

REVIEW ARTICLE

Neoliberal Policies and Reflections on Education in Turkey*

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Abstract

Neoliberal policies have been imposed all over the world with the saying "there is no alternative" to save the world economy from the crisis environment since the 1970s. As a result, state structures and policies have been reshaped under the influence of neoliberal policies. With the neoliberal transformation, education was restructured in line with the demands of international actors such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). As far as Turkey is concerned, until the 1970s controlled financial regulations, inflation, political instability, acts of terrorism, and such issues had started to block government policies. After 1980, the political instability in the economy and the problems experiencing in Turkey, caused the neoliberal transformation. In this sense, the purpose of this paper was to examine the concept of neoliberalism and neoliberal policy reflections on education in Turkey and trying to find out some arguments which have been arguing by educational scientists and policy-makers since the neoliberal oppression on education was started to implement.

Keywords: *Neoliberalism, neoliberal policies, reflections on education, Turkey.*

Introduction

This paper will be searching at the concept of neoliberalism and neoliberal policy reflections on education and trying to find out some arguments which have been arguing by educational

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scientists and policy-makers since the neoliberal oppression on education was started to implement in Turkey. If education is historically analyzed, it is far mainly observed that educational change is usually driven through political or ideological forces. The most important target is the imposition of state ideologies on the public, who are considered to be the future of a nation, for mental and social control (Sancar and Sancar, 2012, p.246). Another forcing impact on educational change is the impact of technological trade requiring successful and professional labor pressure for the changing occupational structures (Hogan, 1979).

According to Thorsen and Lie (2006), the concept of neoliberalism has, throughout the past two decades or so, turn out to be quite massive in some academic and political debates. Many authors have even put forward that neoliberalism is the dominant ideology shaping our society nowadays, and that we live in an age of neoliberalism (e.g. Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Connell, 2013; Hursh, 2005; Spring 2009). The overshadowing significance accorded by a few to the phenomenon of neoliberalism does not signify that it is a defined idea. However neoliberalism has increasingly more prevailed global politics since the 1980s, merely in the last decade it has ended up the consciousness of a good deal discussion in the foundations of education (Lakes and Carter, 2011, p.107).

For the past decades, neoliberalism has dominated financial policy-making in Britain and the United States. Neoliberalism has strong advocates in continental Western Europe and Japan, but the massive popular resistance there has limited its influence so far, despite the US efforts to establish neoliberal rules for them. In most of the Third World and transition countries (outside China), the US has succeeded in dictating neoliberal policies, partly through the IMF and the World Bank, and partly through direct pressure (Kotz, 2002, p.64).

Neoliberalism is an up-to-date model of classical liberal economic thought that prevailed in the USA and England before the Great Depression of the 1930s. From the mid-thirties to the mid-nineteen, a brand new interventionist technique replaced classical liberalism and it was recognized that the compelling nation regulation of capitalism should be valid. In the 1970s, the Old Religion of Classical Liberalism made a rapid comeback first in intellectual economics and then in public policy (Kotz, 2002, p.64).

Purpose

The practice of neoliberalism has been debated in the public together with governments' education and training policies, standards, and changing investment regimes, and has been seen in capitalist societies and education systems since at least the 1980s. Nevertheless, researchers have difficulty explaining what the concept of neoliberalism is, where it comes from, and how education should establish a new ethical order, or how the new student model that neoliberalism predicts should be (Davies and Bansel, 2007, p.247).

Turkey is concerned, from 1970s until 1980s, the country had experienced aggravated political, social and economic problems since there was a period of political instability due to multi-party coalitions (Ayhan, Tan and Baydaş, 2016, p.68). After 1980, the political instability in the economy and the problems experienced in Turkey caused the neoliberal transformation. The post-1980 period is mentioned by an export-led economy along with the rising neoliberal phenomena.

In this study, following the reflections of these policies, which have been discussed by both educational scientists and policymakers since the 1980s, it has been tried to point out some implementations put into practice by the governments.

Method

In this study, the document analysis method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Document analysis involves the analysis of written materials containing information about target phenomena (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011, p.187). During the literature review, related assets and the statistics to the research subject were obtained. After related books and documents were examined, key findings were systematically blended. Finally, it has become an assessment by associating the findings with each other.

What is Neoliberalism?

