



Comparison of Turkey and the Countries with High PISA Success South Korea, Finland and Canada in Terms of Transition Education Levels

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Abstract

It is aimed to compare the countries of South Korea, Finland and Canada, which are highly successful in PISA exam, and Turkey in terms of the transition system between educational levels. Document analysis method was used in the study. In the universe of the study, there are thirty-eight countries from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Turkey and the countries of South Korea, Canada and Finland which are profoundly effective in PISA, constitute the sample of the study. According to the results of the study, it has been determined that there are no exams in transition from pre-school education to primary education in Turkey, Canada, Finland and South Korea. There is a strict examination in the transition system from primary to secondary education level in South Korea, while there are no central exams in Canada and Finland, and transition to secondary education is made according to secondary school student success. In Turkey, a central examination is held for the transition from primary to secondary education level or students are accepted to secondary education by local placement, considering the addresses of the students according to their success. In Turkey and South Korea, a central exam is applied in the transition system from secondary education to higher education. Beneficial practices in nations successful in PISA can be integrated into school systems, taking into account cultural components.

Keywords: PISA, Turkey, OECD, Transition Between Levels

Introduction

Education is a human right for all and transforms people's lives for the better, builds peace, reduces poverty and contributes to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). Every child has the right to education. Education is so important that all children should receive quality education services. By getting quality education, children can overcome many obstacles they will face in business life and in the future (UNICEF, 2023). It is inevitable for children to receive a quality education in order to have a good future. Today's children, who receive a good education, will not only provide a good life for themselves in the

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future, but also make great contributions to the country they live in. Countries are developing policies to improve the social and economic prospects of their citizens, promoting schools, mobilizing resources to respond to needs, and increasingly giving importance to international comparisons of educational outcomes (OECD, 2023a: 3). It is obvious that countries give more importance to education, follow other education systems and try to transfer useful practices.

Comparative education is the study of international education and is used together with international education. As such, comparative and international education complement each other (Maya, 2019). Education systems are very valuable for the future of states and they shape the future of nations. With globalization, countries are greatly affected by each other and compare their education systems (Dertli, 2021: 3). Thanks to the results of international education exams such as TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS, countries can see their own success and compare with other countries and transfer good practices.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment program run by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to evaluate education systems around the world. It is an international research that measures the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in the fields of Reading, Mathematics and Science and is applied every three years. PISA started in 2000 and Turkey first participated in this international exam in 2003. In each PISA cycle, an area is chosen as the main area of assessment. In PISA 2018, reading assessment was determined as the main area (OECD, 2023b; MEB, 2023). Thanks to comparative education research such as PISA, countries can get to know their education systems better and have the opportunity to compare and revise their own education systems with other education systems (Safi & Ozerbas, 2022: 64). By participating in the PISA survey, Turkey can see the strengths and weaknesses of the education system.

OECD shares data about the education systems of member countries. One of these data shows the higher education, secondary, primary and pre-school levels of the countries (OECD, 2022b). These data include which educational levels are available and at what ages each level begins and ends.

Education systems consist of various levels. Although the duration, structure and shape of these levels differ from country to country, they are generally higher education, secondary, primary and pre-school level. The transition system between levels varies from country to country. For example, while the advice and opinion of the teacher are crucial in the transition from primary to secondary education level in Germany, primary school completion exam results are considered in Singapore (Demirbilek, 2022: 134). So it is good opportunity to examine transition systems especially successful countries in international exams like TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS.

Transition practices from primary to secondary education have been researched for a long time, and while at first only academic adaptation and performance were given importance, the importance of social and emotional adaptation of children has been examined in recent years. Although schools and educational systems try to do the transition process well, some students experience negativities and have difficulties in the transition process (Harris & Nowland, 2020: 66). It is important to care about students' emotions in the transition process to secondary level.

In this research, it is aimed to compare the countries of South Korea, Finland and Canada, which have scored highly on the PISA exam, and Turkey in terms of the transition system between levels in this research. It is thought that this research can be beneficial in improving the Turkish education system and increasing the quality of education and training services.

Problem Statement

The main problem in this research is “What is the transition situation between the levels of South Korea, Finland and Canada and Turkey, which have scored highly on the PISA exam?” The sub problems are as follows.

