WHAT DOES THE PISA 2003 MEAN FOR TURKEY?

PISA 2003’ün Türkiye İçin Anlama Nedir?

Mustafa CİNOĞLU*

Abstract

The ‘Program for International Student Assessment’ PISA 2003 was conducted by OECD in 41 countries and Turkey shows the second worst performance after Mexico. The results show that Turkish education system has serious problems and curriculum should be changed. Turkish curriculum includes very limited of PISA contexts. Turkey is far away than ‘European Union’ (EU) countries in terms of educational quality and enrolment rates. On the other hand, Turkey tries to join the EU and to do this; Turkey should increase its education quality and enrolment rate. The study draws a big picture about Turkish education system from past to today and discusses the mean of (PISA) 2003 results for Turkey by using Turkish Ministry of National Education, World Bank and PISA resources.

Key Words: Turkish education system, PISA 2003, Comparative education

Özet


Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk eğitim sistemi, PISA 2003, Karşılaştırmalı eğitim

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**Introduction**

The OECD ‘Program for International Student Assessment’ (PISA) assesses and compares student achievement across the OECD and non-OECD countries. PISA assesses the student achievement based on three-years-period in 2000, in 2003 and in 2006. Major domains are reading literacy in 2000, mathematical literacy in 2003 and scientific literacy in 2006. Turkey participated in PISA in 2003 testing with mathematic, science, and reading to compare its education system with other OECD countries. PISA tests were applied to 15-year-olds students in schools. PISA aims at measuring how well students perform beyond the school curriculum rather than in terms of their school knowledge. PISA results show student performance as knowledge and skills. In addition, it displays relationship between student and school characteristics (PISA, 2004).

The study draws a big picture about Turkish education system from past to today and discusses the mean of PISA 2003 results for Turkey by using Turkish Ministry of National Education, World Bank and PISA resources.

**Turkish Education System from Past to Today**

After founding the country (1923), Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic, closed down the secular and religious ruling institutions of the Ottoman Empire and focused on setting up a new country, adopting Westernizing values. He started the contemporary Turkish education system in 1924 by closing the religious schools and setting up new secular schools. In addition, he made elementary school attendance compulsory, accepted the Roman alphabet instead of Arabic script, separated state and religious affairs, established a secular legal system along the lines of European countries instead of an Islamic legal system, established civil rights and provided for equal rights for women. His reforms between 1924 and 1934 constituted the ideological base of modern Turkey (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2002).

Before the Republic, there were three kinds of schools. One group was made up of district schools and madras. They taught the Koran, and the Arabic language. The second were made up of reform schools and high schools supporting innovation. The third group was made up of colleges and minority schools with foreign language education. These three ‘systems’ of schools were educating individuals in three different ways, serving different groups with different life styles and view points. Under these educational conditions, it was not possible to forge national unity and social cohesion. On March 3rd 1924, the ‘Law of Integration of Education’ no 430 was issued to integrate these schools and to take the education under state control. With this law, the democratization and
secularism of the education system was started (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2002).

The Roman alphabet was adopted with the Law, dated on November 1st 1928 no 1353; it was a big challenge to old system. Mobilization was started to teach the new alphabet to all citizens in urban and rural areas. In order to increase literacy, public schools were opened to teach reading and writing, and after 1930 public reading rooms were established in villages. In the following years, public houses were built in February 1932 to educate the public. Moreover, in 1931, the “Turkish Association of History”, and in 1932, the “Turkish Language Association” were established in order to make the Turkish a common language through out the country.

In today, Turkish education system is under the supervision and control of the state. According to Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, everyone has the right to receive education. The general characteristics of the Turkish education system are secular and national (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2002). Table 1 indicates the number of schools, students and teachers in terms of school level in Turkish education system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: The Number of Schools, Students, and Teachers in Turkey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of schools</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In Turkish education system, only primary education is compulsory and others are optional. After primary education, many students stop their education (see table, 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Turkish Education System</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (1) Source translated from official web site of Turkish Ministry of National Education, (2002).
(2) Total students in Turkey: 15,986,051

Pre-Primary education is optional in Turkey and services for children ages 3 to 5 years. State and private pre-primary education institutions are available to improve children’s mental, physical, and sensory development. These schools prepare children for
compulsory primary education. In addition, these institutions are helpful for working women. According to enrolment rates of OECD countries, OECD mean is 63.1% for 3 to 4-year-olds children. There is no information for Turkey in the same table but Turkish Ministry of National Education sources indicates that Turkey’s enrolment rate for the same age group is 2.7% which is the lowest rate among OECD countries (tables, 2–3).

Table 3: Comparing Enrolment Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group of students</th>
<th>0–4</th>
<th>5–14</th>
<th>15–19</th>
<th>20–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey mean</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD mean</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Source obtained from OECD, (2003).

Primary education lasts for eight years, and is compulsory for all male and female children. Primary schools service for children ages 6 to 14 years and it is free in public schools. The main goal of the primary education is to raise children as good and patriotic citizens by teaching basic knowledge, skills, behaviors, and habits. Another goal of the primary education is to prepare children for high schools. According to enrolment rates of OECD countries, OECD mean is 98.2% for 5 to 14-year-olds children (Primary students). Turkey’s enrolment rate for the same age group is 83.5% which is the lowest rate among OECD countries (see tables, 2–3).

