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Turkish Education Policies and Gender Equality

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma devletin eğitimde toplumsal adaletsizliğe yol açan cinsler arası eşitsizliğe ne derecede yol açtığı ve daimi kıldığı konusuna ışık tutmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Türk eğitim politikalarını incelemek ve bu politikaların eğitimde kadınlardan ziyade erkeklerin lehine işlediğini göstermektir. Bu çalışmanın ana bulgusu şudur: devlet " biçimsel" eşitlik ve "meritokratik" (kabiliyetlerin ve yeteneklerin ön planda olması) toplum kavramlarını destekleyen politika ve uygulamalarla erkeklerin eğitimde katılımını ve temsilini çoğaltmakta ve cinsiyete dayalı farklı eğitim getirilerini onaylamakta ve daimi kılmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyetin eğitimde avantaj yada dezavantaj getirmesi konusunda etkili bir factor olmadığı düşünülmekte, bu yüzden de bütün politaka ve uygulamaların her iki cinse ayırım yapmaksızın eşit bir şekilde fayda sağladığı düşünülmektedir. Halbuki, cinsler arası farkın bulunmadığını varsayan politikalar kız ve kadınlara eğitim olanaklarında eşitlik getirmemektedir. Bu tür politikalar yalnızca statükoyu korumayı ve Türkiye'deki kız ve erkeklerin okula gitmesi ve devam etmelerinde ve okul yaşantılarında cinse dayalı farklılıkların oluşmasına yol açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın erkek eşitliği, eğitim politikaları, eşit eğitim olanakları, cinsiyete dayalı ayrımcılık

ABSTRACT

This research attempts to shed light on how the State sustains and perpetuates the gender-based disparities in education leading to inequitable social outcomes. Its purpose is to examine the role of Turkish educational policies in contributing to educational outcomes that have been more favorable for males than females. The central finding of the study is that the State endorses and perpetuates gender differentiated educational outcomes via its policies and practices by promoting "formal equality" and the concept of a "meritocratic society, which serve to increase the participation and representation of males. Gender is not considered as a decisive factor of advantage or disadvantage and, thus, all policies and practices are assumed to apply equally and undiscriminatingly to both sexes. However, macro education policies without any gender differentiation are not adequate to bring equality in educational opportunities for girls and women. They only help to maintain the status quo and contribute to the gender disparities evident in access, attainment and schooling experiences of boys and girls in Turkey.

Keywords: Gender equality, educational policies, equal educational opportunities, gender discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Inequalities along gender, social class, race and ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation are both structurally and culturally constructed. Policies are tools that can both exacerbate or reduce the existing inequalities. However, if policies are the operational statements of values, statements of prescriptive intent, we need to ask whose values are validated in policy, and whose are not. The authoritative allocation of values draws our attention to the centrality of power and control in the concept of policy. Then, policies cannot be divorced from interests, from c onflict, from

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domination or from justice. Discontinuities, compromises, omissions, and exceptions are also important. If state is one of the primary actors in policy formulation, and it is linked irredeemably with patriarchy [1], [2], [3] then state politics and educational policies will overwhelmingly reflect men's interest. This paper will examine Turkish polices related with education and investigate the role of the Turkish State's complicity in sustaining gender inequalities in education.

Klein [4] provides a useful schema for categorizing the range of policies that have different consequences for males and females. She divides policies into two: those "intentionally focused on gender", which consist of "sex equity policies and sex differential policies" (p.155), and those "general policies that are not designed to have any special effect by gender" (p.155). Similarly, Stromquist [5] groups gender policies into three categories: general policies against discrimination, policies specific to education but addressing women by implication only, and policies specific to women's education. In examining state policies and how they contribute to gender inequalities in education this paper will only deal with the first two categories of policies: general policies against discrimination and policies specific to education but addressing women by implication only. The following questions will set the framework for the policy analysis:

- How are problems defined? What is the intended purpose? What is the problem, if any in terms of women's conditions and how is it attempted to be solved?
- What kind of solutions has been proposed? What is the intended outcome? What does this indicate?
- How will this policy be effective in attaining gender equality?
- What kind of theoretical base do the policies rest upon?

