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## Basic Principles of primary school education in ottoman empire

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When studied the educational institutions of Ottoman Civilization which constitutes a six-century-long part of Islamic Civilization, one appreciates its great importance from the point of Islamic teaching and training. Not from the point of its history but its contents and particulars Primary Educational Institutions in Ottomans are seen to possess guiding aspects even today, in many of its ways.

In this article I have tried to bring solutions to problems met in primary education in our times, within frame-work of basic principles on which primary educational institutions in Ottomans rested.

Main principles of Ottoman Primary Education are as follows;

### 1. *Primary education started at early age.*

In Ottoman society a child started his education at the age of 4-5<sup>1</sup>. Thus «Ottoman Primary Educational Institutions» combined within themselves, to a certain extent, the kindergartens of our time. The most important of all, it is the understanding of common moral values among people which determines harmony in societies. That is, when individuals in a nation are in agreement in the understanding of common values such as bads-and-goods, wrongs-and-rights, such a nation can not be expected to fail easily in their worldly affairs. The acquirement of individuals a similar understanding of such values depends entirely on the similarity in family-upbringing from childhood. This, however, can be provided in

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1 Nisvân-ı İslâm, Fâtıma Aliyye, İstanbul — 1309; p. 23; Türkiye Maarif Tarihi, Nâfi Atuf, İstanbul — 1930, p. 30.

schools by training children to adopt similar habits and attitudes at very early ages. For establishment of habits and attitudes in individual's personality, therefore, it becomes necessary to join kindergartens and primary schools together.

Another benefit in starting primary education at an early age is that, children thus will have an opportunity of receiving a common and proper upbringing under a school-roof instead of being left to teachings and trainings of street-games.

The effect of early beginning primary education on the start of further education or professional life and on self-adoption to life itself is beyond all denials.

No doubt completion of primary education at an age of vivid and robust mind would produce positive results as far as the teacher and his pupil are concerned.

Also, early starting education is a kind of good fortune for those families who are incapable of giving their children essentials of Islamic teachings and proper upbringing at home.

A joint kindergarten-and-primary school education, thus, provides the means to children to receive a knowledge of Islamic attitudes and customs as well as necessary teachings for a practical Islamic life.

*2. Very few subjects were taught. No unnecessary knowledge was given, thus education took a short time.*

Primary education should give only essential teachings necessary for a practical life and not the details. That is, reading and writing, simple arithmetics and essentials of how to live like a muslim... If these can be firmly and thoroughly taught to children in primary educational institutions then the object is achieved. To increase the number of subjects and to hold children responsible of a wide knowledge which they are bound to forget easily as a consequence of their young age, would do no good but exhaust their fresh mind, decrease the quality and lengthen the duration of education. Setting off from such understanding in Ottoman society, up to 19 th century, primary school children were held responsible of reading Koran properly and learning the elements of the religion, some elementary arithmetics and how to read and write<sup>2</sup>. Those who learnt these properly were taken as completed their primary education and not compelled to spend a fixed number of years in the school.

2 Süleymaniye Vakfiyesi, Edit. by. K.E. Kürkcüoğlu, Ankara — 1962, p. 50.

Thus depending upon their ability and industriousness children would benefit from the variable duration of primary education. At the same time problems met in having industrious and capable children together with lazy and incapable ones would have disappeared. Today in Turkey each and every primary school-child, whether he is capable or not, has to spend at least five years in the name of learning mostly unnecessary and timeless knowledge. Even the process of reading and writing which could be mastered within 2-3 months can not be taught properly after five years of education.