When Apple (2006, p.25) speaks about the basics of neoliberalism; it speaks of a "panic" atmosphere in the society over falling standards, school dropouts, and ignorance. Fear of violence in schools and anxiety about the elimination of traditional values have a major impact on the new system, which was marketed with attacks on teachers and their unions and the existence of central curricula and tests support this atmosphere of panic. He argues that if we cannot find ways to relate academic efforts to local communities a neoliberal democracy based on individualism, where citizenship is reduced to barely consumption practices and does not as sharing will prevail.

Although both neoliberals and neoconservatives criticize the policy being anti-entrepreneurial and wasteful, possibly this isn't always the number one region on which we ought to spotlight. Apple refers that rather, we need to ask critical questions about the values of those people who have more strength and money made the political and monetary decisions that segregated these groups economically (and often racially), that destroyed health care structures and social safety nets, and so on. Rather than focus on the disadvantaged ones and their teachers, we may focus on the nearly "pathological detachment" of the prosperous and their allies in government and neoliberal and neoconservative intellectual policy circles (Apple, 2006, p.24).

Historically, education and training developed regionally and were assisted at the local or national level. However, globalization continues to heighten the authority of neoliberal policies through the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Lakes and Carter, 2011, p.108). In the growing world, establishments such as the WB or IMF force neoliberal policies in exchange for debt rescheduling. This obliges nations to enforce institutional reforms such as cuts in welfare expenditures, more bendy labor market laws, and privatization (Stromquist and Sanyal, 2013, p.153).

According to (Robertson, 2007), the mobilization of neoliberal policies to reorganize societies and social relations and the key institutions involved in social reproduction is a class project with 3 main objectives:

- a) Up-redistribution of wealth to the ruling elite through new governance structures;
- b) With the transformation of education systems, human production is the number one task for the financial system;

- c) Structuring education as a public monopoly, initiating strategic investments by for-profit companies. All three goals need to be overcome by teachers and unions with the idea that education exists for public welfare by the public sector and civil society. She continues:

“...there are several important ways in which education sectors in the developed and developing economies have been transformed by neoliberal policies. As we will see, however, these policies have been unevenly implemented and experienced, giving rise to important differences across locales, regions, and countries. They have also been resisted by workers and their unions—including teachers’ unions—in some cases more successfully than others. ... education providers were not only placed under pressure to use funds more efficiently but they were encouraged to seek additional sources of funding from local households and international households, the business, and from marketing their services. There was also an attempt to change the basis for determining a teachers’ salary as in many countries this was part of a system of collective bargaining. Teacher’ unions have been placed under enormous pressure to yield to performance-based pay, while governments have used new governance arrangements, such as Charter Schools (USA), City Technologies (UK) and City Academies (UK) to offer differential wages to teachers”.

Having shortly explored what neoliberalism is and why neoliberal policies might have come about, now let’s see the reflections of those regulations and some implementations in Turkey.

The Background to Neoliberal Policies in Turkey

Throughout history, all societies are changing rapidly or slowly due to changes or developments in social, economic, cultural, technological, and political fields. Liberal policies, along with crises in different sectors, had a major impact on all states in the 20th century. Liberalism discovered interventionist state policies and began to create pressure to restructure countries in financial and political areas. In Turkey, some specific control policies performed until the 1970s yet, after 1980, together with inflation, social changes, terrorist acts, economic and political instability caused the basis of the neoliberal transformation. President Turgut Özal played a key role in Turkey’s transition to a neoliberal development model in the 1980s. He had arguably become Turkey’s most important political figures since the period of Kemal Atatürk. Shortly after the September 12, 1980 coup, Turgut Özal played a crucial role in increasing the credibility of the stable structural adjustment program supported by key international organizations in both local and global environments, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (OECD) (Öniş, 2004, p.113-114).

