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The Construction of Moral Education in Early Republican Türkiye: Reflections of the Second Education Council (1943) on the Discourses of Power and Aydın



Türkiye’de Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ahlak Eğitiminin İnşası: İkinci Maarif Şûrası’nın (1943) İktidar ve Aydın Söylemlerine Yansıması

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the moral education policies and practices of the political power during the Early Republican Period, the discourses of aydins and bureaucrats, and the repercussions of the Second Education Council in this field. Adopting a qualitative approach, this research is designed as an educational history study based on the historical document analysis method. It seeks to develop a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the process through which morality was constructed in Türkiye. Various documents, such as numerous newspaper reports and journal articles related to the period, alongside archival records, the minutes of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, and the report of the Second Education Council, were determined as the data sources of the research. The conducted analyses indicate that moral education was reshaped in accordance with the principle of secularism during the modernization process of the Republic of Türkiye and constituted one of the fundamental components of nation-state building. The content and implementation method of the secular morality education envisioned by the political power were debated and criticized by different circles of society. The Second Education Council, held in 1943, played a significant role in determining moral education policies. The research demonstrates that moral education was not merely a pedagogical issue but was also constructed as an integral part of social transformation and political socialization processes.

Öz

Bu araştırma, Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi’nde iktidarın ahlak eğitimi politikalarını ve uygulamalarını, aydın ve bürokrat söylemlerini ve İkinci Maarif Şûrası’nın bu alandaki yankılarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel yaklaşımın benimsendiği bu araştırma, tarihsel doküman incelemesi yöntemine dayalı bir eğitim tarihi araştırması olarak tasarlanmıştır. Türkiye’de ahlakın inşası sürecine ilişkin derinlikli ve çok yönlü bir anlayış geliştirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Araştırmanın veri kaynağı olarak döneme ilişkin çok sayıda gazete haberi ve dergi yazılarının yanı sıra arşiv belgeleri, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi tutanakları ve İkinci Maarif Şûrası raporu gibi çeşitli dokümanlar belirlenmiştir. Yapılan analizler, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin modernleşme sürecinde ahlak eğitiminin laiklik ilkesi doğrultusunda yeniden şekillendirildiğini ve ulus-devlet inşasının temel bileşenlerinden biri olduğunu göstermektedir. İktidarın öngördüğü “laik ahlak” eğitiminin içeriği ve uygulanma biçimi, toplumun farklı çevreleri tarafından tartışılmış ve eleştirilmiştir. 1943 yılında düzenlenen İkinci Maarif Şûrası, ahlak eğitimi politikalarının belirlenmesinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Araştırma, ahlak eğitiminin sadece pedagojik bir mesele olmadığını, aynı zamanda toplumsal dönüşüm ve politik sosyalizasyon süreçlerinin bir parçası olarak inşa edildiğini göstermektedir.

