



## **Education for all but evaluation for whom? The case of Turkey**

### **“Herkes İçin Eğitim” Ama Kimin İçin Değerlendirme? Türkiye Örneği**

*Hanife Çakıcı*

#### **ÖZET**

*Bu çalışmanın amacı Herkes İçin Eğitim'in dünyada tüm toplumlarda tüm bireylere nitelikli adil bir eğitim sağlamak gibi, çok zor bir hedefin 2015 yılına kadar ne düzeyde etkili ve verimli bir biçimde gerçekleştirildiğini belirlemektir. Bu hedefleri gerçekleştirmek için uluslararası örgütler ilgili ülkelere teknik ve finansal destek sağlamaktadırlar. Ancak, bu değerlendirmelerin yerel kültür, tarih, politik yapı ve değer sistemlerinden bağımsız olarak yapılması, ilgili ülkelerin bu hedefleri yeterince benimsememesine yol açabilmektedir. Bu örnek olay çalışması, Türkiye'de Herkes İçin Eğitim ile ilgili proje ve politika dökümanlarını eleştirel bir biçimde incelemektedir. Uluslararası örgütlerin ilgili ülkelere, gelişimlerini izlemek üzere sağladığı teknik ve ekonomik desteğin ülkelerin kendi ihtiyaçlarına ne kadar uygun olduğu konusunda kendi karar verme ve değerlendirme yöntemleriyle ele alabilmelerinin gerekli olabilir. Ancak, bu genellikle ihmal edilmektedir. Son olarak, EFA'nın küresel olarak önemi, eleştirileri ve bağlam faktörleri ile birlikte, Türkiye'deki EFA uygulamalarının geliştirilmesi konusunda önerilerde bulunmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Herkes için eğitim, değerlendirme, uluslararası örgütler, Türkiye.*

#### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to evaluate Education for All in Turkey. EFA set high ambitious goals in education for all citizens around the World. These goals include specific time frames such as 2015 goals for countries to determine how effective and efficient in realizing these goals. International organizations provide technical and financial support for countries to determine how well they are progressing in terms of these goals. However, conducting evaluations of these goals are usually independent of cultural, historical, politics and local value systems and this create problems in respective countries in terms of ownership. This case study focuses on whether evaluations conducted with the required decision-making systems tailored to their own specific needs. For the analysis, policy and project documents concerning Education for All in Turkey were critically evaluated. The study concludes when evaluations are carried without taking local culture, social-political and economic structures into account, they are likely to fail to reach the goals. Countries needs to develop evaluation frameworks tailored to their own needs and structures. This in turn will likely to help in achieving goals set as in the case of Education for All.*

**Keywords:** *Education for all, evaluation, international organizations, Turkey.*

Education for All (EFA) initiative denotes an ambitious agenda for ameliorating human misery and promoting social justice around the world through first providing and

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: Hanife Çakıcı, Ph.D. Candidate in Evaluation Studies, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. 330 Wulling Hall 86 Pleasant St. SE Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455. cakic002@umn.edu. +1-612-483-6052.

financing quality education for every citizen in every society. Accompanying this ambition is a set of criteria for effectiveness and efficiency by which international donors seek to assess the progress towards achieving the EFA goals by 2015. Despite the sheer number of EFA-related projects and policies in Turkey, however, their effectiveness is unknown because their formal, national evaluations are largely missing in the country (Aydagul, 2008). More importantly, existing evaluations of EFA initiatives are often conducted for the needs and by the criteria of bilateral or multilateral organizations that have provided technical and financial support to Turkey. Conventional wisdom in the field of evaluation dictates that this eventually creates one-sided accountability, and reduces the chances of using evaluation findings to improve national education conditions. This poses a greater risk to the future of EFA since evaluations conducted without crediting cultural, historical, and political structures and value systems, and without seeking national buy-in might perpetuate existing deficiencies in the education system.

