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POPULATION ISSUE IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND ITS REFLECTIONS ON SECONDARY EDUCATION GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Population policies aim to ensure that a country has the necessary qualified population and that population size positively impacts economic development. In Türkiye, population issues have occupied an important place in the development plans prepared for five-year periods since 1963. This study examines how the population policies included in Türkiye's development plans are reflected in geography teaching programs for secondary schools. Using the document analysis method, the five-year development plans were compared with the geography teaching programs provided by the Ministry of National Education. Social issues addressed in development plans are generally the subject of curricula at different levels. Population issues are covered in the 'Human Systems' units of the secondary school geography teaching programs. The findings show that development plans frequently address issues such as population growth, migration, and labor force planning. These issues are specifically addressed under the population geography unit in secondary school geography programs and are conveyed to students in their social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Migration movements, population distribution, and demographic changes were included in the course content in line with the plan's emphasis. Consequently, it has been concluded that the priorities of development plans regarding population issues are directly reflected in the content and objectives of geography teaching programs by establishing a strong link between education and development policies.

Keywords: Population, Population policies, Development plans, Secondary education geography curriculum, Geography education.

KALKINMA PLANLARINDA NÜFUS MESELESİ VE ORTAÖĞRETİM COĞRAFYA ÖĞRETİM PROGRAMLARINA YANSIMALARI

Öz

Nüfus politikaları temelde ülkenin ihtiyaç duyduğu nitelikli nüfusa sahip olmayı ve nüfus büyüklüğünün ekonomik kalkınmayı pozitif anlamda etkilemesini hedeflemektedir. Türkiye'de 1963 yılından itibaren 5 yıllık dönemler için hazırlanan kalkınma planlarında nüfus meselesi kendine önemli bir yer edinmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'de kalkınma planlarında yer alan nüfus politikalarının ortaöğretim coğrafya öğretim programlarına nasıl yansıdığını incelemektir. Araştırmada doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılarak beş yıllık kalkınma planları ile Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı tarafından hazırlanan coğrafya öğretim programları karşılaştırılmıştır. Kalkınma planlarında ele alınan sosyal konular genellikle farklı seviyelerdeki müfredatların konusudur. Nüfus konuları ortaöğretim coğrafya öğretim programlarında "Beşerî Sistemler" ünitelerinde işlenmektedir. Bulgular, kalkınma planlarında nüfus artışı, göç ve işgücü planlaması gibi konulara sıkça değinildiğini göstermektedir. Ortaöğretim coğrafya programlarında ise bu konuların özellikle nüfus coğrafyası ünitesi altında işlendiği ve öğrencilere toplumsal, ekonomik ve çevresel boyutlarıyla aktarıldığı belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, plandaki vurgulara paralel olarak göç hareketleri, nüfus dağılımı ve demografik değişimlerin ders içeriklerinde yer aldığı görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, kalkınma planlarının nüfus meselelerine ilişkin önceliklerinin, coğrafya öğretim programlarının içerik ve hedeflerine doğrudan yansıdığı; böylece eğitim ile kalkınma politikaları arasında güçlü bir bağ kurulduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nüfus, Nüfus politikaları, Kalkınma planları, Ortaöğretim coğrafya öğretim programları, Coğrafya eğitimi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Countries attach great importance to population matters, which are contemporary social issues. The concept of population has been defined in many academic studies. In the Encyclopedia of Population, the term population is defined by McNicoll (2003) as "the total number of people living in a country, city, town or other settlement" (Demeny and McNicoll, 2003: 730). In the dictionary of the Turkish Language Association, it is explained as "the total number of people living in a country, a region, a house at a certain time, the population" (TDK, 2024). Özgür (2017) defined population as "a multidimensional concept that deals with the size, increase, distribution, density, and characteristics of the number of people living in an area" (p.3). Based on these definitions, the phenomenon of population expresses the numerical size, spatial distribution, and socioeconomic characteristics of the human population (Köse and Sertkaya Doğan, 2022). At the spatial level, population dynamics are open to change over time depending on births, deaths, and migration movements (Karaca and Karakuş, 2020). In this regard, knowing the size, distribution, and structural characteristics of the human population living in rural and urban areas within the country's borders is of great importance in terms of producing population-related policies.