Keywords

Moral Education • Secularism • Second Education Council • Aydın • Power



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**Anahtar
Kelimeler**

Ahlak Eğitimi • Laiklik • İkinci Maarif Şûrası • Aydınlar • İktidar

Genişletilmiş Özet

Modern ulus-devletlerin kuruluş sürecinde eğitim, iktidarın meşruiyetini pekiştiren ve ideolojisini topluma yayan temel bir aygıt olarak işlev görmüştür. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşu ve modernleşme projesi de bu tarihsel olgudan bağımsız değildir. Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde (1923-1950) iktidar, toplumu dönüştürme ve yeni bir ulusal kimlik inşa etme sürecinde eğitim sistemine merkezi bir rol vermiştir. Bu sürecin en kritik ve tartışmalı alanlarından biri, Osmanlı Devleti'nin dini temelli ahlak anlayışından koparak laik, ulusal ve modern bir ahlak eğitimi sisteminin nasıl kurulacağı meselesi olmuştur. Bu araştırma, Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye'sinde iktidarın ahlak eğitimi politikalarının inşası sürecini çok yönlü bir perspektifle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın temel amacı; iktidarın "laik ahlak" kavramını nasıl tanımladığını, bu doğrultuda ne tür politikalar geliştirdiğini, bu politikaların dönemin aydınları ve bürokratları tarafından nasıl karşılandığını ve 1943 yılında toplanan İkinci Maarif Şûrası'nın bu süreçteki belirleyici rolünü tarihsel bağlamı içinde ortaya koymaktır. Çalışma, ahlak eğitiminin yalnızca pedagojik bir konu olmadığını, aynı zamanda bir toplumsal mühendislik projesi ve politik bir sosyalizasyon aracı olarak nasıl kurgulandığını göstermeyi hedeflemektedir. Nitel araştırma yaklaşımının benimsendiği bu çalışma, tarihsel doküman incelemesi yöntemine dayalı bir eğitim tarihi araştırması olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın veri setini, dönemin siyasi, sosyal ve entelektüel atmosferini yansıtan birincil ve ikincil kaynaklar oluşturmaktadır. Birincil kaynaklar arasında; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi ve Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu arşivlerinde bulunan resmî belgeler, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM) zabıt cerideleri, İkinci Maarif Şûrası'nın resmi raporu ve dönemin gazete ve dergilerinde yayımlanan makaleler, haberler ve köşe yazıları yer almaktadır. Elde edilen veriler, tarihsel bağlamları dikkate alınarak tasnif edilmiş ve tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenerek iktidar, aydın ve bürokrat söylemleri arasındaki ilişkiler ve kırılmalar ortaya konulmuştur. Araştırma bulguları, Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'ndeki ahlak eğitimi politikalarının belirli evrelerden geçerek şekillendiğini göstermektedir. İlk evrede, Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu (1924) ile başlayan laikleşme süreci, din derslerinin müfredattan aşamalı olarak kaldırılmasıyla sonuçlanmış ve eğitim sistemi dini referanslardan arındırılmıştır. Bu durum, ahlak eğitiminin içeriği konusunda bir "boşluk" algısı yaratmıştır. Dönemin aydınları ve bazı milletvekilleri, dini ahlakın yerine ikame edilecek sağlam, pozitif ve laik bir ahlak sisteminin kurulamadığını, bunun da gençlik arasında ahlaki bir zafiyete yol açtığını ileri sürmüşlerdir. İktidar temsilcileri ise bu eleştirileri reddederek Cumhuriyet'in "laik ahlak" anlayışının yeterli olduğunu savunmuş, ancak bu kavramın içeriğini somut bir politikaya dönüştürmekte uzun süre yetersiz kalmışlardır. İkinci evre, 1938'de Hasan Ali Yücel'in Maarif Vekili olmasıyla başlamıştır. Yücel döneminde, ahlak eğitimindeki boşluğa yönelik eleştirilere somut politikalarla yanıt verme çabası hız kazanmıştır. Yücel, 1939'da TBMM'de yaptığı bir konuşmada, laik ahlak politikasının temel ilkelerini ilk kez sistematik olarak açıklamıştır. Bu sürecin zirve noktasını, 15-21 Şubat 1943 tarihleri arasında toplanan İkinci Maarif Şûrası oluşturmaktadır. Ana gündem maddesi "okullarda ahlak terbiyesinin geliştirilmesi" olan Şûra'da, bir Ahlak Eğitimi Komisyonu kurulmuş ve bu komisyon "Türk Ahlakının İlkeleri" başlıklı kapsamlı bir rapor hazırlamıştır. Rapor, ideal "Türk çocuğunun" nasıl olması gerektiğini tanımlarken; çalışma disiplini, görev bilinci, milliyetçilik, Cumhuriyet'e sadakat ve toplumsal sorumluluk gibi değerleri ön plana çıkarmıştır. Dönemin aydınları Şûra'yı ve sonuçlarını farklı şekillerde yorumlamıştır. Bu araştırma, Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde ahlak eğitiminin, laik ve ulusal bir kimlik inşası hedefi doğrultusunda iktidar tarafından bilinçli bir şekilde yapılandırıldığını ortaya koymuştur. Ahlak eğitimi, sadece pedagojik bir mesele olarak değil, aynı zamanda yeni rejimin "makbul vatandaşı" yaratmayı hedefleyen bir toplumsal mühendislik ve politik sosyalizasyon aracı olarak kurgulanmıştır. Cumhuriyet'in ilk yıllarında din eğitiminin kaldırılmasıyla ortaya çıkan boşluk, uzun süren tartışmaların ardından Milli Eğitim Bakanı Hasan Ali Yücel döneminde ve özellikle İkinci Maarif Şûrası aracılığıyla sistematik bir "laik ahlak" politikasıyla doldurulmuştur. Şûra kararları, sadece bir rapor olarak kalmamış, ders kitaplarıyla doğrudan müfredata entegre edilmiştir. Bu durum, iktidarın ahlaki değerleri okul aracılığıyla nasıl araçsallaştırdığını ve ideolojik hedeflerini eğitim sistemine nasıl yerleştirdiğini göstermesi açısından önemlidir. Dönemin aydınlarının Şûra'ya yönelik destekleyici veya eleştirel tutumları, rejimin eğitim politikaları etrafındaki entelektüel müzakere ortamının dinamiklerini gözler önüne sermektedir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Türkiye'de ahlak eğitiminin tarihsel serüveninin, modernleşme, laikleşme, devlet kontrolü ve toplumsal dönüşüm arasındaki karmaşık ilişkinin bir yansıması olduğunu ve bu sürecin günümüz eğitim tartışmalarını anlamak için de önemli bir tarihsel zemin sunduğunu göstermektedir.