Thus, the primary objective of this case study is to provide a critique of evaluations (or lack thereof) of EFA-related projects and policy initiatives around the world drawing from the country case of Turkey based on a critical examination of official EFA documents. The present paper is premised on the argument that evaluations as tools of knowledge production constitute a central place in national educational decision-making, hence need to be conducted by and for the country people based on their own criteria for their own information needs. This case aims to contribute to the field of comparative education by bringing evaluation practice from background to foreground as a primary area of interest, which is rarely done in the field, in understanding the adequacy and future of major global education initiatives. The study problematizes the involvement of international and supranational organizations in developing countries' education activities by analyzing the kind of knowledge produced from these agencies' evaluation practice.

In doing so, the research first briefly describes the background and significance of EFA in global education. Next, the study questions the adequacy and future of EFA through its national evaluations (or lack thereof) in Turkey, and critiques the continued involvement and dominance of Northern-based aid organizations in the field of evaluation. The paper will conclude with policy recommendations by introducing indigenous, contextual evaluation frameworks to improve the impact of EFA in Turkish context.

### **Education for all agenda**

In an era where billions still live in pain and misery, education is viewed as a catalyst to help people realize their full potential. The world houses almost 1.3 billion people nowadays who live on income less than \$1.25 a day, and we have not witnessed a meaningful reduction in this figure yet since 1990s (World Bank, 2013a). Significant differences in life chances across racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural groups resume despite equity-based and infused development efforts around the world. HIV/AIDS is the new normal in many low and middle-income countries for which effective remedies have yet to be discovered. To overcome these challenges and enhance our prosperity, global actors such as World Bank and the United Nations promoted access to education as the main driver in their development

efforts. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirmed every human's right to free education at fundamental stages several decades ago, access to basic, quality education is a lingering problem troubling both developed and developing nations equally. It was towards this endeavor that the World Conference for Education for All was convened in Thailand in 1990 where over 180 countries announced a common commitment to universal basic education for every citizen in every society, which later gave rise to the enactment of Education for All (EFA) as a global policy initiative (UNESCO, 2007).

Funded primarily by the World Bank, EFA targets both quality and quantity of education for children, youth, and adults alike, specifically drawing attention to gender disparities and ethnic inequities. World Bank has financed over 800 education projects/programs under the general theme of EFA since 1990 with a financial burden of almost \$70 billion (World Bank, 2013b). EFA's mission has been articulated in 6 specific goals at the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) to be attained by 2015 (see UNESCO, 2002a). Two of these goals have later been adopted as Millennium Development Goals (i.e., universal primary education and gender equality). To achieve its goals, EFA brings together a pool of national and international governmental and non-governmental entities and agencies in efforts to promote mutual accountability and national ownership towards this global initiative. While donors mobilize financial and technical resources to assist developing countries in achieving the EFA goals, national governments are expected to develop a national education agenda and associated programs in line with the framework. More specifically, countries were encouraged to develop national action plans during the Dakar Framework for Action in line with the existing national education strategies and wider poverty reduction framework through a democratic and coordinated support of all development partners.

Marked as “the most ambitious educational promise ever made” (Smith, 2008), measuring the effectiveness of the EFA movement has gained utmost importance and political currency over the years. The sixth goal of the EFA emphasizes the importance of achieving predetermined learning outcomes based on systematic and reliable education statistics. As a result, monitoring and evaluation emerge as essential activities in improving ongoing programs, holding country governments accountable, and planning for future education reforms. UNESCO is designated as the main player in monitoring the progress towards achieving the EFA goals in every country through UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the EFA Global Monitoring Report. To support the development of these reports, country teams monitor the implementation of EFA-related national education programs, and disseminate results via country assessments. The EFA 2000 Assessment was the first global compilation of such national assessments. These regular global monitoring reports not only aim to demonstrate progress, opportunities, and challenges in achieving thematic goals and specific objectives under the EFA framework related to teaching, learning, youth and leadership but they also maintain the commitment and accountability of each country to universal primary education.

Turkey was among 180 some countries at the World Conference in Thailand and committed to provide access to primary education for all citizens. Education occupies public agenda in Turkey perhaps more often than any other sector largely due to dramatic, and sometimes unexpected changes in national education policies. The country has no doubt taken notable economic and political steps over the last decade to become a strong power both in its highly volatile region and in the ever-changing global economy. Motivated by the aim to improve this performance, Turkish decision makers and thought leaders often underscore the significance of education as a prerequisite to ensure competitive, talented, and adaptive workforce, as well as secure equality and inclusion of all in socio-economic and political life (Erguder, 2013). In light of this overarching goal, educational policies in Turkey have often been appropriated and sometimes justified under the hegemony of bilateral and multilateral organizations such as World Bank, UNICEF, and OECD (Gur, Celik, & Ozoglu, 2012). EFA-framework of which Turkey has been a part since early 1990s is one of these supranational education initiatives.

