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Contemporary Education Systems: The Case of United States

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Abstract: Modernization efforts for the development of education systems were carried out in parallel with the needs of the age. In this direction, societies that have taken the step of modernization have first tried to revise their existing education systems and identify the prominent obstacles. Education systems have followed a very different course in history; It has been affected by many historical, geographical, economic, social, and cultural factors. The United States education system is an education system that is managed locally due to the history and structure of the country, where the education program, academic calendar, programs, school system structuring, and teacher appointments are determined by the states. In this study, first the political and cultural history of the country and then the functioning and structure of the education system are discussed. The study also compared the Turkish education system and US education. Finally, the study was concluded by including the problems encountered in the US education system.

Keywords: Contemporary education, Education systems, Educational program,

Introduction

The American continent, also known as the New World, was in the past considered a single continent extending from the North Pole to Cape Horn (Gumus, 2004). The United States of America (USA) is a 50-state country with a vast area of 9,628,382 square kilometers and a population of 302,503,635 people. The USA, which had its first written constitution on September 17, 1787, is a federal republic based on pluralist democracy and governed by a presidential system (Harmanci, 2011). The Spaniards were the first to establish colonies in the area where the territory of the United States today is spread. The Spanish colonized Florida, Texas, and California in the 16th century. In this century St. Laurent region and Louisiana in the south came under French rule. In the mid-18th century, the entire coastline from Newfoundland to Florida and the western slopes of the Appalachians belonged to the British, the interior from Labrador to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico belonged to the French, and all the lands west of the Mississippi belonged to the Spanish. It was under the rule of. The Russians also captured Alaska and advanced close to San Francisco (Ferro, 2011).

The largest ethnic group among the first settlers of the United States was the British. Thus, the dominant language in the country became English (Drabelle, 1997). The victory of England in the Seven Years' War, which ended in 1763, paradoxically pulled the mechanism of the American Independence movement, and the introduction of new and heavy taxes for the budget that was deteriorated in these wars mobilized the colonies. (Bryce, 1962; Ferro, 2011). The 13 British colonies, which declared their independence on July 4, 1776, were successful in their struggle and established the United States of America in 1787 (Selen, Undated). The first US President is George Washington. George Washington was a Virginia farmer who fought against the French in the Seven Years' War as an officer of the local troops (Luraghi, 1975). In 1798, Congress, held under the leadership of the US president, passed the Naturalization Act, which made it difficult to become a US citizen. The Law on Foreign and Insurgent Movements, which was adopted in the same year, made it difficult for French and Irish immigrants to become naturalized against a possible war with France, and brought some restrictions to the print media (Mashlaw, 2007).

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The period 1789-1861 was a period of compromises that resulted in the Civil War. Although the problem that confronted the Northern states and the Southern states during this period seemed to be slavery, the main conflict problem actually arose from the developments in resource distribution (Mashlaw, 2007). A few years after the end of the Civil War, the United States became a leading power in industry, and skilled businessmen became wealthy (Drabelle, 1997). The development of industry in the country, reaching ever greater dimensions, required an unprecedented concentration of transportation and communication. The supply of raw materials from distant places and the sale of manufactured goods in distant markets led to significant developments in road and canal construction in many parts of the USA, and the Panama Canal zone was established in 1903. (McNeill, 1989).

While Americans were embarking on dangerous adventures abroad, they were also bringing new perspectives to social problems within the country. Despite the appearance of prosperity in the country, half of the industrial workers still lived in poverty. New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco; while they were proud of their museums, universities, and public libraries, they were ashamed of their slums. At that time, the "laissez faire" principle was dominant, and the government was wanted to intervene in trade as little as possible. In 1900, the 'Progressive Movement' began. The aim of this movement was to reform individuals and society through the government. The supporters of the movement were economists, sociologists, engineers, and bureaucrats who sought scientific, cheap, and effective solutions to political problems (Drabelle, 1997).

The USA also entered the 1st and 2nd World Wars and played a major role in winning these wars with its great economic and military power (Ferro, 2011). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, African Americans initiated non-violent demonstrations and boycott actions, under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, to end racial discrimination and be equal before the law. These actions culminated on August 28, 1963, when more than 200,000 people of all races gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Shortly after this date, the United States Congress passed laws that gave blacks the right to vote, prohibited discrimination in employment, and provided equal access to education and community services (Drabelle, 1997).