Population constitutes the basis of the human resources of countries and has maintained its importance since ancient times (Kayacan, 2022). Although countries implement different population policies depending on their socioeconomic conditions, they seek to reveal the population size of the people living within their geographical borders. States with a central government have recorded their population size using different methods (Gibson and Jung, 2002). Some of these records were kept periodically and regularly, and some were kept irregularly (Karal, 1943). However, since the 19th century, population censuses have been conducted at certain intervals (Köse and Sertkaya Doğan, 2022). Countries generally consider the results of population censuses when creating population policies.

According to population inquiries, the demographic characteristics of countries may have changed throughout history. In the change, wars, famine, epidemics, extension of human life due to developments in health, population policies implemented by nations, and the transformation of family structures over time are effective (Haupt and Kane, 2000). Compared to world history, population growth is a very new phenomenon. Until the late 1700s, birth and death rates remained relatively close to each other. Therefore, the world population increased slowly and reached one billion in the early 1800s. Since the 19th century, the use of new technologies in agriculture and production, as well as developments in health and hygiene, have been effective in extending human life. Because of these developments, although death rates decreased, birth rates continued to increase, and the world population reached 2 billion in approximately 130 years. According to the United Nations (UN) population surveys, the total world population reached 4 billion in 1975, doubling in 45 years. The estimated world population will exceed 8 billion by 2024 (US Census Bureau, 2024).

Parallel to modernization, the socioeconomic and sociocultural transformation of countries has caused rapid changes in the quantitative or qualitative characteristics of the population (Köse, 2021). In addition, the population policies implemented by countries to control population size and growth rate have been directly effective in fundamentally changing the demographic characteristics of societies. Population policies implemented immediately after the establishment of the Republic in Türkiye played a key role in shaping the demographic characteristics of the country (Köse and Sertkaya Doğan). When these population policies are examined, it becomes clear that the policies do not show integrity. In different periods, both pronatalist (encourages people to procreate) policies that support population growth and antinatalist (encourages people to slow down the fertility rate) policies that balance the population have been implemented (Doğan, 2011; Oktay, 2014; Aydoğan and Çoban, 2016; Özdemir, 2017). Pronatalist policies were adopted between 1927 and 1965, antinatalist policies between 1965 and 2014, and pronatalist policies again after 2014. The General Public Health Law dated 1930 (1593 Sayılı Umumi Hifzıssıhha Kanunu) is the most basic law that determines pronatalist policies

(Akin and Aykut, 2011). At the same time, the compulsory marriage law (bachelor tax), registration of children born out of cohabitation, road tax, income tax, and registration of the people who emigrated from other countries are pronatalist policies that aim to increase the population of the newly founded Republic of Türkiye (Semiz, 2010). Moreover, the increase in births has been encouraged by the Ministry of Health. In 1936, an amendment was made to Turkish criminal law to prevent the dissemination of contraceptive information and prohibit sterilization (DPT, 1963). During this period when birth-increasing policies dominated, the country's population increased rapidly and reached 24 million according to the 1955 general census results. Shortly after this period, the State Planning Organization was established in 1960. Because of the rapid population growth, officials of the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare and the State Planning Organization reached a consensus on the necessity of birth-balancing policies instead of pronatalist population policies. At the same time, the First Five-Year Development Plan was prepared in 1963, and the necessity of changing pronatalist policies was emphasized within it. The population issue has been addressed in detail in the development plans that have been put into practice regularly since this date.