General Policies against Discrimination

Constitution

The Turkish Constitution is the primary national decree that all other laws need to abide to. Article 10 is a non-discrimination law and endorses equality to all individuals and prohibits discrimination by the state or citizens on grounds of race, color, sex, religion, language or any other considerations. Article 10 promotes the principle of equality and guarantees equal rights for every individual. Gender is stated explicitly as one of the factors that cannot be used to discriminate individuals. Article 10 is as follows:

> All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language and any other considerations.
>
> No privilege shall be granted to any individual, family, group or class.
>
> State organs and administrative authorities shall act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings.

Policies Specific to Education but Addressing Women by Implication Only

Education for all children is assumed to be of national importance tied to social and economic progress, with meritocratic assumptions that education raises individual's opportunities. Especially in the Basic Law of National Education No. 1739, and in almost all of the National education conventions and Five-year Development Plans, "equality of opportunity" has been included in the rhetoric of educational policy-making, whether it meant the provision of scholarships to the talented and skilled students who did not have sufficient funds to continue their education or it meant the expansion of education to increase the relative opportunities of the disadvantaged.

Equal opportunity policies in education are generally based on the assumption that they will reduce existing inequalities by providing an expanded opportunity for a larger segment of the population to participate, particularly from traditionally deprived regions and rural areas of the country. Consequently, this would have a positive impact on the number of girls enrolling in schools as well. However, the educational policies to extend educational opportunities have not reflected specific gender concerns. They have relied on gender-neutral policies to universalized education and, nonetheless, have perpetuated unequal gender-related outcomes.

Constitution

Article 42 is directly related to education, and sets up the scope of Law No. 1739., the Basic Law of National Education. Article 42 assigns the control and administration of all educational activities to the State and mandates primary education to be compulsory for all citizens. A closer examination of article 42 reveals three main themes embedded in its

context: equality, social integration, and centralized control. The concept of equality is emphasized through the provision of free, compulsory primary education and provision of scholarships and financial assistance. Social integration is emphasized through conducting education along the lines of Ataturk's reforms for the purpose of promoting and establishing a single, national identity. Centralized control is emphasized through state regulation of all educational provision.[1] The statements that fall under the equality perspective in Article 42 of the Constitution are as follows:

No one shall be deprived of the right to learning and education.

> Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in State schools.
>
> The State shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education.
>
> The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in special education so as to render such people useful to society.

Article 42 of the Constitution establishes three primary measures to be carried out by the state for the achievement of social equality. The first is the provision of free education at the primary level, the second is the provision of scholarships and assistance in accord with ability and socio-economic status, and the third is the provision of special education to the gifted and physically disabled. Gender is given consideration only in regards to primary education being compulsory for both sexes.

Basic Law of National Education, Law 1739.

The Basic Law of National Education, which closely adheres to Article 10 and Article 42 of the Constitution, establishes the basis of the Turkish National Education system, and is the principle legislation in the formation of all the other policies and laws designed and implemented in the field of education. Three principles of the Basic Law of National Education set the boundaries and the scope of the right to education. These are the principles of "Universality and Equality", the "Right to Education" and "Equality of Opportunity".

> Universality and Equality:
> Article 4.
> Educational institutions are open to every individual regardless of language, race, sex and religion. No individual, family, group, or class will be accorded any privilege in the education system.
>
> Right to education:
>
> Article 7.
>
> It is the right every Turkish citizen to receive basic education. Citizens can take advantage of post-basic education institutions commensurate to their interests, aptitudes and abilities.
>
> Equality of Opportunity:
>
> Article 8.
>
> All citizens, male and female, are assured equal educational opportunity. Necessary assistance in the form of free boarding facilities, scholarships, loans, etc. is given to successful students who lack the financial resources, to enable them to pursue their education to the highest level.
>
> Special measures are taken to train those children who are in need of special education and protection [6].

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[1]The items in Article 42 grouped under "social integration" and "centralized control" is as the following:

Social Integration

"Training and education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Ataturk, on the basis of contemporary science and education method.

"The freedom of training and education does not relieve the individual from loyalty to the Constitution".

"No language other than Turkish shall be taught as mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of training and education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting training and education in a foreign language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserved."

Centralized Control

"Training and education shall be conducted under the supervision and control of the State".

"The principles governing the functioning of private and secondary schools shall be regulated by law in keeping with the standards set for State schools".