3. *Schools were next to a mosque and included in the same foundation.*

From the point of up-bringing children it is very important to choose a place for a primary school, as they happen to be at the age of copying everything they see around like a photographic-camera. Although this same argument applies for all other educational institutions it bears a particular importance in deciding for a place and environment where primary school-children will get their teaching, play about and meet their other needs. It is a matter of teaching and training pointed out in the instructions that children should spend their leisure time in a safe and protected environment. A primary school-child in direct contact with street and having no opportunity to spend his breaks between garden-walls is bound to be overcome by improper up-bringing. Primary educational institutions in Ottomans were mostly situated within a foundation comprising a mosque, an Islamic University (Medrese), a library, a kitchen (İmâret), a public fountain (Sebîl) and baths. In the absence of such a complete environment it was considered a prime necessity to plan and build primary schools next to mosques. I think it is not difficult to guess the good personal qualities that children of 5-8 years old will gain when they are in contact with people attending prayers in the mosque and their fresh minds become accustomed to Koranic recitations and prayer-call.

4. *Wakf as an establishment.*

As necessary and basic knowledge are taught in primary education each and every child has to go through it. This can only be fulfilled by providing all related facilities and establishing these institutions all over the country. And this is not a problem for the state to handle alone. In

other words establishing educational institutions in every part of the country is quite a heavy task. In Ottomans the problem was tackled by establishing these institutions in the form of Wakfs and thus it became possible to build them everywhere down to villages without costing the state a heavy burden<sup>3</sup>. Apart from that all the running expenses were met by wakf. Thus was it possible also to give the children their pocket money, provide their clothing, and other needs without demanding any kind of school fees<sup>4</sup>.

5. *Orphan and poor were preferred.*

As those under their parent's guardian and of rich families could meet educational expenses themselves, in Ottoman schools the first preference was given to orphan and poor children<sup>5</sup>.

When poor and destitute in the Western Christian societies are even robed of their human rights, this understanding of preferring orphans and pors at the first place in the Islamic world shows how esteemed and great the Islamic Civilization is.

6. *There was a thight discipline.*

A child at the age of primary education is in his most critical years as far as development of his habits, attitudes and manners are concerned. He should not be considered only as a game-child and this period of his life which is of great importance from the point of building up his future personality and character should be spent in a disciplinized surroundings. To give a child unlimited freedom at this period not only may deprive him from acquiring a number of good habits and attitudes but also make him a spoilt and erratic character. On the other hand to keep him under excessive pressure will weaken his abilities and cause him to grow up as a timid personality. So primary education under a moderately disciplinized atmosphere may eliminate such abnormalities as above.

3 Kastamonu Vilâyeti 1306 Sene-i Hicriyyesi Sâlnâmesi, p. 436; Sâlnâme-i Vilâyet-i Bağdad Sene-i Hicriyye 1319, p. 199.

4 Fâtih Mehmed II Vakfiyeleri, Ankara — 1938, p. 257; Süleymaniye Vakfiyesi, pages 37, 43, 48 and 50.

5 Fâtih Mehmed II Vakfiyeleri, p. 257; Süleymaniye Vakfiyesi, p. 37.

### 7. *Staff were humble but qualified*

In Ottomans until Tanzimat\* staff of primary schools, almost in every district, was usually made up by a teacher, his assistant and a cleaner. Each one of these three people had to have high personal qualities and also be highly qualified for the job. This can be seen in the deeds clearly<sup>6</sup>.

No doubt positive influence of such qualified staff on teaching and training of children who are at the age of developing personality and acquiring habits and manners, can not be denied.

### 8. *Lessons were done together, in harmony*

In Ottomans, primary school children, usually at the age of 4-8, used to learn alphabet and glossary together, uttering loudly in a harmony. This is a method accepted to be a very successful way of teaching in modern pedagogy today. In this way a child learns his lesson while he enjoys himself and therefore it is the best short-cut and sure way of teaching especially in a system where kindergarten and primary school educations are combined together and education starts at an early age.

### 9. *Children were helped by assistant*

In all early Ottoman teaching and training institutions there were assistants to help teachers.

They were responsible of helping children to prepare their lessons before coming to the presence of the teacher the next day<sup>7</sup>. Thus by the help of assistant children would study in discipline, the work of teacher would become easier and those children who do not normally work themselves when alone thus would be encouraged.