Social issues, such as population, economics, and tourism, addressed in development plans are often the subject of curricula at different levels. Population is a fundamental theme of geography education in Türkiye and worldwide. Population is a factor that directly influences the economic, social, and environmental development of societies. The Population Geography course presents an overview of how the population is addressed, along with its content and teaching activities. In secondary school geography programs, the topic of population is generally covered under the units of settlement and population. These units address the distribution, density, structure, change, and future of the population, as well as migration movements, fertility, gender, and ethnicity (Robbins, 1998; Sharma, 2000; Şahin and Şahin, 2023). The fundamental aim of including the topic of population in the curriculum is for students to gain the skills to interpret demographic data, develop map literacy, and understand the relationship between population and development. This study analyzes how Türkiye's secondary education geography curriculum, particularly through textbooks and programs, covers population geography. As mentioned in the literature, policies aimed at both increasing and decreasing the population size have been implemented in Türkiye over time. The qualitative and quantitative characteristics of Türkiye's population have been shaped within the framework of these policies. One of the goals of this study is to investigate whether the population policies implemented in the country are included in the geography curriculum.

2. POPULATION POLICIES

Population policies are defined by the United Nations (UN) (2019) as actions and programs designed to contribute to countries achieving their social, economic, political, demographic, and other social goals. These policies can directly affect the size, geographic distribution, growth rate, and other demographic characteristics of the population. Micklin (1992) emphasized that population policies are designed by governments to produce demographically specific results. Therefore, policies implemented for reasons such as managing national or transnational migration processes, controlling the population growth rate, and finding solutions to the elderly population growth rate have socioeconomic and legal foundations. Additionally, population policies may consist of only a single aim such as to increase or reduce fertility (Yücesahin et al., 2016).

Population size has been recognized as a symbol of military, political, and economic superiority throughout human history (Aksoy, 2016). Because of the wars that lasted until the mid-20th century, the idea that the population would gain political and military power was reinforced, and countries aspired to increase their population. Depending on the socioeconomic developments and the modernization process in the 19th and 20th centuries, the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the country's population also changed. In the last 200 years, wars, social disturbances, and epidemics around the world have caused a decline in the population; technological advances, improvements in healthcare systems, and social welfare have led to population growth. During this period, countries implemented different policies to control the size and development of their total

population (McIntosh, 1982). Both pronatalist and antinatalist policies have been implemented in different countries to improve the quantity and quality of the population (Table 1) (Heitlinger, 1991; Atalay Şimşek and Atalay, 2020). In fact, the main objective of these population policies is to reach the optimal population level for countries. In this respect, population policies need to be evaluated not only on the scale of geographical space but also in the context of time. As is well known, the decline in fertility rates in countries around the world, especially in the European continent, became evident during the latter quarter of the 19th century. The downward trend in birth rates has been taken seriously by various governments, and significant resources have been allocated to increase births (Bradatan and Firebaugh, 2007). In France, which has the longest history of fertility decline on the European continent, pronatalist policies began to be implemented in the second quarter of the 19th century (Quine, 1995; Yüksel, 2015). In other European countries with low population growth rates, pronatalist population policies have been enacted, and coercive or noncoercive decisions have been implemented since World War I and II. (Pendleton, 1978). For example, Germany and Italy have implemented coercive and systematic population policies to accelerate population growth. Tax reforms, child benefits, and marriage credits were introduced as pronatalist policies in most European countries between 1920 and 1940 (Bock, 1991). Additionally, Sweden implemented more flexible policies to maintain a balanced population growth rate.

Table 1. *Decisions Taken by Countries in Different Periods within the Scope of Population Policies.*

	Pronatalist Policies	Antinatalist Policies
Economic Decisions	Maternity allowance	Free contraception
	Tax reductions	Free education
	Child benefit	Incentives to postpone births
Social Decisions	Maternity leave	Contraceptive training
	Postponement of family planning	Family planning campaigns
	Child Care Subsidy	Propaganda and advertisements
	Lowering the marriage age	Private clinics for family planning
Health Decisions	Restricting abortion	Legalization of abortion
	Prohibition of sterilization	Legalization of sterilization
	Banning contraceptive methods	Free contraceptive pills