The principle of "right to education" rules "basic education" to be the fundamental right of every individual and the provision of post-basic education to be commensurate with one's abilities. The meritocracy perspective is also reflected in the five-year development plans, especially in the first two five-year plans of Turkey that covers the years between 1963-1973. In the Second Five-year Development Plan (1968-1973) it states "the provision of post-basic educational opportunities to citizens will be based on the principle of equal opportunity.... The ones who will be able to take advantage of the limited educational opportunities will be selected,... merit will be taken as a measure" [7]. Thus, while basic education is made available to all, merit plays an important role in determining who takes advantage of post-basic education. The theoretical base of article 7, the right to education, rests upon on a functionalist view of schooling, closely linked to the concept of a meritocratic society. The assumption of a meritocratic society is part of an optimistic, liberal ideology that stresses the importance of ability in contemporary industrialized society and the school's role in searching out that ability. It explains unequal outcomes as a function of individual differences in motivation and intellectual ability. From this perspective, the prevalent gender differences in access and attainment in post-basic education can only be explained in terms of girls having less motivation and intellectual ability than boys. A meritocratic ideology of equal opportunities fails to deal with gender as a main social construct that leads to unequal educational outcomes.

The third principle, equality of opportunity, mandates that everyone, male and female, will be provided equal opportunity. Social class and disability are identified as the two main variables that can obstruct individuals from taking advantage of educational opportunities. Both article 42 of the Constitution and Law.1739 provide special consideration to two groups: the disabled and the socio-economically disadvantaged. According to both laws supportive incentives such as scholarships, free boarding, etc., are to be provided to those who have the interest, aptitude, and ability to pursue higher levels of education but do not have the financial means to do so. Also it promotes taking special measures to train children who are in need of special education and protection.

Social class and disability are considered as decisive factors of advantage or disadvantage but sex is not. The state in its policies reveals sensitivity towards individuals from low social economic status and individuals with disability. This sensitivity is illustrated in the opening speech of the former president of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel, at the 15th National Education Convention, "All of this country's children, whether they are disabled or not, all of them are going to take advantage of equal opportunities; that is what equality of educational opportunity is"[8]. In fact, in the 16th National Education Convention it was proposed that all work places should be required to hire 3% of all their apprentices from individuals with disabilities [9]. Thus, disabled individuals are considered as a group who are disadvantaged from the start and thus need to receive remedial measures. Low social economic status is also seen as a factor of disadvantage. Supportive incentives such as scholarships, free boarding and social assistance are provided to increase the proportion of talented but poor students to take advantage of education commensurate with their ability.

Socio-economic status (SES) and disability are considered as factors that prevent individuals from taking advantage of educational opportunities but gender is totally ignored. The fact that girls just because of their gender are being deprived of educational opportunities is not identified as a problem. Although Article 42 of the Constitution mandates that "no one is to be deprived of the right to learning and education", it has not resulted in any concrete policies that would ensure that girls take advantage of educational opportunities equally to boys.

The Report on "Women in today's Turkey" (2000), prepared under the auspices of the Turkish parliament, the World Bank report on "Turkey: Women in Development" (1993) as well as many of the research conducted by scholars [10], [11], [12]; General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems [GDWSP], 1998a) indicate that girls' access to school is much less than boys because of the sociocultural factors that work against girls. If gender is a factor that determines who takes advantage of education and who does not, and if girls are being deprived of education because of their gender, then gender just as SES and disability, needs to be provided special consideration when designing equity policies. However, the only concrete policies that are brought into existence in relation to educational equality are those that provide supportive incentives to enable students from low socio-economic status to pursue

higher levels of education. Article 5 of the Scholarship, Free Boarding, and Social Assistance Regulation of the Ministry of Education, states that in order to enter the examinations to receive any kind of scholarship, free boarding, and social assistance the applicant needs to be a Turkish citizen, come from a low income household, and fulfill the registration requirements of the school he/she wishes to enroll. Thus, the provision of equality of opportunity entails the provision of horizontal and vertical mobility to those who have the ability, talent, and aptitude but lack the financial means to do so. Research data clearly indicates that the situation of women are not that different from the socioeconomically disadvantaged, handicapped or culturally different. The opportunities of schooling and treatment females receive in schools are neither the same as nor equal to that given to males.