Introduction

In the process of the formation and development of modern nation-states, education was assigned a new mission as an instrument for ensuring the legitimacy of political power and consolidating its authority. In this context, the emergence of mass education and its instrumentalization through a social engineering approach to shape individuals comprehensively became a characteristic phenomenon in modern world history.¹ Turkish modernization, which began with the reform era of the Ottoman Empire and continued with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, must also be evaluated within this framework. Indeed, the modernization movements² along the axis of Westernization/Europeanization that had begun to appear in the Ottoman Empire since the 1700s turned into a fundamental state policy with the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict (1839). With the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, this modernization was pursued in a more systematic, sharp, and explicit manner. In the construction of the Republic as a modern nation-state, the transformative power of education was utilized to its fullest extent. In this process, moral education was not neglected; on the contrary, its central role in the education policies of the Early Republican Period was emphasized. During this period, one of the most prominent characteristics of modern education systems -its “homogenizing” effect- came to the forefront. Shaping the moral values of society was considered a critical part of the nation-building process. Moral education played a key role in instilling values such as a sense of responsibility, ethical behavior, and social harmony, as well as in cultivating the qualities of the “acceptable citizen”³ desired by political authority. These values were regarded as indispensable elements for achieving the objectives of the newly established Republic and ensuring social cohesion.

Education policies thus functioned as an essential mechanism for realizing social transformations. With the proclamation of the Republic, the education system was placed on a secular and national basis⁴, which profoundly influenced the content and methods of moral education. In this respect, the Republican approach to moral education was built upon reshaping the Ottoman legacy on a secular, national, and more modern foundation. In the Ottoman Empire, moral education was primarily conducted through religious institutions within the framework of Islamic morality.⁵ In the Republican era, however, with the process of secularization, moral education was redefined away from religious foundations and repositioned around the principles of science, rationality, and nationalism.⁶ In this way, moral education emerged as a reflection of the Republic’s aim to construct a secular, modern, and national identity.⁷

The new conception of morality, which became distinct with the unique characteristics of modernity in Early Republican Türkiye, was shaped by different actors who determined the education policies of the period. Chief among these were the ruling bureaucrats who held the power of governance and

¹ Louis Althusser, *İdeoloji ve Devletin İdeolojik Aygıtları*, trans. Y. Alp, M. Özışık, 5th edition, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2002, pp. 42-43.

² Benjamin C. Fortna, *Mekteb-i Hümayûn: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Son Döneminde İslâm, Devlet ve Eğitim*, trans. Pelin Sıral, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2005, pp. 17-25.

³ Füsun Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde, II. Meşrutiyet'ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi*, 7th Edition, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2016, pp. 319-322; Süheyla Nil Mustafa, “Immorals” in Ottoman Society: Genealogy of the Ottoman Morality Discourse in Late Nineteenth-Century”, *Düşünce ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 2022, pp. 1-25.

⁴ Seyfi Kenan, “Türk Eğitim Düşüncesi ve Deneyiminin Dönüm Noktaları Üzerine Bir Çözümleme”, *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 41, 2013, pp. 1-31.

⁵ Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Osmanlı'da Eğitimin Modernleşmesi (1839-1908): İslâmlaşma, Otokrasi ve Disiplin*, trans. Osman Yener, 2nd ed., İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2015, p. 227; Benjamin C. Fortna, “Islamic Morality in Late Ottoman ‘Secular’ Schools”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2000, p. 369; Umut Kaya, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Osmanlı'da Ahlak Eğitimi*, Değerler Eğitim Merkezi Publishing, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 361-360.