Following the entrepreneurial spirit of EFA, educational authorities in Turkey have undertaken major educational reforms with the technical and financial support of international donors, and domestic partners. A notable example is the introduction of eight-year compulsory schooling in 1997 (Aydagul, 2008). The most recent extension of compulsory basic primary education to 12 years in 2012 was included in the second EFA National Action Plan (2002) to ensure all children, particularly girls, have access to quality education. In addition to system wide changes, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has implemented several independent projects with support from domestic and international NGOs, multilateral agencies such as World Bank, UNICEF, European Union, and International Labor Organization. Early Childhood Development and Pre-School Education Project, Basic Education Project, Girls' Education Campaign, and Mother-Child Education Programs are to name a few (UNESCO, 1999, 2002b). Since 1990, World Bank supported the implementation of 8 EFA-related education projects in Turkey totaling over \$3 billion (World Bank, 2013b), and the discourse on EFA to this date is still incorporated into various projects and policies by the Turkish educational authorities.

Similar to the larger development landscape, Turkey's success in achieving the EFA goals is somewhat mixed, and different evaluations provide different results. Due to accountability purposes towards donors, in 2000, Turkey reported its first national assessment of progress in providing and increasing quality education for all citizens (UNESCO, 1999). The report outlined the national goals and objectives in relation to the EFA framework, specified indicators for each objective, announced the amount of investment made for each indicator, and provided a road map for future policies and initiatives. According to this assessment, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) expected to achieve four outputs in relation to EFA targets: (1) Full access to education; (2) maximum 30 pupils per class; (3) interactive learning through new instructional technology, and (4) improved adult literacy (UNESCO, 1999). Based on national education statistics only, the report provided a very positive picture in terms of achieving these targeted outputs. On the contrary, according to the global report on Education for All – Is the world on track? (UNESCO, 2002a), Turkey was

grouped with other developing countries for being at risk of not achieving the predetermined goals for primary education net enrollment ratio, gender parity in primary gross enrollment, and adult literacy rates despite the progress being made. Although both national and global reports primarily use statistical information and similar indicators to demonstrate progress, understandings of why these evaluations were conducted in the first place seem to differ dramatically.

The discrepancy between the national and global assessment of Turkey's situation is curious to investigate as it calls for understanding a major gap in our knowledge as to how evaluations can paralyze national decision-making – contrary to their essential use – when they are imposed by international agencies for accountability purposes.

### **Evaluation of development education**

The debate about the role and value of monitoring and evaluation for decision-making remains front and center across the international development landscape. In the closing decades of the last century, evaluation systems and practice have expanded globally as a potential decision-making tool to contexts outside of the global North primarily by northern-based and created aid organizations (Carden & Alkin, 2011). The practice of evaluation is indeed inextricably linked to decision-making (Chelimsky, 2006; Weiss, 1998). Evaluations provide useful information for decision-makers that help guide program and policy design, implementation, and improvement, which is why evaluations can be appealing to managers, administrators, or even policymakers (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). Despite international donors' intensive and expensive efforts to disseminate evaluation systems and practice, state and non-state actors in some developing countries are still widely suspicious and cynical about the value of evaluation in decision-making processes because they do not see the utility of donor-driven evaluation activities for their own information needs (Hay, 2011). In addition, scholars submit that developing country nationals might view evaluation as a Western, imperialist notion that subjugates and marginalizes local knowledge and styles of decision-making (Bhola, 2003; LaFrance, 2004; Smith, 2012; Rai, 2001; Merryfield, 1985).