The USA is a country with a lot of ethnic diversity, as it is the product of a structure founded and shaped by immigrants from many countries. As a result of immigration, a new synthetic ethnic structure, a new nation, began to rise in America. In the past, the integration of immigrants, who created America and are America itself, into American society was perceived as a sign of goodwill that would prove their belonging to this country (Glazer, 2004). The globalization process, which started in the 1500s, expanded to include the American continent in the second half of the 18th century. After the North and South continents, as well as the whole America, were opened to settlement starting from the 15th century, European people brought European culture to the country and settled it (Sander, 2003). At the beginning of the twentieth century, President Theodore Roosevelt, while defending those immigrants are the most important power of American society, defended the idea that immigrants should express their loyalty to America and should not prioritize their ties with their former countries of origin over their ties with America (Glazer, 2004).

The USA has a heterogeneous culture that has come to the fore in today's world (Taş, 2002). Cultural transfer is also very important in the US education system. In transferring cultural elements to the educational process, the US education system; its aims are to help students understand that culture has an impact on human behavior, to make them aware of common behaviors shown in common situations in the target culture, and to help students objectively evaluate generalizations about the target culture (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). The applied education curriculum is considered important for the harmony of ethnic groups in terms of bringing a common identity awareness and emphasizing a common history.

Education System

Each country creates an education system suitable for its own political, economic, social, and cultural structure. In the United States, education is largely the responsibility of states and local school districts. It is not possible to talk about a formal function of the federal government in education (Erdoğan, 1997). Ornstein and Levine (2006) stated that there are 50 different state education systems in the USA and that there are many differences between the local school systems in these states. In this regard, determining the US education goals; federal, state, and local politicians, as well as special interest groups, community organizations, and professional educational organizations (Spring, 2010).

In 1989, in Charlottesville, Virginia, President George Bush and 50 state governors held an Education Summit to set national goals for US primary and secondary schools to implement a general reform package that would

give new impetus to American education (Drabelle, 1997). The goals determined at the summit are as follows (Fiske & O'Grady, 2000):

- All children will start school ready to learn.
- High school completion rate will be increased to at least 90%.
- Student achievement will be increased and all schools in America will be taught to use their minds to become responsible citizens and actively participate in the economic life of the nation.
- Teachers will develop their professional knowledge and skills to prepare American students for the next century.
- American students will be at the top of the world, especially in mathematics and science.
- Every adult American will be literate, have the knowledge and skills to compete with the global economy, and fulfill the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- There will be no room for alcohol, drugs, and violence in any American school. Schools will provide students with safe and disciplined learning environments.
- Parents will be more involved in the education and training process in all schools.

Although none of these goals, which were accepted at the summit and expected to be achieved by 2000, were fully realized in 2000, the decisions taken in terms of creating a common understanding of the determined goals deeply affected the US education system (Fiske & O'Grady, 2000).

In the early days of the USA, free public schools were opened with the money obtained from taxes and the states were made responsible for their own education systems (Demirel, 2000). Considering the financial resources of education in the USA, the weight of the states is better understood. For example, 90% of the \$852 billion spent on education nationwide in the 2003-2004 academic year was covered by state, local and private sources. Therefore, it can be said that the federal government's national education expenditures are at the level of 10%. Considering that part of this 10% budget comes from the programs implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture for schools, the contribution of the US Department of Education to education is 6%. The US Department of Education's \$63.3 billion budget is 2.7% of the federal government's \$2.3 trillion 2004 fiscal year budget (US Department of Education, 2012).

Public schools, which basically benefit from state and state funds, are taught by at least one or two teachers, and are managed under a higher education institution, include classical, private, vocational/technical education. The majority of students who do not attend public schools attend paid private schools. Private schools, on the other hand, are schools that provide education within the same framework as public schools but belong to private enterprises. Four out of every five private schools in the United States were opened by religious groups. In the education program of these schools, religious education is also given in addition to academic courses (US Information Agency, 1997). Of the 55.8 million children estimated to have attended primary, secondary and high school in the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately 6 million, or 11%, were enrolled in private schools (USA Education of Brief, 2012). Although small in number, an increasing number of parents are choosing to educate their children at home. Students who receive education in this way can take the school leaving exams and receive a diploma (US Information Agency, 1997). A small number of Public Charter Schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools, which are granted special rights and are neither public nor private schools, are also included in the US education system. For this reason, in order to meet the needs of different groups in education, practices such as multicultural education and multicultural programs have been implemented in the country (Erdoğan, 1997).

Each of America's 50 states has its own laws regulating education. While these laws may be similar from state to state, some laws may be completely different. For example, while all states require children to attend school, the compulsory education age varies from 16 in many states to 18 in some states. Therefore, all students in the USA receive education for at least 11 years, regardless of gender, race, color, religion, or physical disability. While some states distribute state funds themselves, playing a major role in the selection of books to be read and course materials to be used throughout the education process, some states leave the selection of books and the determination of the subjects to be taught to local school administrators. Although there is no general national education program throughout the USA, some basic subjects are taught in common. (Fiske & O'Grady, 2000).