Boys take advantage of state incentives such as scholarships, stipends, and free boarding at a greater proportion than girls in Turkey. This is not because girls are less skilled or talented than boys but because girls are restrained from taking advantage of such opportunities because of social and cultural constraints. As can bee seen in Table 5.8, the proportion of female students who receive scholarships from the government is much less than male students. Statistics indicate that between 1997-1999, female students who received scholarships both at the primary and secondary education levels constituted less than 38 percent of all scholarship students. In 1999 females received 37.4 percent of the scholarships offered at the primary education level and 37.8 percent of the scholarships offered at the secondary education level. When compared with male students, female students are less likely to benefit from the scholarships provided by the government.

Table 5.8 Percentage of Students who received scholarships at the Primary and the Secondary Education Level by Sex (1997-1999)

		1997		1998		1999
Primary Education	5.1	4.9	5.8	4.2	2.6	7.4
Secondary Education	7.1	2.9	2.3	7.6	2.2	7.8

The Scholarship, Free Boarding, and Social Assistance Regulation of the Ministry of Education, establishes the provision of scholarships and free boarding on the criteria of individual merit and fair competition. Therefore, it is assumed that provision of scholarships and boarding school applies equally and undiscriminatingly to females and males. However, the data on both the distribution of scholarships and enrollment in boarding schools by sex indicate that the primary beneficiaries of these equal opportunity measures are male. Anecdotal evidence indicates that mostly in the east and southeast of Turkey in which most of the boarding schools have been established, parents do not want to send their girls to these schools because a majority of them are co-educational and distant from home. Thus, equal opportunity measures designed within a framework of neutral laws in fact serves to preserve, and in fact exacerbate the existing gender disparities.

Iris Marion Young states that opportunity " is a concept of enablement rather than possession" [13]. She further concludes that, "a person has opportunities if he or she is not constrained from doing things, and lives under the enabling conditions for doing them" [13]. The concept of a meritocratic society hides the fact that the conditions for boys and girls are not equally enabling. Social, cultural and material conditions constrain the possibilities of women in education to the advantage of men. The emphasis on individual skills and ability undermines the cultural, social, and structural barriers that prevent girls and women from taking advantage of educational opportunities.

The provision of equal opportunity also brings with itself the notion of fair competition which is important in maintaining political stability. Those who have been rewarded, as well as those who have not, believe that they competed under a fair system of rules. Tests are utilized to identify talented people from all classes in society. Thus, they provide the means

for a fair system that promotes selection or screening of people based on talent. Vocational guidance in Turkey is based upon this notion of fair competition and individual merit and thus school and program selection are designed to be made in accord with one's skills and talents. Article 5, " Individual and Social Needs" and Article 6, "Orientation" of the Basic Law of National Education are the two principles that provide the scope of vocational guidance in Turkey.

Individual and Social Needs:

Article 5.
The national education service is organized in accordance with the interest and abilities of the citizens of Turkey and the needs of the Turkish society.

Orientation:

Article 6.

Individuals are directed into various programs or schools in accordance with their interests, aptitudes and abilities throughout their education.

The national education system is to be organized to realize this orientation fully.

Guidance services and objective testing and measurement methods are used in the orientation, and evaluating their success [6].

Article 24 of the School Guidance Services Regulations also states that "the purpose of guidance councils is to assist students in becoming familiar with different occupations and social values and to help them choose education programs in accord with their skills". The provision of vocational guidance in accord with one's talents and skills has been emphasized in all of the Five-Year Development Plans as well as in the resolutions taken in the VII, VIII, IX, XII, XV, and XVI National Education Conventions. However, the rationalization of a meritocratic society undermines the sex-stereotyped beliefs and expectations that direct women into choosing traditional subject areas that lead mostly to low-paying and dead-end jobs. Role specific and culture specific expectations of society have been recognized as strong determinants in the career choices of boys and girls, men and women [14]. Expectations of what is appropriate work for women and men are fairly traditional, and still have a large effect in determining the program choices made by boys and girls. The Turkish Higher Education Statistics of 1999-2000 reveals the obvious gender-streaming apparent in program choices. According to the Higher Education Statistics of 1999-2000, females constitute the majority of the student population in programs such as psychology (77%), nursing (100%), nutrition and child care (94%), and pre-school education (95%) whereas males constitute the majority in economics and business administration (62%), technical sciences (79%), and agriculture and forestry (72%).