The domination of international donors in the field of evaluation in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) manifests itself both in conceptualization and utilization of evaluation. First and foremost, aid organizations consider evaluations as a prerequisite to make evidence-based decisions in the developing world as opposed to opinion-based policies that result from “untested views of individuals or groups, often inspired by ideological standpoints, prejudices, or speculative conjecture” (Segone, 2008, p. 27). Parallel to this view, they use the term evaluation interchangeably with performance-based budgeting, results-based management, and financial accountability (see Mackay, 2009; OECD, 2006; World Bank, 2004). Although the learning and accountability functions of evaluation are commonly cited, there is a clear tendency to first ensure financial accountability towards donors (see World Bank, 2004) (e.g., step by step supervision of public expenditures) then ensure improvement in decision-making (Schiavo-Champo, 2005). In return, it is expected that evaluation evidence based on financial indicators will help policy makers in LMICs

demonstrate that they have achieved the citizens' goals in a cost-effective manner, using available resources efficiently (Giovannini, 2009).

In line with their conceptualization of evaluation, Northern-based aid organizations tend to privilege post-positivist scientific evidence with its emphasis on quantification while conducting development evaluations. The significance of quantitative indicators in creating objective, credible, economical evidence for improving decisions is widely recognized across development donors (Segone, Sakvarelidze, & Vadnais, 2009). Some scholars suggest that the dominance of economists and economics in development evaluation might have promoted the production of this kind of evaluation evidence (Mathur, 2009; Riddell, 1999). Thus, Northern-based organizations' evaluation activities focus primarily on methods-first approach with quantitative indicators to show value for financial investment. To support this type of development evaluation, organizations invest in building quantitative databases in many developing countries. For example, the World Bank (2002) reported spending 4 million USD annually to strengthen statistical capacity in LMICs. In sum, aid organizations favor the use of quantitative evidence in development evaluation to ascertain some degree of rigor and objectivity in national decision-making.

A critical examination of existing country evaluations of EFA initiatives in Turkey would clearly exemplify this trend. While formal national policy and program evaluations are largely missing in Turkey (Aydagul, 2008), bilateral and multilateral aid organizations often influence and inform the questions, design, methodology, and utilization of evaluations of global education initiatives in the country (see also USAID, 2001; OECD, 2005; World Bank, 2011; UNDP, 2010). The zeitgeist of logical framework – a common managerial and planning tool promoted by donors – whereby inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes are linked in a linear fashion that demonstrates the value chain of a development effort has been infused into Turkey's assessment of its progress in achieving the EFA goals. For example, financial inputs were attached to specific outputs on which Turkey's performance is to be measured by only quantitative indicators such as gross enrollment rates or the number of classrooms built (see UNESCO, 1999). However, information is provided only on outputs rather than outcomes, and the analysis of process of how the policy is supposed to work to achieve the targeted goals is missing. More importantly, most of the intended outcomes imply rather a sophisticated and interpretive framework for evaluation such as children gaining a broad view of the world, and adapting to the environment they live in. Hence, aid organizations' focus on quantitative indicators to produce rigorous evidence is quite narrow to assist national decision-making. This leads LMICs like Turkey to only monitor the large development efforts for accountability purposes rather than formatively improve and shape these initiatives to better meet the needs of the society.

Indeed, an approach that equates performance-based budgeting and evaluation may not accurately capture the nuances of social programs and policies and may improperly prescribe evaluation models and systems that focus only on financial accountability with quantitative indicators of measurable services without paying attention to the quality of such services (Bamberger, 1991). Kawakami and colleagues (2008) questioned the political

rhetoric of scientific rigor because of which evaluation adheres to strict standards and assume that the strict definitions of validity can become an element of control in the hands of an evaluator – Northern-based aid organizations in this case – that may potentially lead to cultural misinterpretations. Borrowing the term “epistemological racism” from Scheurich and Young (1997), the scholars claim that validity is a “white, majority Western thought” (p. 202) that is likely to compromise the interests of underrepresented groups because it limits the “questions asked, theories considered, designs selected, measurement strategies employed” (p. 202) (cf. Kirkhart, 2005). As such, narrow constructions of validity in the form of rigid quantitative indicators do not leave room for appreciating the cultural nuances in evaluation activities from the formulation of questions to utilization of results. Consequently, aid organizations’ focus on financial monitoring and accountability may reduce the potential of program evaluation’s learning function to improve decision-making (Dabelstein, 2002).