Formal education: The USA enacted compulsory education law in all its states in 1918. Between 1920 and 1930, compulsory education laws were enacted in the majority of states. While 90% of children aged 7-13 in the country were enrolled in school in 1920, this rate reached 99% in 1980 (Cremin, 1988). Ültanır (2000) stated that the duration of compulsory education in the USA today varies between 10 and 13 years depending on the

states. Again, depending on the states, compulsory education starts at the age of 5, 6 or 7 and continues until the age of 16 (Table 1).

Table 1. Formal education stages in the USA (Education America)

School	Age	
Graduate Programs	22	Postdoctoral programs
	and above	PhD programs Master programs
College or University	21	Senior (Students who graduate with success in their 4th grade are entitled to a bachelor's degree)
	20	Junior (University 3rd year)
	19	Sophomore (Those who graduate from the 2nd year, or the 2nd year of college are entitled to receive an associate degree diploma)
	18	Freshmen (1st year or 1st year of college)
Secondary Education	17	Grade 12
	16	Grade 11
	15	Grade 10
	14	Grade 9
	13	Grade 8
	12	Grade 7
Primary Education	11	Grade 6
	10	Grade 5
	9	Grade 4
	8	Grade 3
	7	Grade 2
Pre-school Education (Kindergarten)	6	Grade 1
	4-5	Kindergarten

Primary education: The biggest goal of primary education in the US education system is the general intelligence and social development of children between the ages of 6-12 or 15. The system and lesson plans in public and private schools must be in harmony. In primary school, lessons are given to improve skills such as history, literacy, pronunciation, geography, mathematics, music, and painting. The most common school form is the 6-year primary school model (Elementary or Primary School). If a student who has studied for 6 years goes to high school without continuing secondary school, he/she will study for 6 years in high school. In secondary school, students mostly continue their education in English, science, social sciences, mathematics, and physics. In addition to these courses, there are elective courses such as career preparation, fine arts, and foreign languages. Students generally choose nearly half of the courses between 9th and 11th grades. In the 7th, 8th and 9th grades, students begin to plan their future and choose courses that can be useful to them in their future professional life. The duration of education in secondary school, with an enrollment rate of 99%, is 4, 3, 2 years (Demirel, 2000). In foreign language teaching, there are two types of programs implemented in primary schools in the USA. The first of these is FLES (Foreign language in the elementary school), and the second is FLEX (Foreign language experience programs). It covers all primary and secondary education foreign language programs of FLES (Jane, 1989).

Secondary education: In the USA, secondary education starts in the 7th, 8th or 10th grade, depending on the model applied in the region. The schooling rate is 94% (Demirel, 2000). The ratio of those who have completed secondary education in the United States to the relevant age population has also varied. While the ratio of secondary school graduates to the relevant age population in the United States was approximately 8% in 1900, this ratio increased to 80% in 1975 and in some states to over 90% (Bloom, 1998).

High schools: Secondary education generally consists of six years of primary education followed by three years of junior high and three years of upper secondary education (Senior High). Since education systems differ by state, there are also 6-year schools (Combined Junior-Senior High Schools) that combine both levels or 4-year high schools (4 Year High Schools) that provide education after 8 years of primary education. Students who attend high school and leave the intermediate classes can receive a high school diploma by attending evening schools or summer schools (Demirel, 2000). In addition, in the first semester of secondary education, vocational guidance is given importance to guide students in planning their future (Harmanci, 2011). In the USA, different

models are applied depending on the states. We can summarize the applied primary and secondary education models as follows (Education Department of The United States of America, 2012):

- 8+4 Model: Eight-year Elementary School or Primary School / Four-year High School.
- 4+4+4 Model: Four-year Elementary School or Primary School / Four-year Middle School / Four-year High School
- 6+6 Model: Six-year Elementary School or Primary School / Six-year Combined Junior and High School (Comprehensive High School)
- 6+3+3 Model: Six-year Elementary School or Primary School / Three-year Junior High School / Three-year Senior High School.

In some primary and secondary education institutions, students are divided into level groups within the classroom according to their abilities and knowledge levels. It is recorded that this practice, called "Streaming", was followed in 28% of primary schools and 34% of secondary schools as of 1973. However, in many states, especially Washington, this practice has been deemed discrimination by the court and banned (Erdogan, 1997).