For two decades since 1980, Turkish authorities undertook market reforms without comprehensive regulatory reform. Not surprisingly, Özal preferred a decision-making style based on Cabinet Decrees as opposed to Acts of Parliament. For example, key decisions on the privatization of state economic enterprises from 1986 onwards were achieved by government decrees. The absence of an explicit Privatization Law, however, has been amply exploited by the opponents of the privatization program who managed to block key privatization deals via recourse to the Constitutional Court. Hence, the absence of a strong legal infrastructure has clearly jeopardized the success of the privatization program. It is the only aftermath of a crisis, in 1999 that drastic regulatory reforms started to be implemented. Their absence was, by then, taken into consideration to be the source behind major economic problems (Öniş, 2004). In the short term,

although these implemented regulations had effective results because of the lack of sustainable social and political infrastructure they emerged negative consequences in the long term. Özal's government in the economic area throughout the liberal themes was ongoing, at the same time as the political factors of liberalism have fallen behind. During this period, the democratization did no longer provide extensive improvement inside the human rights context. According to Özal, financial liberalization will bring both political liberalization and democratization. Özal's insistence on European Union accession policy, resulting in the improvement procedure of the EU after 1990, each the financial system and politics of European integration has introduced to the democratization efforts in Turkey (Cizreliogulları, 2013, p.135).

The Economic Recovery Program, which came into force on January 24, 1980, in our country, was the turning point of economic and social transformation. After the decisions taken on this date, the reduction of public responsibility in the economic system and the transition to the market system were largely paved. Therefore, the provision of social services such as education, health, and social security has shifted from the public to the private sector. This change in the public service in Turkey starting in the 1980s certainly was not a coincidence. The capitalist order tried to capture the disaster in the 1970s with neoliberal arrangements known as "restructuring." In this context, "structural adaptation programs" and neoliberal regulations provided by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have opened up public service areas globally. Unions and institutions such as the European Union (EU), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which provide worldwide trade and financing agreements to mediate and introduce neoliberal policies to the public sector (Polat, 2013, p.160).

Turkey was signed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995, which promoted the liberalization of all services in countries. Thus, it paved the way for the liberalization of education, health, tourism, communication, and many different infrastructure sectors. It also meant that power was no longer to nations, but transnational capital by using transnational agents because the GATS forces some certain obligations such as most favored nation (MFN) principle. The MFN can compel the obligations on the member countries not to discriminate among foreign services and service suppliers.

NPE in Turkey: A closer look

In the 1980s, society experienced great changes in terms of economy, society, and politics. These changes brought the question of whether an unusual transformation can occur in the education system. As a result, it has begun to debate whether education, one of the service items offered by the state, can be transferred to the private sector (Yirci and Kocabas, 2013, p.1524).

Due to the limitations of this article, not all problems highlighted in the literature can be addressed. Instead, the main areas of the neoliberal policies being implemented in Turkey will be summarized. Polat (2013, p.161) argues that the method of privatization and commercialization of education in Turkey can be summarized in the following five main areas.

Load Shedding Method

After the changes of the privatization policies, it can be easily seen the number of private schools in all levels. Even the World Bank suggests that primary schools should be held by state funds, except for other levels of education, which are said to have a better social benefit. The overall range of non-public schools from pre-primary education to upper secondary education in Turkey is 7403 (MEB, 2014). The variety of private schools has ended up 9 percent of the whole number of schools. This range was 1 percent when we go twenty years back.

Central/Competitive Tests

In all neoliberal systems, central tests are valued greater, and students can keep on their further educations following these exam results. Likewise, in Turkey both students and their parents competed at the very beginning of the academic level. That's why private education institutions or courses are becoming more popular. While the children of high-level people can go to these institutions, there is a pressure on poor families to send their children to these courses with the belief that they will provide a better future and profession for their children. In fact, these courses have no real benefit other than deepening educational inequality, with the transitions between the social and economic strata determined only by standard tests (Gök, 2005, p.103).

Private Courses

In Turkey, families are spending a significant amount of money on the courses. For instance, according to a study (TED, 2005), 17 high-quality universities with 3500 students could be established with the money spent on private courses in 2004. The number of private courses increased from 43 in 1965 to 4099 in 2011 (tuik.gov.tr). In other words, there have been approximately 100% growth with the number of establishments (Polat, 2013, p.163). The number of private courses has now reached 11,694 in 2019 (MEB, 2019).

The Voucher Method

When Special Education considered, the government financially supports families seeking services and encourages them to seek providers from the private sector. Some poor families send their children to these institutions by agreeing with the special education institution to earn money as a benefit from the state. The number of those institutions that started to serve in 2006 increased to 2178 in 2017. In the voucher system, governments can determine the eligibility of students. Vouchers can be made available for all students or only for low-income students. Alternatively, vouchers can be made available for disadvantaged groups like girls in rural areas or disabled students. Governments can use voucher policy for schools such as religious schools or technology-based schools (Cinoglu, 2006).