On the contrary, decisions aiming to have fewer children in order to reduce the population growth rate are considered an antinatalist population policy (Morioka, 2021). Countries with a population growth rate above the development rate have followed population policies that prioritize family planning to achieve economic development goals. The One-Child Policy has long been implemented in China. In the mid-20th century, India adopted an official antinatalist population policy that encouraged national family planning to control births (Kirk and Nortman, 1967). Japan is also one of the countries that have enacted a series of decisions for the control of population growth through concerted family planning programs (May, 2012). After 1960, the number of countries adopting population policies based on family planning has increased rapidly. Population policies, including birth control methods, have attracted the interest of developing countries, considering that high fertility levels and rapid population growth are a major obstacle to socioeconomic development (Wisensale and Khodair, 1998).

3. POPULATION ISSUE IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Türkiye entered the planned period with the implementation of the First Five-Year Development Plan in 1963. In the following years, development plans were implemented at 5-year intervals, in which many social issues ranging from economy to population were evaluated and priority development goals for the future were determined. Before evaluating the population issue within the scope of development plans, it would be appropriate to reveal the effects of the decisions taken in the 40-year period from 1923 to 1963 on the population of Türkiye.

Türkiye lost a large portion of its population during World War I and the Turkish War of Independence, and shortly after the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the first general census

was conducted to determine its total population. In this census conducted in 1927, the total population of Türkiye was determined to be 13,648,270. Since this date, considering that the total population is low, policies aimed at increasing the population have been brought to the agenda (Semiz, 2010). The pioneering policy aimed at population growth is the General Public Health Law, which came into force in 1930 (Eryurt et al., 2013). Mainly due to pronatalist policies and the high fertility rate, the total population increased from 13.6 million to 28 million from the first census to 1960 (DİE, 1995; DİE, 2003; HÜNEE, 2009).

In the First Five-Year Development Plan (1963-1967), the population was evaluated in all its aspects under the title of "Population Issue". First, in this chapter, there is a close relationship between population size and economic development, and the necessity of clear population policies is emphasized. In addition, on the grounds that Türkiye's population is rapidly increasing, it has been suggested that policies that support population growth should be drastically changed. In this regard, Population Planning Law No. 557 dated 1965 (557 Sayılı Nüfus Planlaması Hakkında Kanun) constitutes the first of the policies aimed at balancing population growth. Because of this population policy and the socio-economic changes experienced in society, the total fertility rate began to decrease slowly.

In the Second Five-Year Development Plan (1968-1972), which was put into effect in 1968, the population issue was examined under the title "Türkiye's Population and Characteristics of Social Structure". Similarly, this development plan aims to reduce the population growth rate to a level that will not affect economic development. Additionally, family planning was also mentioned in this development plan.

In the Third Five-Year Development Plan covering the years 1973-1977, population characteristics were evaluated under the title "Developments in the Social Domain". In this heading, the decline in birth and death rates since 1950 has been evaluated. It has been emphasized that although the birth rate has decreased compared to previous years, Türkiye has a young population structure due to the high fertility rate. In addition, it was stated that the rate of the dependent population was high, and emphasis was placed on improving the qualitative characteristics of the individuals in this age group.

In the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979-1983), population, employment, and labor force were analyzed under the heading "Human Resources". It is underlined in this development plan that population policies are an extension of socio-economic policies. In this context, it is emphasized that prenatal care services should be conducted effectively and that health practices that prioritize reducing infant mortality rates should be considered together with population policies. In the early years of the Republic, population size was defined as economic, military, and political power, and population policies were implemented in this context. Nearly half a century later, the necessity of population policies aimed at meeting the health needs of the society and increasing the level of welfare due to rapid population growth has come to the fore. Accordingly, the Population Planning Law No. 2827 (2827 Sayılı Nüfus Planlaması Hakkında Kanun) was enacted in 1983, and the principles of population planning were determined within this framework.

In the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1985-1989) prepared in 1984, it was emphasized that the most important component of socioeconomic development is human resources. However, it has been stated that improving the qualitative characteristics of the total population has been adopted as a basic principle. Expectations that the birth rate and population growth rate will decrease in the coming years due to the increase in social welfare have become even stronger. In this regard, it has been reported that it is mandatory to meet the basic needs of the society such as education, nutrition, and shelter in settlements where fertility is still high. As such, it was indicated that individuals' levels of benefiting from social welfare and social security services would be increased.