Vocational and technical education: The duration of education in vocational and technical education is two years after high school and is paid. Credit application is essential in determining student success at the end of the year. The main purpose of vocational education is to increase the student's knowledge and skills in a particular job or professional field. In addition to the diploma, these students are also issued a professional qualification certificate (Bolay et al., 1996; Demirel, 2000; Ultanir, 2000).

Technical education is schooled at the post-secondary level. In order to have proficiency in technical education, it is necessary to continue 2-year higher education programs. After this associate degree education, the student can transfer to a 4-year higher education institution (Guclu & Bayrakci, 2004).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Reform

The most sweeping change to the federal government's role in education since the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 was the No Child Left Behind Act, passed by the Bush administration in 2001. The NCLB requires states to establish educational standards for different grade levels and take steps to improve the performance of those who do not meet these standards (USA Education of Brief, 2012). The NCLB reform aims to close the large achievement gap between states and schools within states and to provide equal educational opportunities to all children living in the USA (Guclu & Bayrakci, 2004).

NCLB also envisions setting state targets for what students need to know in reading and mathematics as measured by standardized tests in grades 3 through 8. These and similar measures used for accountability on school performance are collected in report cards published annually throughout the state. Although state and local school systems have considerable flexibility to improve performance levels, this law calls for removing students from failing schools over time and cutting funding. Parents who have students in failing schools have the right to send their children to other public schools or schools with special status through horizontal transfer. Such students are also eligible for tutoring or other special services (USA Education of Brief, 2012). Jason Kamras, who was elected national teacher of the year in 2005, stated that the most positive aspect of NCLB was that it "institutionalized high expectations for every child in America"(USA Education of Brief, 2012).

Higher education: The growth in the service sector, along with developments in technology and business, has increased the need for employees who have completed their higher education in the USA (Krauss, 1976). Throughout history, American institutions of higher education have remained bastions of the privileged class, with predominantly white and male populations. This order did not change much until 1944, when the law known as G.I. (a term frequently used for American army soldiers fighting in World War II) was approved. Within the scope of the G.I. Bill of Rights, in addition to state aid to encourage vocational training and homeownership, there was also an article to provide state support for receiving education in almost all legally recognized higher education institutions (USA Education of Brief, 2012).

The autonomous character of the American education system is most evident at the higher education level. The reason for this is that American educational institutions (private) have surpassed public higher education institutions (Demirel, 2000). There are more than 3,600 institutions of higher education in the United States. More than 2100 of these are 4-year and more than 1500 are 2-year. Higher education institutions are administratively divided into two: private schools and public schools. There is no difference between public

universities and private universities in terms of education quality. In the USA, education is paid at both public and private universities. However, the fact that state universities benefit more from government support has made the tuition fees more economical (Education America, 2012).

The enrollment rate in higher education is 29%. Almost every state provides financial support to at least two public universities. Both private universities and public universities have three types of income sources: These are;

- Student fees,
- Donations and
- They are federal funds.

Higher education institutions select their own students. While selecting students, their scores and recommendation letters from general aptitude and achievement tests such as GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) are taken into consideration. Apart from these documents, there are universities that organize a separate selection exam (Erdoğan, 1997). Students who have received a bachelor's degree, if they want to continue their education, continue their education for 1 or 2 more years and are entitled to receive a Master's Degree / Postgraduate Diploma. In addition, Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate programs are also certificate and diploma programs continued after university. Students who have a master's degree can continue their doctorate programs if they wish. Some universities and some departments directly accept students who have received a bachelor's degree into doctoral programs (Education America, 2012).

Teacher Training

Today, all states require a bachelor's degree or five years of university education, except for provisional certificates, in order to teach in the United States (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Many states require teachers to earn a graduate degree such as a master's or doctorate within 10 years (Demirel, 2000). Anyone who wants to teach in American public schools must obtain a state certification in line with the grade level or major they choose, in addition to a college education. In previous periods, teaching certificates in the USA were given for life-long use. Today, some states limit the duration of teaching certifications to three to five years. Teachers who received indefinite certificates in previous periods were not affected by the latest application. (Ornstein & Levine, 2006).

There is no central control over teacher education in the United States. However, teacher education is influenced by different groups and organizations. The church is at the forefront of these institutions. 62% of universities and colleges are associated with the church. Although federal and state governments are not directly involved in teacher education, they are indirectly influential through guidance (Erdogan, 1997).