As Stromquist notes, "the tendency for sexual inequality in women's education is not the result of deliberate policies of exclusion but unchallenged social norms regarding social roles of men and women" [15]. The education policies, which are, constructed on the notion of equal opportunity and the creation of a meritocratic society leaves the social norms regarding the social roles of men and women unchallenged. Policies fall short in questioning whether the system really enables girls and boys to realize their abilities to the full or whether their potential and abilities are given shape in accord with the different socioeconomic roles they are expected to perform. Equal opportunity policies assume that formal provision of education applies equally and undiscriminatingly to females and males. However, merely attempting to equalize existing patterns can exacerbate, because it can mask, fundamental sources of inequality.

Basic Education Reform Act

The Basic Education Reform Act No. 4306 passed on August 18, 1997, promulgating compulsory education in a continuous eight-year format of primary education has marked a significant change in the enrollment patterns of girls and boys at the primary level. In accordance with this act MONE launched the Basic Education Program (BEP), a 15-year program with a total estimated cost of USD 11.3 billion, to expand the coverage of basic education. The program funded primarily by the World Bank was to be carried out in two phases. The World Bank has provided USD 300 million for each phase. The reform involves an intensive school building and renovation program, employment of thousands of new teachers and inspectors and improving the quality of education. The program prioritizes the less-developed regions of Turkey such as Sirnak, Mardin, Van, Hakkari and Bitlis as well

as the provinces in the Marmara region affected by the August, 1999, earthquake, in the construction and renovation of school buildings.

The BEP encompasses measures taken in three different directions: quality, efficiency and equity. Integrating I/T (Information Technologies) in education, in-service training of teachers and inspectors, special education, improvements in basic education curricula, new educational materials and provision of educational materials to rural schools, and social assistance to students and families are the basic components of raising the quality of schools. Measures taken to improve efficiency can be as follows: establishing central schools in sparsely populated areas, shared utilization of resources such as teaching staff, physical capacity and educational materials and equipment. Equity measures are taken to reduce the educational disparities that exist between developed and less developed regions of Turkey.

The measures taken to reduce inequity can be as follows: the recruitment and stationing of qualified teachers in less developed areas, provision of free educational materials and equipment, and giving priority in construction and renovation of schools in the less developed provinces. The measures taken to increase access and retention of students can be grouped under three headings: a) bussing system, b) boarding schools and c) social assistance. The group who is supposed to benefit from these equity measures at the primary education level is intended to be children of ages 6-14 who live in less-developed provinces of Turkey such as Sirnak, Hakkari, Bitlis, Mardin and Van. The provision of boarding schools and social assistance are another group of equity measures intended to increase the chances of talented and skilled students from low-income families to further their education.

However, none of these measures are intended specifically to increase the educational opportunities of girls. Because the nature of policies and regulations adopted to increase the access and retention of students are gender-neutral, gender disparities in educational enrollment and attainment continue to exist. The Basic Education project, which is the most recent and comprehensive project for the expansion and improvement of primary education, does not carry any special measures for the elimination of gender disparities that exist in access, attainment and schooling experiences. It is assumed that with the expansion of educational provisions there will be an increase in the participation of students, both boys and girls. Increases in the numbers of enrollment in primary education have in fact taken place for both sexes. Nevertheless, it has not proved effective in cutting down the high female drop out rates in the underdeveloped regions of Turkey.

The expansion of education as a result of the extension of compulsory education to eight years has not had much effect in decreasing the high attrition rates for girls evident in the underdeveloped regions of Turkey. In the Southeast and East regions of Turkey, which are the most economically deprived regions, a progressive decline is notable in the number of girls after fifth grade. Table 5.6 illustrates the distribution of attrition rates at the upper primary level in the East and Southeast regions by gender. In the Southeast region, while the number of girls in fifth grade in 1997 was 98,709, the number of girls in eighth grade in 2000 was 53,479. Thus, by the time the fifth grade female students in 1997 became eighth grade students in 2000, female students decreased by 45.8%. The decrease in the number of male students, however, was 19.5%. In other words, by the time fifth grade students reached eighth grade close to half of the female students and one fifth of the male students had dropped out from the schooling system. In a few provinces, such as Sanliurfa, Mardin, Agri, and Van, the attrition rates for female students have been even more disturbing.