Contracting and Franchising Methods

In many other countries, governments buy the services in some different sectors and pay the charge of the providers or make the institutions that the providers pay. For instance, cleaning services in all public schools from preschool to higher education institutions have been privatized,

or accommodation enterprises and food providers in universities have been transferred to the private sector.

Financial Assistance for Private School Enrollment

As of the year 2014, the Ministry of National Education started an incentive program for families to encourage them to send their children to private colleges, which offer a better education to students than crowded and normally ineffective public schools. The application envisages contributing about TL 3,000 per student in numerous installments to the non-public schools in turn for a discount in fees.

Results

In Turkey, the neoliberal transformation was administered during the years of military repression following the coup of 1980. Universities, which had become a turbulent center of revolutionary idea action in the 1970s, were paid specific attention by the army, and a special government body, the Council of Higher Education, was established to administrate them. Even though the Council of Higher Education is just a council, the president of the council holds all the decision-making power about universities and is answerable merely to the president of Turkey, consequently the government regulations directly affect the universities' destiny and their nature. Giroux (2014) explains this situation like this: "Higher education institutions converge corporate administration models; they more and more use and exploit cheap faculty labor whilst expanding the ranks in their managerial class. Modeled after a savage neoliberal value system in which wealth and power are redistributed upward, a market-oriented class of managers largely has conducted the governing structures of most higher education institutions in the US".

Although article 130 of the 1980 constitution allowed the state to establish universities, foundations also had the right to establish non-profit higher education institutions in 1984, with a minor amendment made in this article. This change was justified according to two arguments: a) Turkish higher education institutions are inefficient and not globally competitive. b) Existing universities cannot meet the increasing demand for higher education. They cannot respond to the growing needs of the globalizing world. What has been happening in the Turkish higher education system can be considered as an institutional transformation regarding the integration efforts of a late-capitalized country into the world capitalist system (Aslan, 2014).

For these reasons, the way has been opened for the establishment of private foundation universities with criminal restrictions that retain their non-profit character. However, the establishment of foundation universities did not have the expected impact on society. This initiative appeared contrary to the principle of education, which should be a free public service to all levels of society. It also had negative effects on middle or low-income students studying in public universities in the context of social justice. (Birler, 2012). Moreover, with the neoliberal policies, universities are rapidly moving away from their public responsibilities with so-called "reform" or "law" regulations (Aslan, 2014).

According to the findings of The Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI), which has carried out in Turkey since 2002, named "Education Expenses Study", 64.45% of the total education expenses are provided by the state while 34.75% by private sources, however, the factor is that all those expenses are provided by parents under the names of paperwork, school bus, cleaning, certificate, etc. which means that the whole funding is covered by families.

Some changes in Public Administration Reform Package in Turkey have changed the structure of education. With the PAR package, the Public Administration Basic Law Draft, which came into force in 2003, has been stated that the services deemed appropriate by the decision of the authorized bodies of the central and local administrations can be provided to the private sector and non-governmental organizations specialized in their field. As Güler (2004, p.6) states, the state has established a regulatory state agency in itself. The primary reflection of this law on education was clarified why central administration is transferred regionally and downsizing of the state.

The reflection of the Public Administration Basic Law Draft on education can be addressed in 3 stages (Kurul, 2012, p.214-215): The first stage is the "problem of financial resources of education", which is related to the government's failure. Based on this, it contains very important regulations to shift the economic burden of schools from central administrations to local administrations, commercial business environments, and families. The second stage is opinions in the context of "effectiveness and efficiency". The need for more effective use of existing resources was emphasized by ensuring the continuous participation of family and local people in education. It is about the "redistribution of political power" at the last stage. It is claimed that the distribution of political power will have some consequences such as transferring from central to local and from one social cluster to another (cited Polat, 2013, p.167).

