their critical thinking skills. This will give rise to a generation capable of sound reasoning and critical thinking. In addition to schools of philosophies students should also be introduced to world religions. Teaching of religion must be through scientific methods. This will help students to develop a sense of religion free of superstitions.

4-The subject of the education is student. Students' interest, inclinations, skills and needs must be prioritized.

5-Education must be national. Individuals lacking national consciousness cannot be expected to internalize their nationality.

6-Educational system must conform to improvements and developments. However it should not be in an arbitrary and random fashion.

7-Educational system must create generations beneficial to their nation. This is possible through acquisition of modern skills and technical and vocational training.

In summary, Ataturk's educational philosophy aims generations who are conscious of their history, equipped with required skills and philosophies applicable to life and are devoid of superstitious beliefs. To achieve these objectives Ataturk turned to Western world. Thus, policy makers attempted to create an amalgamation of Western cultures and technologies and national educational principles. These attempts involve idealist and realist conceptions. (Toker Gökçe. A)

In the Republican Era, Safa Bey, invited J. Dewey to Turkey. To Dewey, schools were the most definitive national transformation domains through which certain philosophies could become "realities" of life. Dewey emphasised the need to transfer theories into realities and establishment of democracy. Dewey's thoughts are rooted in democracy and freedom. His devotion to democracy and practice is rare among other educational philosophers. One distinctive feature of Dewey's thought is that it is not confined to particular eras and nations. For instance, in Democracy and Education (1916) Dewey attempts to answer universal questions. It is this quality that makes Dewey an "indigenous-foreigner" (Özsoy, S. 2009).

Dewey submitted his report in 1924 to Safa Bey, Deputy of Minister of Education. Mustafa Necati put the report into effect in 1924 starting attempts to make Turkish Education System a pragmatic one. Dewey's

report has had great impact in Turkish Educational System. Countryside Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri) owes their existence to Dewey's report (Altunya, N. 2005). During his second visit to Turkey in 1945, Dewey stated his excitement following his observations at one of the institutes, "My dream schools are having come to life in Turkey. The whole world should see these schools and follow Turkish example" (Ata,2001).

Dewey's "dream schools" in Turkey were founded on practical and pragmatic concepts still applicable today. Today the major problem of the schools in Turkey is the gap between theories and real life. Learning and teaching activities must conform and answer to realities of life. (Kocabaş, 2008)

CONCLUSION

In the light of philosophies mentioned in this study several educational philosophies have been developed: perennialism, essentialism and progressivism. Perennialism depends on realism and idealism. Education must be universal and human reason must be fostered through intellectual activities. Essentialism, on the other hand, focuses on transfer of fundamental cultural components, social harmony and preservation of the cultural-self. Progressivism is fundamentally pragmatist. Its focal point is interpretation of and adaptation to changes. Re-constructivism depends on pragmatism. It is also considered to be the continuation of progressivism. Its fundamental objective is constant re-organisation and re-construction of societies. Education is the major tool for social reforms. (Erişen, 2012). This educational philosophy was adopted during the Republican Era in Turkey. Re-constructivism puts students in the centre of learning activities in contrast to subject and teacher centred approaches. Its objective is to allow students to transform their capacities to maximum and transfer them to real life (Cevizci, 2011). These approaches are still effective in modern education system.

Turkish Educational system has considerably been impacted by politics. Educational institutes have been the most vital mediums for the transfer of the principles of the new republic and democracy. New Turkey, as with all other nations, needs to preserve this new order and it is only possible through education (Gökalp, 2012).

One of the urgencies for the new republic was to recover from the traumatic impacts of the wars and adapt to the new world. Transfer of cultural riches to new generations was as vital as economic development. It is remarkable that Atatürk initiated an educational summit in İzmir during the war. Practical and pragmatic knowledge transferable to daily life was indispensable for a society torn by long wars. In such a country schools are inevitably supposed to be pragmatic. Countryside Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri) to educate and train peasants were the most significant examples of such pragmatic necessities.

In conclusion, the new Turkey's objective was to create an independent and science-driven generations loyal to the principles of the new republic. This objective required a pragmatic educational philosophy. Curriculums were expanded to cover social and physical sciences, mathematics, Turkish, foreign languages, philosophy, arts and physical training. Vocational and technical education was indispensable. Educational system was founded on reason and science. Schools adopted co-education. Primary education became a legal obligation for all citizens (Sönmez, 2003).

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