In short, donor domination over the field of evaluation in the developing world reduces the opportunities for evaluation praxis to be an integral part of national decision-making processes (Sridharan & Silva, 2010; Kumar, 2010). Donor’s need for demonstrating “value for money” (OECD, 2010) creates one-sided accountability towards development initiatives whereby developing country governments continuously miss the opportunity to integrate evaluation into their national decision domains, and create a better and more informed foundation for tailoring policies and programs to remedy educational problems.

### **Future of EFA and evaluation**

Despite considerable progress, the EFA initiative will fall short of achieving all of its objectives around the world by 2015, and Turkey is no exception (UNESCO, 2007). Available monitoring and evaluation evidence suggests that the progress on achieving the EFA goals by 2015 is somewhat mixed, and varies depending on the region. While a majority of countries have made substantial progress in providing access to primary education, over 70 million children are still out of school; most of these children are girls and live in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2013c). Turkey also continues to face persistent enrollment and attainment gaps in secondary and high school education (see World Bank, 2007; Education Reform Initiative, 2012). A gap in the base of knowledge about how government programs and policies work to improve educational outcomes for whom under what circumstances remains as a significant obstacle in Turkey to remedy educational problems.

While national evaluations of EFA-related education initiatives could fill in this gap, many LMICs conduct evaluations based on quantitative indicators only as a donor requirement without understanding its utility or practicality for their decision-making. In the absence of compelling, contextual information, it may be premature for decision-makers in Turkey and other LMICs to design comprehensive education reforms that impact the lives of citizens. As a result, related policy initiatives might be ineffective, hence miss high social returns.

The dominance of majority privilege in the field of evaluation in LMICs has long demanded answer to the question of whose interests are being served by Northern-based

organizations' evaluation agendas, models, and questions (Sridharan & Silva, 2010; LaFrance & Nichols, 2008; Hopson, Kirkhart & Bledsoe, 2012). These calls gave rise to an indigenous evaluation approach that gives prominence to historical, social, cultural, and political context in designing, conducting, and using evaluations for in-country decision-making. This approach supports the evolution of indigenous evaluation cultures and capabilities by and for the developing country nationals to self-determine their understandings of social problems, responses, and ways to create useful knowledge that will contribute to the country's national decision-making (Smith, 2012; Kawakami et al., 2008). Rejecting Northern-based metanarratives and essential meanings in the practice of evaluation, these scholars imply that there is not a unified and fixed meaning of evaluation and they advocate for bottom-up, contextually congruent evaluation systems in developing countries to improve national policies and programs (LaFrance & Nichols, 2008). This approach seeks to eliminate the influence and control of Northern-based aid organizations in the field of evaluation, testing all evaluation theories and methods from scratch based on country information needs so that evaluations can penetrate into national decision domains and meaningfully contribute to decision-making (Hay, 2010; Carden, 2010).

Although the literature on indigenous understanding of evaluation in developing countries is in its infancy, this approach still provides clear and justifiable points for improving the prospects for achieving the EFA goals in Turkey and other LMICs. Recent emerging forms of national evaluation systems in Turkey (see Turk, Yalcin, & Unsal, 2006; Dincer & Yilmaz, 2003) provide a policy window for diffusing evaluative thinking into national education policymaking process based on Turkish cultural, historical, and socio-economic context that could continuously provide responsive feedback about the shortcomings of policies and programs. More especially, Public Financial Management and Control Law (PFMC) No. 5018, which requires every public institution to prepare and implement a strategic plan to improve administrative performance, and the statutory decree No. 652 concerning the reorganization of the Ministry of National Education, which resulted in the establishment of Monitoring and Evaluation Units for the first time, are notable illustrations of this window of opportunity to eliminate the influence of Northern-based aid organizations in national evaluation efforts.

All in all, social, political, cultural and economic structures constrain the developing countries' ability to progress, and these structures can be easily crystallized by the donor driven, funded and mandated evaluations throughout the history of development assistance. Thus, if the international community is to achieve the EFA goals by 2015, they should carefully examine and be sensitive and responsive to cultural norms and values; national sensitivities, political systems, and interests; the styles of decision-making and communication; and local knowledge, and social structures in each country context while conducting evaluations. Indigenous evaluation framework for assessing the progress in achieving the EFA goals is a step in the right direction for all.



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