⁶ Seval Yinişmez Akagündüz, *Ahlaklı Yurttaş: Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarından Günümüze Ders Kitaplarında Ahlak Eğitimi*, Yeni İnsan Publishing, İstanbul, 2021, pp. 243-250.

⁷ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Geç Osmanlı ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemlerinde Okumayı Öğrenmek*, trans. Mehmet Beşikçi, Koç University Publishing, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 36-38.



administration in the Republican regime - namely, the president, the prime minister, cabinet members, and deputies. Additionally, the Ministry of Education (Maarif Vekâleti)⁸ served as the central institution that determined the content and methods of moral education. At this point, it can naturally be stated that the Minister of Education and other high-ranking bureaucrats within the Ministry of Education played a decisive role as policy-making actors in education. Consequently, changes in the curriculum and the inclusion of moral education in educational programs were carried out under the control and supervision of the Ministry of Education. All provisions determined on this matter were officially approved in Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi - TBMM) and turned into legal regulations. Teachers were assigned a vital role in implementing moral education in accordance with this legislation and conveying it to students. During this process, aydins (the Turkish term for the state-affiliated elite, contrasted with the critical intellectual) expressed their views on moral education and influenced the shaping of society's moral outlook. While some aydins criticized the moral education policies of the political authority, others supported them.

The contributions of all these actors materialized in platforms such as the Education Congress (Maarif Kongresi)⁹ of 1921, the Scientific Committees (Heyet-i İlmiye)¹⁰ convened three times between 1923 and 1926, and the Education Council (Maarif Şûrası)¹¹, which was planned to meet periodically every three years and held its first session in 1939. To date, the Education Councils have been convened twenty times, the most recent in 2021. These Councils functioned as platforms where educators, aydins, and state officials of the period came together to discuss educational issues and develop policy recommendations. Historically, they played a crucial role in determining education policies and initiating reforms in the field of education.¹²

The Second Education Council (İkinci Maarif Şûrası), convened during the presidency of İsmet İnönü, in the years corresponding to the Second World War, from February 15–21, 1943, assumed a serious and historic role in shaping moral education policies and determining their fundamental principles. Indeed, in line with the ideology of the Early Republican regime, the analysis shows that the principles of “Turkish morality” were reconstructed in this Council. The principles of Turkish morality determined in the Second Education Council were expressed as “the natural outcome of the Turkish Revolution.”¹³ Accordingly, moral education, considered within the framework of social engineering, was used as an instrument of social control aimed at shaping the behavior of individuals in the desired direction. In the curriculum debates of the Council, particular emphasis was placed on strengthening moral values among youth and instilling a

⁸The institution responsible for educational affairs in the Republic of Türkiye has operated under various names since its establishment. The institution served under the name “Maarif Vekâleti [Ministry of Education]” from 1923 to 1935, “Kültür Bakanlığı [Ministry of Culture]” from 1935 to 1941, “Maarif Vekillîği [Minister of Education]” from 1941 to 1946, and “Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education]” from 1946 to 1950. The institution was again named “Maarif Vekâleti [Ministry of Education]” from 1950 to 1960, and “Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education]” from 1960 to 1983. From 1983 to 1989, it continued its work as the “Millî Eğitim Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports]”. Since 1989, the institution has been operating under the name “Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education]”. Yenal Ünal, “Maarif Vekâleti”, *Atatürk Encyclopedia*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2021, (Online), <https://www.ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr>, January 31, 2025.

⁹Erol Kapluhan, “1921 Maarif Kongresi’nin Türk Eğitim Tarihindeki Yeri ve Önemi”, *Yalova Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 2014, pp. 123-134; Zeki Sarıhan, *1921 Maarif Kongresi*, 2nd ed., Tarihçi Kitapevi Publishing, İstanbul, 2019, pp. 9-17.

¹⁰Osman Kubilay Gül, “Maarif Kongresi, Heyet-i İlmiyeler ve Uluslararası Ortaöğretim Öğretmenleri Kongresi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme”, *Karadeniz Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 10, No. 19, 2018, pp. 509-523.