In the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1990-1994), the population issue was evaluated as "Human Resources". Improving the qualitative characteristics of the population, which is a crucial factor of economic development, is stated as the basic principle. In the development plan, the high infant mortality rates were criticized, and it was emphasized that a decrease in this would both

increase the life expectancy at birth and contribute to socioeconomic development. In addition, the importance of the continuity of family planning and maternal and child health services, which are among the basic health services, was underscored. Moreover, unlike previous development plans, it was announced that in this plan, organizations conducting research and training on demography would be supported, and emphasis would be placed on periodic research on population policies.

In the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996-2000), the population issue was explained under the title "Population and Family Planning". Thus, the concept of "Family Planning" was used in the title of the development plan. First, it is discussed in this section that rapid population growth increases the need for creating new infrastructure, including shelter, health care, and schools. Therefore, it is argued that rapid population growth is an obstacle to sustainable development and increasing the level of welfare. Second, foreigners coming from abroad as refugees or illegal workers in recent years have been mentioned. The lack of sufficient statistics determining the demographic or socioeconomic characteristics of those coming from abroad illegally is seen as an important problem in making socioeconomic policies. Third, because of the decision to conduct population censuses every 10 years since 1990, it was emphasized that population data collection studies and data collection units should be in integrity. Finally, demands for the continuity of family planning services were maintained in this development plan. The importance of services such as accessibility, education, health, counseling, and intersectoral cooperation for the implementation of family planning was emphasized.

In the Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005), the population issue was explained under the title of "Human Resources Development". First, it was mentioned that it is necessary to improve the qualitative characteristics of the population, especially education and health, to achieve a population structure suitable for sustainable development goals. Accordingly, raising living standards, eliminating regional differences throughout the country, and creating a more homogeneous population distribution have been determined as the basic principles.

In the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2007-2013), the population was evaluated under the titles "Increasing Employment" and "Strengthening Human Development and Social Solidarity". In this plan, it is stated that the proportion of adult and elderly population has started to increase since 2000, and the demographic structure of the country has started to show similar characteristics to developed countries.

Population dynamics were examined under the heading of "Qualified People and Strong Society" in the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2014-2018). In 2012, the total fertility rate decreased to 2.08 and fell below the population renewal rate of 2.10. Therefore, the development plan emphasizes that the total fertility rate is constantly decreasing with each passing year. Second, the long-term population estimates made by TÜİK in 2013 were examined in this planning. According to these projections, the population size of Türkiye is expected to reach 84.2 million in 2023 and 93.5 million in 2050. It is estimated that the total population will decrease from this date onwards and will drop to 84.2 million in 2075. In addition, the increase in the proportion of the elderly population as a result of both the decrease in the infant mortality rate and the extension of life expectancy at birth was mentioned in this plan. In this regard, the necessity of increasing the fertility rate through effective population policies and applicable policies for the elderly population has been explained. Therefore, unlike the antinatalist policies put into practice in 1963, the need for pronatalist policies was emphasized in this development plan. This situation heralds that there will be radical changes in the population policies implemented in the future.

In the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2019-2023), the population issue was evaluated under the main title of "Qualified People, Strong Society", as in the previous development plan. However, in the section where population characteristics were evaluated, the title "Population and Aging" was used for the first time. It is specified here that the main aim is to increase the quality of life of elderly individuals, as well as to protect the young and dynamic population structure. In addition, the ability of elderly individuals to live their lives independently, to participate effectively in social life, to benefit

from healthcare services adequately, and to create active aging environments for these individuals are listed in this section.