The attrition rates in some provinces such as Şanlıurfa and Mardin came to be around 60 percent and in Van to be around 66 percent. In the same provinces the attrition rate for male students was 20-25%. The attrition rate for the province of Ağri was the highest with a 72 percent decrease in the number of fifth-grade girls by the time they reached eighth grade. Some of the decline might be attributed to migration to other regions of the country. This does not however explain the fact that attrition rates for girls are in general twice as much as for boys. Moreover, in provinces like Mardin, Sanlıurfa, Kilis and Bingöl the attrition rate of girls is three times of that of boys and in Hakkari, Erzurum, Elazığ and Malatya the attrition rates of girls is four times that of boys. Not only girls enroll in primary education in lower numbers than boys but they also have lower retention rates as well. The striking discrepancy between male and female enrollments and the higher attrition rates for

girls signals the fact that higher proportions of girls are kept away from school than boys.

Table 5.6 Attrition Rates in Intermediate Primary Level (Grades 6 - 8) by Sex in the Southeast and East (1997-2000).

	Number of students enrolled in 5th grade in 1997		Number of students enrolled in 8th grade in 2000		Difference		Attrition rate	
SOUTHEAST	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Adıyaman	7884	7098	6528	4381	1356	2717	17.2	38.3
Diyarbakır	12645	8945	9400	5197	3245	3748	25.6	41.9
Gaziantep	15533	13994	12544	7544	2989	6450	19.2	46.1
Mardin	7399	5613	5883	2209	1516	3404	20.4	60.6
Siirt	2454	1465	1998	695	456	770	18.5	52.5
Sanlıurfa	14808	9838	11148	3708	3660	6130	24.7	62.3
Batman	4365	3172	3502	1633	863	1539	19.7	48.5
Sırnak	2960	1507	2398	717	562	790	18.9	52.4
Kilis	1253	1291	1135	843	118	448	9.4	34.7
EAST								
Agrı	4600	3137	2712	876	1888	2261	41.0	72.1
Bingol	2233	1608	1992	1064	241	544	10.8	33.8
Bitlis	3220	1948	2388	815	832	1133	25.8	58.2
Elazığ	5786	5237	5331	3538	455	1699	7.9	32.4
Erzincan	2125	2020	2296	1771	-171	249	-8.0	12.3
Erzurum	9413	8070	8476	4388	937	3682	10.0	45.6
Hakkari	1516	1035	1635	745	-119	290	-7.8	28.0
Kars	4081	3539	2974	1898	1107	1641	27.1	46.4
Malatya	7628	7252	7315	5757	313	1495	4.1	20.6
Mus	3938	2624	2548	873	1390	1751	35.3	66.7
Tunceli	674	582	829	669	-155	-87	-23.0	-14.9
Van	9454	5640	7012	2227	2442	3413	25.8	60.5
Ardahan	1814	1709	1297	1022	517	687	28.5	40.2
Igdır	1725	1385	1241	909	484	476	28.1	34.4
Total	127508	98709	102582	53479	24926	45230	19.5	45.8

Source: Ministry of National Education Statistics, 1997-2000

Equality of educational opportunity policies are generally based on the assumption that they will reduce existing inequalities by providing an expanded opportunity for a larger segment of the population to participate, particularly from traditionally deprived regions and rural areas of the country. Consequently, this would have a positive impact on the number of girls enrolling in schools as well. The Education Reform Act, Law No. 4306, by extending compulsory education to eight years, has been successful in putting more girls into the formal schooling system. However, it has not been successful in reducing the drop out rates, especially in the provinces of the East and Southeast regions. The Education Reform Act, Law No. 4306, does not provide any special measures for the elimination of gender disparities that exist in access, attainment, and schooling experiences. It is assumed that with the expansion of educational provision there will be an increase in the participation of students, both boys and girls. As the data on the enrollment patterns of girls and boys in primary education indicate, males and females do not benefit equally from educational opportunities provided. Gender-neutral policies to expand education do not necessarily increase the educational opportunities of women.