- 1) How is the PISA 2018 success situation in Turkey, South Korea, Finland and Canada?
- 2) How is the transition from pre-school level to primary education level in Turkey, South Korea, Finland and Canada?
- 3) How is the transition from primary level to secondary education level in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada?
- 4) How is the transition from secondary education level to higher education level in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada?

Research Method

Design

The research was carried out by document analysis method. Document review includes the analysis of written documents containing information about the subject to be researched (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2016: 189). Data were obtained by examining the laws, official websites and international education reports about the education systems of the countries included in the study.

Universe and sample

Thirty-eight (38) countries from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are included in the universe of the research. Turkey and the countries of South Korea, Finland and Canada, which are highly successful in PISA, constitute the sample of the research.

Data collection and analysis procedures

In the research, the data were obtained from the laws of the countries on education systems, official websites, international reports containing education and scientific publications about comparative education systems, PISA 2018, OECD reports.

Findings

Information about the success of the PISA Survey conducted in Turkey, Finland, South Korea and Canada in 2018, the transition from pre-school to primary education, the transition from primary education level to secondary education level and the transition from secondary education level to higher education level is presented in this section.

Findings Concerning the Success of the 2018 PISA Survey in Turkey, South Korea, Finland and Canada

Reading, Science and Mathematics achievement scores and rankings in the PISA research conducted in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada in 2018 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Situations of Success in the 2018 PISA Survey

Countries	Reading points	Reading rank	Mathematics points	Mathematics rank	Science points	Science rank
Canada	520	2	512	7	518	5
Finland	520	3	507	11	522	3
South Korea	514	5	526	2	519	4
Turkey	466	31	454	33	468	30
OECD average	487		489		489	

Source: OECD, (2022a). <https://PISAdataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idePISA/>

Table 1 shows the results of selected OECD countries participating in the PISA survey conducted in 2018. In the 2018 PISA survey, Canada ranked 2nd among OECD countries with 520 points in Reading, 7th in Mathematics with 512 points, and 5th in Science with 518 points. Finland ranked 3rd with 520 points in Reading skills, 11th with 507 points in Mathematics, and 3rd place in Science with 522 points. South Korea ranked 5th with 514 points in Reading skills, 2nd place in Mathematics with 526 points, and 4th place in Science with 519 points. However, Turkey ranked 31st with 466 points in Reading skills, 33rd with 454 points in Mathematics, and 30th in Science with 468 points in the 2018 PISA survey, and achieved scores below the OECD average.

Findings on Transition from Pre-school to Primary Education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada

Table 2 shows the findings regarding the pre-school age range, whether pre-school education is paid or not, whether pre-school education is compulsory or not, and whether there is an exam or not in the transition from pre-school to primary education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada.

Table 2. Comparison of Transition from Pre-school to Primary Education

Pre-school Education				
Countries	Age range	Paid/Free	Compulsory/ Not compulsory	Exam in transition to primary
Canada	3-5 age	Free	Compulsory	There is not
Finland	3-6 age	Free	Compulsory	There is not
South Korea	3-5 age	Paid/Free	Not compulsory	There is not
Turkey	3-6 age	Paid/Free	Not compulsory	There is not

Note: This table was created by the researcher, considering OECD data and document reviews.

According to Table 2, the preschool age range is 3-5 years in Canada, 3-6 years in Finland, 3-5 years in South Korea, and 3-6 years in Turkey. It has been determined that pre-school education is free in Canada and Finland, but in Turkey and South Korea it is free for 1 year before starting primary education, and pre-school education is paid at younger ages. While pre-school education is compulsory in Canada and Finland, it is not compulsory in South Korea and Turkey. In addition, in this research, it has been observed that there is no examination in the transition from pre-primary education to primary education in all existing countries (Canada, Finland, South Korea and Turkey).

Findings on Transition from Primary to Secondary Education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada

Table 3 shows the findings regarding the age range at primary education level, whether primary education is paid or not, whether primary education is compulsory or not, and whether or not there is an exam in the

transition from primary education to secondary education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada

Table 3. Comparison of Transition from Primary to Secondary Education

Primary				
Countries	Age range	Paid/Free	Compulsory/ Not compulsory	Exam in transition to secondary
Canada	6-14 age	Free	Compulsory	There is not
Finland	6-15 age	Free	Compulsory	There is not
South Korea	6- 15 age	Free	Compulsory	There is
Turkey	7-15 age	Free	Compulsory	There is

Note: This table was created by the researcher, considering OECD data and document reviews.