Secondary school education service children between 15-18 age and is not compulsory but it is free. There are two main purposes of the secondary education. One of them is to give students a minimum common culture, and help them to recognize the individual and social problems, and look for solutions for these problems. It is expected that students after secondary education should have knowledge and interest to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. Another purpose of the secondary education is to prepare the students for higher education, for professions, for life and for business according to their interests and skills (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2002). According to enrolment rates of OECD countries, OECD mean is 77.7% for 15 to 19-year-olds (secondary students). Turkey’s enrolment rate for the same age group is 30% which is the lowest rate among OECD countries (see table, 3).

Higher education includes all educational institutions where an educational program of at least two years over and above secondary education is implemented. These educate students at associate's, bachelor's, master's or doctorate degree levels. Higher education institutions, however, charge tuition (Metz, 1995). According to enrolment rates of OECD countries, OECD mean is 21.8% for 20 to 29-year-olds (college students).
Turkey’s enrolment rate for the same age group is 5.4% which is the lowest rate among OECD countries (see table, 3).

**PISA 2003 Results from Turkey Perspective**

According to PISA 2003 results, mathematic mean of Turkey is 423 point. With this result, Turkey shows no significant differences from Greece, Serbia, Uruguay, and Thailand and higher performance than Mexico, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Brazil. Turkey shows less performance than other all countries in PISA project. Hong-Hong and China has the best performance with 550 point. Finland, Korea, Holland, Liechtenstein, Japan, Canada, and Belgium follow Hong-Hong and China on the comparison scale. Brazil has the lowest performance in mathematic (OECD, 2004).

Finland has the best result on PISA 2003 reading tests with the mean of 543 point. Korea, Canada, Australia, Liechtenstein follow Finland on the comparison scale. Tunisia has the worst performance on reading. Reading mean of Turkey is 441 point. With this point, Turkey shows the similar performance with Uruguay, and Thailand. Turkey shows better performance than Serbia, Mexico, Indonesia, and Tunisia. Other all countries in PISA project have better results than Turkey in reading (OECD, 2004).

Finland has the best result on the science with the mean of 548 point. Japan, Hong-Kong China, Korea, Liechtenstein, and Australia follow Finland with good results. On the science, Turkey has the mean of 434 point. With this point, Turkey shows the similar performance with Serbia, Uruguay, and Portugal but better than Thailand, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, and Tunisia. All other countries in PISA project have better results than Turkey. In another word, among all OECD countries, Turkey has the lowest performance in reading, mathematic, and science except for Mexico (OECD, 2004).

In addition, PISA results show that Turkey has significant regional inequalities in educational standards and student performance. Western side of the Turkey shows better performance than Eastern side (OECD, 2004).

**What Does PISA 2003 Mean for Turkey?**

PISA 2003 was conducted by OECD in 41 countries and Turkey shows the second worst performance after Mexico (see table, 4). The results show that Turkish education system has serious problems and curriculum should be changed. Turkish curriculum includes very limited of PISA contexts. Improvement in education takes long time. If government changes the curriculum or teaching method it would take 7 to 10 years to changes to be felt.
According to relationship between performance in mathematics and GDP per capita, there is a significant positive relationship between countries with higher national income and better mathematic performance. Turkey has the lowest GDP per capita among OECD countries. Rich countries show more successful performance in PISA but there are some exceptions: Korea’s national income, for example, is 30 per cent below the OECD average but its students are among the best performers in OECD countries (see figure, 1).

When we look at the PISA results we can see three groups of the countries: having mean performance statistically significantly above the OECD average; not statistically significant different from the OECD average; statistically significantly below the OECD average. Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea, Netherlands, Lichtenstein, Canada, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden show the statistically significant above the OECD average in mathematic, science and reading. Turkey is in the group of statistically significantly below the OECD average in mathematic, science and reading tests.
In mathematic performance, Turkey is in the same group with some south European countries like Greece, Portugal, and Italy in spite of its lowest GDP amount. Turkey also show the similar results with some developing countries like Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, Thailand, Uruguay, Serbia, and Latvia.

Other tests, science and reading, show the similar results: Turkey has the second lowest performance in all tests among OECD countries but the results not significantly different than some Mediterranean European countries like Greece, Portugal, and Italy.

It is also interesting to compare Turkey’s performance on PISA with different grouping of EU countries. Turkey’s falls into the same zone of achievement as EU Mediterranean countries Italy, Portugal, and Greece and the ‘new’ EU member, Latvia.

**Conclusion**

Turkey, as a developing country, focuses many problems in education. The educational system is suffering because of the lack of resources, central management, migration and the rapid growth in school-age population. In education, large class size, low enrolment rate, girl’s education, high illiteracy rate, religious education, textbooks, curriculum and multicultural education are some of the important problems. Moreover, economical problems and regional differences make the solution hard. Turkey’s highly centralized traditional educational system cannot address the diversity needs.
Decentralization, privatization, and accountability are suggested policy tools by World Bank to address the problems of Turkey (World Bank, 1999).

Before PISA, Turkish politicians frequently talked of their effective reforms in the educational system and many citizens believed them. After PISA results, all these kind of speaking looks meaningless. For all level, Turkey has the lowest enrollment rate among OECD countries. Turkey is very far away than EU countries in terms of educational quality and enrollment rates. On the other hand, Turkey tries to join EU and to do this; Turkey should increase the education quality and enrollment rate.

References