### 10. *School buildings were simple.*

Primary school buildings in Ottomans were generally of two storey buildings and had a few rooms. In the first floor there used to be a cellar for wood and coal, an ablution place, a cleaner's room and a toilet.

\* The political, social and cultural reforms of Sultan Abdülmejid in 1839.

6 Fâtiḥ Mehmed II Vakfiyyeleri, p. 257; Süleymaniye Vakfiyesi, pages 37 and 50.

7 Fâtiḥ Mehmed II Vakfiyyeleri, p. 257; Süleymaniye Vakfiyesi, p. 50.

Class-rooms were in second floor so as to have the benefit of more sunshine, to be free from dampness and also away from street-noise<sup>8</sup>.

The fact that school buildings were simple and did cost much was number one factor for the spread of primary education all over the country. Today's costly school buildings are first to come to one's mind when primary education is thought of.

As teaching was done after beginning in the name of Allah and remembering Allah's Blessings for the owner of school's wakf with everybody sitting kneeled-down on carpets<sup>9</sup>, the result was obviously very effective from both spiritual and material point.

### 11. *Encouragements.*

A number of encouraging measures which, I believe, produces positive results on both parents and children can be seen exercised in Ottomans as well. For instance ceremonies and feasts organized by parents, depending on their economic well-being, when their children started to primary education was a kind of encouragement for the children<sup>10</sup>. Also to be a pupil whose needs including field-trip expenses<sup>11</sup> and pocket money met by wakf<sup>12</sup>, and to be a schoolboy who was given an opportunity to have meal with local governor once a year as his guest and accompanying pocket money given by him as «teeth-fee» were some of the attractive aspects of being a school-child for young and old everybody<sup>13</sup>.

I am in the opinion that most of this article which I tried to outline under eleven subtitles constitutes «Islamic Primary Educational Principles» which would be beneficial in all muslim countries including Turkey even in this century.

No doubt it is the right and task of every muslim nation to make use of «Ottoman Civilization and Her Institutions» which is a six-century-long part of the whole Islamic Civilization.

8 For the architectural peculiarity see. Osmanlı Devri İstanbul Sıbyan Mektepleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme, Özgönül Aksoy, İstanbul — 1968, pages 128-171.

9 Türkiye Maarif Tarihi, Osman N. Ergin, İstanbul — 1939-1943, volume I, p. 76.

10 Ibid, p. 77-82.

11 Türk Vakıfları ve Vakfiyeleri Üzerine Mücmel Bir Etüd, H. Bâki Kunter, İstanbul — 1939, p. 27.

12 Türkiye Maarif Tarihi, O.N. Ergin, volume I, p. 73.

13 Ibid, p. 76.

## — Ö Z E T —

İslâm medeniyetinin altı asırlık uzun bir dönemini işgâl eden Osmanlı medeniyetinin eğitim müesseseleri tetkik edildiğinde, bu müesseselerin İslâmî öğretim ve eğitim nokta-i nazarından taşıdığı ehemmiyet açıkça görülür. Aynı zamanda Osmanlı ilk öğretim müesseseleri pek çok hususlarda bugün dahi numûne alınabilecek hususiyetlere sahiptir.

Osmanlı ilk tahsil hayatının temel hususiyetleri şu cihetlerden tedkik edilebilir :

1 — Öğretime başlama yaşı : Osmanlı cemiyetinde bir çocuk 4-5 yaşlarında öğretime başlar. Bu cihetiyle zamanımız ana okulları ile mütâbâkat halindedir. Kıymet hükümlerinin kazanılması geniş ölçüde çocukluk çağındaki aile terbiyesine dayanır. Sonra çocuk, cemiyetin diğer fertleri ile paylaşacağı huy ve davranışları küçük yaşta başlayan eğitimle elde eder. Bu sebeble ana okulunu ilk öğretime raptetmenin ehemmiyet ve lüzumu âşikârdır.