Looking at Table 3, it is seen that the primary education age range is 6-14 years in Canada, 6-15 years in Finland and South Korea, and 7-15 years in Turkey. It is seen that primary education is free and compulsory in selected OECD countries and Turkey. It is seen that during the transition from primary to secondary education, there is no central examination in Canada and Finland, but there is an examination in the transition to secondary education in South Korea and Turkey.

Findings Regarding Transition from Secondary Education to Higher Education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada

Table 4 shows the findings regarding the age range at secondary education level, whether secondary education is paid or not, whether secondary education is compulsory or not, and whether or not there is an exam in the transition from secondary education to higher education in Turkey and South Korea, Finland and Canada.

Table 4. Comparison of Transition from Secondary Education to Higher Education

Secondary				
Countries	Age range	Paid/Free	Compulsory/ Not compulsory	Exam in transition to higher education
Canada	15-18 age	Free	Compulsory	There is (university board)
Finland	16-19 age	Paid	Not compulsory	There is (university board)
South Korea	15-18 age	Free	Not compulsory	There is (central)
Turkey	15-18 age	Free	Compulsory	There is (central)

Note: This table was created by the researcher, considering OECD data and document reviews.

According to Table 4, the secondary education age range is 15-18 in Canada, South Korea and Turkey, and 16-19 in Finland. It is seen that secondary education is free in Canada, South Korea and Turkey, but secondary education is paid in Finland. While secondary education is compulsory in Canada and Turkey, secondary education is not compulsory in Finland and South Korea. While there is not a central exam in transition to higher education in Canada and Finland, there is a central exam in South Korea and Turkey.

Conclusion and Discussion

In the PISA survey conducted in 2018, Finland, South Korea and Canada countries were found to be successful and above the OECD average in Mathematics, Reading Skills and Science. Turkey, on the other hand, was found to be below the OECD average in the fields of Mathematics, Reading Skills and Science in the 2018 survey.

According to the research results, it has been determined that there are no exams for the transition from pre-school to primary education in Turkey, South Korea, Finland and Canada. It has been determined that there is a strict examination in the transition system from primary level to secondary level in South Korea, while there are no central exams in Canada and Finland, and transition to secondary education is made according to secondary school student success. In Turkey, on the other hand, it has been observed that a central examination is held for the transition from primary education to secondary education or students are accepted to secondary education by local placement, considering the addresses of the students according to the grades of the last three years (6-7-8th grades) of primary education. [Kerimoglu \(2019\)](#) stated in his research that there is a strict examination in the transition to secondary and higher education in South Korea. In the studies of [Atilgan \(2017\)](#), [Gockan \(2019\)](#), and [TEDMEM \(2022\)](#), it was emphasized that there is a central examination in Turkey in the transition from primary level to secondary level and from secondary level to higher education level.

[Demirbilek, \(2022: 143\)](#) stated in his research that there are exam-based systems in countries such as Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, China, Vietnam, Netherlands and Poland in the transition from primary to secondary education level. Since these countries are mostly located in East or Southeast Asia, it is thought that the traditional belief systems and philosophies of these countries (such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism) stem from disciplinary and selective lifestyles. He also stated that there are no strict exams in Canada and Finland in the transition from primary to secondary level.

In Turkey and South Korea, it has been observed that a central examination is applied in the transition system from secondary education to higher education. However, there is not a central exam in the transition from secondary level to higher education level in Canada and Finland, and it has been determined that students are accepted to universities according to university board decisions, student grades and students' interests and abilities.

Recommendations

The level of preschool education has a significant impact on students' personality development and future academic success ([Gockan, 2019: 80](#)). Therefore, it may be beneficial to make pre-school education free and compulsory in Turkey, as it will increase access to pre-school education.

A supra-political understanding can be shown in education policy decisions ([Celik, 2016](#)). Educational practices can include inclusive and qualified practices that can carry countries such as Turkey to the top in global exams like PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. Thus, with quality education, qualified manpower can also develop and Turkey can be at the top levels in every field.

Curriculum can be updated according to today's needs and regional differences, in addition to this, comparative education systems, international education exam results such as PISA and TIMSS can be carefully examined. Good practices in countries successful in PISA can be integrated into education systems, considering cultural elements.

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Conflict of Interest

Author has no conflict of interest to report.

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