Requirements for obtaining teaching certification vary by state. This situation prevents teachers from relocating across the country. Many states operate alternative teacher certification programs in addition to traditional teacher certification programs. Today, 47 states and the District of Columbia offer alternative teaching certification programs. There are two main reasons why states offer alternative certification programs. The first is to attract more talented candidates educated in different fields to the teaching profession, and the second is to close the gap in teacher shortage areas such as science and mathematics. The most well-known alternative certification program implemented in the USA with a nationwide impact is the 'Teach for America' (TFA) program. Within the scope of this program, individuals who graduate with high success from various departments of universities other than teaching are selected and hired as teachers, and after undergoing an eight-week intensive training, they are placed in school districts with serious urban problems. (Ornstein & Levine, 2006).

Philosophy of Education

The education system and philosophy currently in force in the USA focuses on teaching students' methods of obtaining information independently and instilling research habits, instead of requiring students to stick to a single book within the framework of a strict curriculum and memorizing information based on the teacher's dictation. In addition, instead of specializing in only one subject at a young age, it is important to develop a broad and tolerant perspective, and to have a wide knowledge and cultural background by taking courses and

researching as many different subjects as possible. It is believed that an individual who has gone through a program suitable for this purpose will be able to evaluate events more healthily, adapt to changing conditions more easily, and find easier and more accurate solutions to problems that may arise. The number of courses given to students in an academic year in America is less than the number of courses given in Turkey. It is desired that students develop in all aspects and can spare time for extracurricular subjects. Students are encouraged to engage in activities such as sports, chess, music, painting, and scientific research. Very detailed information that requires expertise is given to students who are interested in that subject in additional courses. It is also thought that the details can be learned more easily through in-service courses, seminars, and on-the-job training in a short time after starting a job. When the aims of the US education system are examined, it is seen that the aim is to ensure the biological and emotional development of students. It is also aimed to ensure developments appropriate to various cultures arising from the demographic structure of the country (Şahin, 2009).

Comparison of US and Turkish Education Systems

Societies form their education systems in line with the values accepted in their societies. While the education systems of some societies have a centralized feature, the education systems of some societies have a feature based on local administration. For example, while the US education system is based on local government; Turkey's education system has a centralist feature (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of US and Turkish education systems (Harmancı, 2011)

United States Education System	Turkish Education System
The education system is local.	The education system is central.
There is no separate ministry of education at the centre. In the central government, the Department of Health, Education and Social Problems under the General Secretariat of the Presidency carries out educational affairs.	There are many general directorates in the ministry.
There is a state system.	There is a provincial system.
The State Board of Education and the State Director of Education are responsible for the educational affairs of the state.	He/she is the Provincial Director of National Education responsible for the educational affairs of the province.
School principals report to the local government.	School principals report to the central administration.
There is no central higher education institution, universities are autonomous.	The Council of Higher Education has concentrated all authority at the centre.
The school system structure (primary and secondary education) is in 4 different ways: 6+6, 6+3+3, 4+4+4 and 8+4.	The school system structure (primary and secondary education) is 4+4+4.
12 years of education is mandatory.	8 years of education is mandatory.
Programs and legal regulations are made in state assemblies.	Programs and legal regulations are made centrally.
The number of weekly lesson hours in primary education varies by state.	The number of lessons per week in primary education is 30.
The enrollment rate in primary education is 99%.	Schooling rate in primary education is 95.5% gross and 89.7% net.
The language of education is English. However, in classes or courses where most of the students' native language is not English, education can be provided in a foreign language until the students learn English at a sufficient level.	The language of education is Turkish.
Private schools are supported by the central government and local governments.	Private schools pay teachers themselves.
Temporary autonomous universities determine higher education on their own.	There is a central exam for transition to higher education.

The education systems of Türkiye and the USA compared have very different characteristics from each other. The education system implemented in Turkey has a centralized structure and is managed in accordance with this feature. This situation is also reflected in the education system. The US education system is largely based on the local government system. The education system is determined by the states. The central organization, on the

other hand, gets involved in providing financial support to state organizations and in the event of inextricable situations.

Problems Encountered in the US Education System

- The purpose of education needs to be defined in a way that reconciles the needs in terms of academic learning, social order, and vocational training.
- Both educators and students need to understand very well the power of education in developing society and raising awareness of democracy.
- Planning educational techniques for students who vary in terms of ability, social and economic level, vocational training, and aptitude has emerged as a problem for schools.
- Schools must meet the challenges posed by the rapid change in moral standards, especially among young people.
- Eliminating racial discrimination in public education has become a necessity.
- Due to the growing schools and the increasing number of students, the problem of meeting the need for books, buildings and other equipment has arisen.
- Financial support is needed for an education system that is growing and becoming more expensive every year.
- It is necessary to improve teacher education, improve teaching conditions and increase the attractiveness of the profession in order to attract more women and men with the necessary qualifications to the profession (Demirel, 2000).

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The author declares that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the author.

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