Küçük yaşlarda başlayan talim-terbiye, çocuklarına islâmî eğitim verme imkânı bulamayan ebeveyne bu imkânı temin ettiği gibi, çocukları da sokak yerine okul çatısı altında terbiye edilme imkânına kavuşturur.

2 — Dersler : İlk öğretim sadece amelî hayatta gerekli bilgileri vermeli, teferruata girilmemelidir. 19. asra kadar Osmanlı ilk öğretim müesseselerinde bu esas içinde kalınmış, çocuklar Kur'an'ı âdâb ve erkânına uygun olarak okuyabilmek, güzelce okuyup yazmak ve basit matematik bilgilerinden mesûl tutulmuşlardır.

3 — Okulun yeri : Osmanlı eğitim müesseseleri bilhassa cami, medrese, kütüphane, imaret, sebil ve hamamdan müteşekkil bir külliye içinde yerini alır. Eğer böyle bir külliye yoksa camilere yakın bir yerde kurulurdu. Böylece 5-8 yaşları arasındaki çocuklar camide okunan Kur'an âyetlerini kolayca ezberler ve namaz âdâb ve erkânını görerek bellerlerdi.

4 — Vakıf : Osmanlı ilk öğretim müesseseleri vakıf esasına müstaid olarak kurulur ve desteklenirdi. Bu sayede hem devlete yük olmaksızın kurtulur hem de çocukların tabii ihtiyaçları ânında karşılanırdı.



5 — İlk tahsil müesseselerine yetim ve fakir çocuklar tercihen alınırđı.

6 — Disiplin : Çocukların şahsiyet ve karakter teşekkülü ilk tahsil yıllarında başlar. Bu devrelerde onlara tanınan hudutsuz ve müdâhalesiz serbesti kötü huy edinmelerine, şımarık ve derbeder büyümelerine yol açar. Aşırı baskı ise onun kabiliyetlerini köreltir. Ürkek mahcup bir kişi olurlar. O halde tatbik edilecek mutedil bir disiplin yukarıdaki mahzurları bertaraf edecektir.

7 — Vazifeli memurlar : Tanzimata kadar ilk öğretim müesseselerinde 1 hoca, 1 kalfa (öğretmen yardımcısı) ve bir de kayyum (hademe) istihdam edilirdi. Bunların mesleklerinde ehil kişiler olmalarına bilhassa önem verilirdi.

8 — Eğitim usulü : Okulda alfabe ve gerekli açıklamalar sesli olarak hep bir ağızdan bir ahenk içinde öğretilirdi. Bugün modern pedagojide bu öğretim metodunun çok başarılı olduđu kabul edilmektedir.

9 — Öğretmen yardımcıları : Bütün ilköğretim müesseselerinde öğretmen yardımcıları (kalfa) vardır. Onlar talebeye derslerini hazırlamalarında yardımcıdırlar. Bu şekilde talebenin disiplin içinde çalışması temin edilir, öğretmenin işi de kolaylaşırdı.

10 — Okulun yapısı : Okul iki katlı ve birkaç odadan müteşekkildir. İlk katta odun ve kömürlük, abdest alma yeri, müstahdem odası ve helâ bulunur. Dershaneler ikinci kattadır. Dershanelerin ikinci katta oluşu sayesinde bol güneş ışığı sınıflara dolar, rutubet yoktur ve aynı zamanda cadde gürültüsünden de uzaktır.

11 — Teşvik : Osmanlı eğitim sisteminde hem ebeveyn hem de çocukların öğretime teşvik edildikleri tatbikatta açıkça görülebilmektedir. Meselâ veliler tarafından düzenlenen okula başlama merasimleri ve âmin alayları çocukları öğretime teşvik edici mahiyettedir. Aynı zamanda vakıf tarafından çocuklara verilen cep harçlığı, ziyafet ve dış kirası küçük büyük herkesi öğretime teşvik eden âmillerdendir.