In the Twelfth Five-Year Development Plan (2024-2028), the population issue was examined under the general title of "Qualified Person, Strong Family and Healthy Society". In this development plan, population characteristics were evaluated under the subheading of Population and Aging. Here, the basic principles have been determined as keeping fertility above the replacement level of the population, strengthening the family institution, reducing the average age of marriage, encouraging marriages, encouraging having more than two children, and preserving the dynamic population structure. When these principles are examined, it is seen that pronatalist policies that support population growth are the main goal within the scope of the development plan. In addition, improving the quality of life of the aging population, increasing their physical and mental health levels, their participation in active life, and their ability to benefit from healthcare services at an adequate level are stated as the main objectives in this plan. Finally, it is aimed to increase the total fertility rate from 1.7 to 2.1, which is the population replacement level, by 2028.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using document analysis as the main method. At the beginning, the literature on the subject of population was reviewed. In document analysis, the collected sources, documents, plans, and reports must be analysed systematically. In this way, the analysis results are subject to evaluation. The motivation behind choosing this method is that the issue of population is frequently addressed in geography curriculum and development plans. Therefore, these resources can be systematically evaluated.

The research was carried out in three main stages. First, population policies were examined theoretically through a comprehensive literature review. Throughout the history of the Republic of Türkiye, both pronatalist (birth-promoting) and antinatalist (population control) policies have been implemented at different periods. Therefore, a chronological evaluation of these policies is crucial for presenting a comprehensive overview of the demographic strategies adopted by the state. Such an analysis not only reveals the shifting priorities in population management but also provides insight into the socio-political and economic factors influencing these policy transitions over time. Secondly, the representation of population issues in the Five-Year Development Plans, which have been implemented in Türkiye since 1963, was analyzed to examine how population-related themes and priorities have evolved over time within national development strategies. Five-Year Development Plans are strategic policy documents that aim to guide national development in both social and economic domains, while also outlining the policies to be implemented across the public sector. Lastly, the study examined the extent to which the fundamental principles, goals, and objectives articulated in the Five-Year Development Plans are reflected in the secondary school geography curriculum, with a particular focus on how population-related themes have been integrated.

In this context, the data sources of the study consisted of legal regulations on population, Five-Year Development Plans, and secondary geography education programs that include population-related content. Document analysis is a qualitative method that involves the systematic collection, examination, and interpretation of written materials that provide information about the research topic (Sak et al., 2021). Document analysis allows historical developments to be tracked, and reports and documents on the selected topic can be compared with each other. This method allowed for an in-depth analysis of existing documents to reveal how population policies are integrated into educational content.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The population issue constitutes one of the main study subjects of geography (Bostan and Sertkaya Doğan, 2019). The distribution of the population, the factors causing this distribution, migrations, births, deaths, temporal and spatial changes of population characteristics are discussed in population geography. One of the requirements for economic development is a qualified population. Therefore,

the issue of the population has a wide place in development plans. In these plans, factors that directly affect the increase or decrease in the population, such as birth rates, death rates, and total fertility rate, are explained, and basic principles for the population are determined. These factors also form a part of geography education.

Annual curriculums are the basic texts in which all dimensions of education are determined and which outline the subjects to be taught for a certain grade (Şahin and Şahin, 2023). Further, the curriculums are organized according to how future generations in the country want to be educated. In this context, countries both present a vision of the future and regulate the social structure through their educational programs. Geography is one of the core subjects in the Turkish secondary school curriculum. Teaching programs for geography courses or geographical education started to be prepared in the first years of the Republic of Türkiye. In Türkiye, the first Geography Lesson Teaching Programme was implemented in 1924. Changes were made to the geography teaching programmes in 1934, 1942, 1957, 1971, 1973, 1982, 1983, 1992, 2005 and 2018 (Türkiye Maarif Ansiklopedisi, 2025). Finally, the Geography Lesson Curriculum was restructured based on the Türkiye Century Education Model Joint Text in 2024. By its very nature, the topic of population is one of the subjects most in need of updating in the geography curriculum.