The largest part of the civil servants working in the public sector in Turkey constitutes the teacher. To become a teacher, they must graduate from the faculty of education or have a pedagogical formation certificate issued by faculties of education. Besides, they are expected to have a sufficient score in their branches from the public personnel selection exam held to be appointed as a civil servant after graduation. Teacher applicants are appointed in accordance with their rankings from the highest to the lowest. Since there have not been a few proper educational policies among the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education Council, which stated above and accountable for all higher education institutions the teacher needs in public schools would differ. Now the government is forcing the employ them into the private schools by providing some investment for those who are willing to establish a private school. The point is that; this process always works for a few investors who have no difficulty with education but take it merely economic purposes. According to Sezgin and Duran (2011, p.12), while the number of applicants for (PPSE) was 278.048 and only 50.000 of them or much less could be qualified. Due to the fact that employee personal rights in the private sector are insubstantial, teacher applicants are pressured to be public school servants which are called as over-employment in the public sector but in fact, the country still wishes more classes, schools, and teachers when it comes to classroom sizes and the features of quality education for every citizen.

One of the most important findings of the neoliberal implementations in Turkey is for sure the numbers of the private schools. From pre-school to higher education,

many private institutions have been dispersed for the last ten years. Between 2014-2019, while the number of private schools increased by 41.65% and the total number of public schools increased by 3% (MEB, 2019).

Another type of school, which is subject to the privatization process, is vocational high schools, which are considered to be "unqualified" in the axis of neoliberalism, are equipped with the technical skills required by the market through education (Polat, 2013, p.172). These are of course welcomed by educators but the primary purpose of establishing a new school or these investments is to transfer those who are inefficient in the society and force them to be a productive part of the market no longer to educate them just because they are individuals and that is their natural right.

Discussion and Conclusion

With this purging process created by neoliberal policies, the state's functionality in the public sphere has been left behind; all financial and political actions have entered the restructuring process under the influence of this power. Therefore, a state model, which is responsible for responding to market needs and equipped with different capabilities, has emerged.

According to the mentioned state, we can only advance the efficiency and quality of service and decrease the expenses thus enhance the benefits and public interests by restricting the possible intervention of state and increase the market-place mechanism. Accordingly, the public provider nature is changing and these types of efforts are reformatted and repriced as "for-profit" activities. The pricing mechanism is transferring services from being a social right and altering the concept of "citizens" as "customers". This limitation in public service productive ability restructures the state and transferring of all those social functions and features of state essentially mean a restriction of social rights of citizens. Similarly, Bayram (2018) stated that education is the most fundamental right that everyone can enjoy the right of qualified, public education only within the framework of public service.

Nowadays, neoliberalism is unfortunately removing the social rights as a part of citizenship rights despite the rhetoric such as "participation", "transparency" and "democracy" and decelerating democracy. This neoliberal tendency may generate such outcomes like the exclusion of the needs of massive components of society, narrowing of the social base of the political system, and a new authorization wave with the "technocracy" rhetoric. The wave of monopoly may cause the commodification of the general public service area under the name of "structural reform". The commodification of the general public services can exchange the partition relations of the total profits in opposition to the large parts of society.

In this context, while neoliberal policies and the social transformations that it brings together turn people into economic vehicles; It also transforms education systems into the process of raising human resources, which is focused only on the profitability of capital. Of course, the main concern is that education should be transformed into a capital-oriented process rather than its real and social development. In the neoliberal system, the main purpose of developing individual capital is for sure to develop social capital. However, when the aims of education concern, the gap between the social and individual capital benefits created by neoliberal policies will have some inevitable consequences. In this way, education will be in a position where only those with purchasing

power can benefit as a commodity in the market process (Cooper 2008, p.215), additionally argues in his essay about neoliberalism and education reforms, he indicates those neoliberal education systems have been a source of major social harm.

On the other side, education as a commodity produced within the market is probably ignoring the principle aim of education with the aid of serving, just profitable jobs in the market that is jammed limited fields of expertise and this will cause the development of some certain areas of science rather than the holistic improvement of the science. Akkaymak (2014) reminds us, there are still several countries, such as Venezuela and Brazil heading a counter direction and producing alternative policies against neoliberal policies.

To sum up, the importance of education for the improvement of capital is so crucial but this importance is contradictory to the development of the social situation, that is, it will have negative outcomes whilst the education is capitalized just in terms of capital development. As Hursh and Henderson (2011) go, “finally, given how neoliberalism exacerbates inequalities, damages the environment, and undermines education, we argue that we must develop alternatives to neoliberalism” (p.172). We know that the world is on the verge of a social and economic transformation. It is no exaggeration to say that we are nearing the end of neoliberal policies. However, the discussions about what will be replaced are still ongoing. In this context, considering the future generations, both social justice and social improvement will only be possible by developing long-term solid education policies.

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