CONCLUSION

In terms of actual design and implementation of gender policies in education, the fight for equal rights presents a bleak picture. Policies that are radical in nature are not present in Turkey. Turkey is still trying to ensure equal access and attainment and policies tend to have a conservative nature that helps to maintain the status quo. While most developed countries seek to introduce special policies and programs focused on girls and women in educationally disadvantaged communities [16],

[17]. Turkey depends only on macro education policies without any gender differentiation to ensure educational equality. Therefore, educational policies continue to be gender-neutral, far from challenging the gender dynamics that discriminate against girls and women. Gender is virtually ignored as an equity issue in any of the educational policies or statutes enacted by the state. There is an absence of laws that would seek to give greater support to women in order to ensure that they ultimately reach a condition of equality with men. The educational policies and practices in Turkey are based on the premises of "formal equality" and "meritocracy".

Formal Equality

Almost all mainstream policies in Turkey are gender-neutral. They assume males and females benefit equally from all educational opportunities and resources and ignore the fact that gender makes a significant difference in educational attainment and educational experiences. The Basic Education Reform Act, No.4306, which is the most recent and comprehensive policy for the expansion and improvement of primary education, does not carry any special measures for the elimination of gender disparities that exist in access, attainment and schooling experiences.

Meritocracy

The Ministry of Education incorporates a functional view of education, in which the concept of meritocracy is central to the formation of policies and practices. Schools are seen as agencies working to create a more meritocratic society: a society of equal opportunity where status and power depend upon ability and effort. Moreover, almost all major educational policy documents emphasis is on providing education in accord with individual talents, abilities, and interests. In the Apprenticeship and Vocational and Technical Council Meeting held in 1990 it was stated that,

> The system by all means needs to be democratic. It is not democratic to have our young people enter vocational areas that we choose according to their abilities and capabilities. The boy/girl needs to have interests. It is undemocratic first of all to have a boy/girl work in an area that he/she is not interested in. Especially in the current times we are at today it is impossible to continue an education system that is undemocratic. [18]

From this notion of education that gives priority to individual interests and skills, one is to presume that the subject choices made by students at all educational levels is a reflection of individual skill and interest, without taking into account the fact that they can be reflections of preconceived notions of what is "right" for females and males. Another aspect of providing programs according to interest and skill perpetuates the gender segregation in occupational choices. Women will prefer to go to programs that are an extension of their domestic tasks and because these programs are in demand by women the state makes its priority to open more programs in these areas and thus, reinforces the gender ideology manifest in the social, cultural and political life. In order for policies to address gender inequalities, there first needs to be recognition on the part of policy makers that choices made in regards to courses and disciplines are not simply a question of individual preference but are the result of socialization messages that lead to those choices.

The concept of meritocracy, also, brings with itself the notion of fair competition. Those who have been rewarded, as well as those who have not, believe that they competed under a fair system of rules. Tests are utilized to identify talented people from all classes in society. Scholarships and accommodations to boarding schools are granted to students from low-income families who have achieved high scores on screening tests. Thus, tests provide the means for a fair system that promotes selection or screening of people based on talent. Thus, it is assumed that provision of scholarships and boarding school applies equally and indiscriminatingly to females and males. However, the data on both the distribution of scholarships and enrollment in boarding schools by sex indicate that the primary beneficiaries of these equal opportunity measures are male. The functional view of schooling undermines the social, cultural and material conditions that constrain the possibilities of women in education to the advantage of men.

Recommendations

1. In every decision that is made a gender analysis needs to be made to determine how that decision will impact women and men, respectively. Thus, gender issues become an integral part of every policy that is made concerning men and women. This is a necessary step to eradicate the discrimination that occurs against women due to "gender-neutral" mainstream polices, which in fact serve the interests of men. Because there is no gender analysis

in equal opportunity polices, they don't take into account how certain equal opportunity policies, such as in the case of scholarships and boarding schools, work for the disadvantage of females. The two government initiatives to promote equal educational opportunities, scholarships and boarding schools, at this point benefit males more than females. If a gender analysis is integrated into these two government initiatives, they can serve to decrease the gender gap in access and attainment of schooling.

2. The state needs to recognize that discrimination is not an individual problem but a social problem. If women are seen as the problem, policies will function as remedial measures. Initiatives that focus on long-term goals to eliminate unequal gender relations within both the education system and the broader society needs to be part of gender policy agendas.

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