Yıldız Yılmaz and Meydan (2020) studied the geography topics between 1923-2018 in the primary education curriculum. In this study, they examined the geography subjects that have been included in the secondary education curriculum since 2000. In 2002, the Ministry of Education started to reorganize all the curriculums within the scope of education reform. In 2003, the Geography Lesson Curriculum was one of the first renewed programs within the scope of high school educational programs (Şahin and Karabağ, 2021). The geography curriculum, which was updated and implemented in 2005, is the first program prepared in accordance with the methods of preparing the teaching programs. This curriculum was revised in 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2018.

This section presents findings on population and population policies in secondary school geography curriculum after 2000. The learning areas in the 2005 curricula are organized under the headings “Geographical Skills and Applications”, “Natural Systems”, “Human Systems”, “Spatial Synthesis: Türkiye, Global Environment: Regions and Countries”, and “Environment and Society” (MEB, 2005). The units of the 2018 Geography Lesson Curriculum consist of “Natural Systems”, “Human Systems”, “Global Environment: Regions and Countries” and “Environment and Society”. The 2024 Teaching Program consists of the following units: “The Nature of Geography”, “Spatial Information Technologies”, “Natural Systems and Processes”, “Human Systems and Processes”, “Economic Activities and Their Effects”, “Disasters and Sustainable Environment; Regions, Countries” and “Global Connections”. In this curriculum, topics related to the geography of Türkiye have been organized to be included in all other units rather than in a separate unit. The subjects related to population geography were evaluated in the Human Systems unit in the 10th and 11th grades within the scope of the 2005 and 2018 geography course teaching program (Tables 2 and 3). Within the framework of the new education model (2024), the Geography Course Teaching Program covers the population in the 9th grade.

Table 2. *The 10th and 11th grades geography topics (2005).*

	10 th grade	11 th grade
	Population, Population Growth Population Distribution Population and Population Characteristics	Population Policies Why Population Policies? Cities and Their Spheres of Influence
Human Systems	Population Distribution in the World Historical Development of World Population What Do Population Pyramids Tell Us?	The Location of World's Major Cities City Functions and Spheres of Influence Population Development in Cities Throughout History

As geography teaching in secondary education in Türkiye is theme-based, population geography topics have also been organized accordingly in this curriculum. In the 2005 Secondary Education Geography Curriculum, the topic of population is addressed within the 10th grade learning area of Human Systems. The program structures the population topic for students not only at the level of definitions but also around interpreting statistics, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, and connecting with current data. First, population distribution, population development in countries, and population characteristics of countries around the world are explained. In the following sections, conclusions are drawn based on the population pyramids. However, the topic of population was addressed alongside urbanization in the 11th grade. First, the nature and necessity of population policies were discussed. Afterwards, cities, their functions, spheres of influence, and the distribution of major cities around the world were examined. Finally, population development in urban areas throughout history was addressed.

Tablo 3. *The 10th and 11th grades geography topics (2018).*

	10 th grade	11 th grade
Human Systems	Characteristics and Distribution of Population	Population Policies
	Importance of Population	Population Policies of Countries
	Population Development and Distribution	Population Policies in Türkiye
	Population Pyramids	The Effects of These Policies
	Population Development in Türkiye	The future of the population of Türkiye
	Population Distribution in Türkiye	
	Structural Characteristics of Population in Türkiye	
	Population Movements: Migrations	
	Migration Types	
	Migrations in Türkiye	

The curriculum (dated 2018) prepared for the 10th grade covers topics such as the definition of population, its importance, and population change in the world and in Türkiye. It also covers factors affecting population distribution, characteristics of Türkiye's population, migration, spatial characteristics of migration, and reasons for migration. At the same time, topics such as determining the characteristics of the population using population pyramids are also included in this section. In other respects, the curriculum prepared for the 11th grade includes policy-based topics such as the reasons for population policies, the population policies implemented by countries in different periods, and the effects of population policies on population change. In addition, changes that may occur in Türkiye's future population depending on population projections are also included. When the topics in the human systems unit are evaluated, it is clearly seen that less attention is given to population policies.

Tablo 4. *The 10th and 11th grades geography topics (2024).*

	9 th grade
Human Systems and Processes	Historical Change and Future of Population
	Population Distribution and Movements
	Demographic Change and Population Pyramids
	Opportunities, Problems and Policies Related to Population

In the geography curriculum of the new education model (2024), the topic of population is covered in detail in the ninth grade within the unit on human systems and processes. The Human Systems and Processes unit is addressed within the framework of the system-process approach. Therefore, this unit plans to address human-nature interaction with all its process components. This unit primarily aims to examine historical changes in population, the demographic transition process, and the interpretation of population pyramids through tables and graphs. Furthermore, the aim is to enable conclusions to be drawn about the population distribution and the factors influencing this distribution. Finally, an objective of this unit is to make opportunities, problems, and policies related to the population in Türkiye and different countries understandable through geographical inquiry.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Population issues have increased significantly from World War I to the 21st century. In the post-war environment, governments, which lost a great number of their populations in wars, desired to increase the population size of countries. For this reason, decisions were taken to implement pronatalist policies. Since the foundation of the Republic in Türkiye, the population issue has been considered, and a general population census was conducted to determine the total population size. After this census, policies supporting population growth were implemented immediately. When the enacted population policies are examined according to their aims and targets, three different periods arise. The goals and objectives of both pronatalist and antinatalist policies are stated in the development plans. Development plans have also had an impact on how population policies will be shaped in the future. Moreover, decisions taken regarding population are also reflected in population issues in the geography curriculum.

The contents of the curriculum prepared for students may overlap with the issues prioritized in the development plans. The population issue included in these plans constitutes one of the main subjects of the geography curriculum. Numerous changes have been made in the Geography Teaching Program over the years. A major change was made in the geography curriculum in 2005, and four separate revisions were made in 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2018. In the current geography teaching programs and textbooks, population issues are addressed in the human system unit. When these sections are examined, the 10th and 11th grade geography textbook primarily examines population definition, population density, population distribution, factors affecting the distribution, demographic features of the population of Türkiye, population pyramids, national and transnational migrations, population policies, population policies applied in the world and Türkiye, and the reasons for these policies. In addition, assumptions are made regarding the future of the Turkish population. As a result, the issue of population is discussed in secondary school geography education, but population policies are generally not mentioned. Population-related laws, which are effective in shaping the demographic structure of the country, can be examined in detail in geography teaching programs.

Population is of great importance because it directly affects a country's economic, social, cultural, and environmental structure. This is because population size, distribution, age structure, migration movements, and demographic characteristics determine resource use, labor capacity, health service planning, and environmental sustainability. Globally, declining fertility rates and an aging population are creating a transformation that is reshaping the economic, social, and political systems in many countries. To eliminate the negative effects of demographic change, nations are adopting a series of population policies. Maintaining fertility above the population replacement level and preserving a dynamic population structure are frequently emphasized in population policies. Furthermore, improving the quality of life for older individuals, enhancing their functionality so they can lead active and independent lives, ensuring their participation in economic and social life, and enabling them to benefit from care and health services form the basis of these policies.

In this context, topics such as demographic transformation, population policies, and population distribution are included in education curricula. Particularly in the secondary school geography curriculum, the topic of population is addressed to enable students to understand the relationship between people and place, comprehend social and environmental issues, and develop conscious citizenship skills for the future. Students' knowledge of their countries' demographic characteristics will facilitate the implementation and adoption of policies. By studying the subjects of population, students are enabled to develop an awareness and appreciation of the human, social, and cultural dimensions of life. Thus, students become aware of the central role of the population in geographical processes and gain the capacity to make informed decisions at both local and global scales. In the future, the teaching of population issues should not be limited to statistics and definitions; it should adopt a multidimensional approach that engages students with digital tools, data analysis, problem solving, and critical thinking. In this way, geography lessons can equip young people with the ability to understand global population changes and to develop solutions to local problems.

Disclosure Statements

1. The author/s of this article confirm that their work complies with the principles of research and publication ethics.
2. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).
3. This article was screened for potential plagiarism using a plagiarism screening program.

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