¹¹The Education Council was established and began to operate as a high-level board within the organization of the Ministry of Education starting in the 1920s. In fact, there is an Instruction on the Education Council, consisting of six articles, dated January 7, 1927, in the Republican Archives. *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA) [Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives]*, 112-541-14/180-9-0-0, 07 January 1927.

¹²Ahmet Kuşçi, “Türk Maarif Şûralarının Ulusal Basına Yansımaları (1939-1943) [Reflections of Turkish Education Councils to the National Press (1939-1943)]”, *FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 19, 2022, pp. 1-19; Serkan Şen, Sadegül Akbaba Altun, “Dönemin Ruhunun Türk Milli Eğitim Şûralarına (1939-2014) Etkileri: Hermenötik Bir Analiz”, *MAUN Journal of Education*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2022, pp. 23-45.

¹³Kumbalı’s study, which examines the Second Education Council from the perspective of building modern Türkiye, is important for showing the aim and objective of power in moral education from a unique point of view. Serhat Kumbalı, *Modern Türkiye’nin İnşasında Ahlak Eğitimi: 1943 İkinci Maarif Şûrası*, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Graduate Studies in Social Sciences, Muğla, 2016, pp. 121-122.



sense of nationalism.¹⁴ These discussions shed light on the educational approach and social expectations of the period. The decisions of the Council, presented to the public through the press in vivid and colorful language, were disseminated to society at large. The Second Education Council and its decisions, which provided an important framework for the construction of moral education, were evaluated in different ways by the educators and the aydins of the period.

The outcomes of the Education Councils, which can also be interpreted as the transformation of the Ottoman tradition of consultation (meşveret) into a modern platform, not only shaped education policies but also played a significant role in influencing and directing public debates. Newspapers and journals - whether pro-government or oppositional- functioned as mass communication tools that conveyed the debates in the Councils to the public on a daily basis. At the same time, they served as platforms where the aydins of the period expressed their opinions and shaped public opinion. Indeed, Ersoy's study¹⁵, which centers on contemporary sources and provides a detailed analysis of the Second Education Council, is full of evidence supporting this argument. Numerous articles and reports on the Second Education Council published in newspapers and journals of the time presented the moral education policies of the political authority to the public and revealed the supportive or oppositional views of aydins regarding these policies. In this way, critical opinions voiced in the press underlined the necessity of revisiting moral education policies, while pro-government discourses sought to shape public perception of education and generate social support.

In this research, the concept of "aydın" has been deliberately chosen instead of the term "intellectual" in its Western sense to describe the group that, through their writings either supporting or criticizing political authority, constituted a certain segment of society in Early Republican Türkiye. In the Turkish context, the fundamental difference between the aydın and intellectual lies in the fact that the intellectual in the Western sense seeks to remain distant from political authority, while the aydın is intertwined with it. The aydın is defined as a person whose mind and reason are enlightened. The aydins generally act in line with the interests of political authority and seek to establish ideological hegemony in society.¹⁶ In contrast, the intellectual in the Western sense is a person who bases themselves on reason, science, and knowledge, and who struggles against prevailing ideas and ideologies. Intellectuals in this sense strive to remain distant from political authority and everything associated with it.¹⁷

This distinction aligns with the framework proposed by Edward Shils in his comparative sociological analysis of intellectuals. Shils describes the intellectual as a minority endowed with an "extraordinary sensitivity" who strives to transcend the concrete and immediate experiences of ordinary people (the laity) in order to remain in contact with the "ultimate principles" or the "sacred" that govern the universe and social order¹⁸. Such a deep commitment to higher and abstract values inevitably creates a tension and distance between the intellectual and the conciliatory, pragmatic world of institutional authority (powers).

The intellectual's distanced stance toward power gains a new political function in Michel Foucault's conception of the "specific intellectual". Foucault rejects the notion of the intellectual as a "spokesperson of universal truth" or the "conscience of the masses." The Foucauldian intellectual operates within the

¹⁴Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekilliği, *İkinci Maarif Şûrası: Çalışma Programı, Raporlar, Konuşmalar*, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekilliği Publishing, Ankara, 1943, (Online), https://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/dosyalar/suralar/dokumanlar/2_sura.pdf, February 10, 2025.

¹⁵Adem Ersoy, *İkinci Maarif Şûrası'nda Alınan Kararlar ve Dönemin Aydınlarının Görüşleri*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Marmara University Graduate Studies in Social Sciences, İstanbul, 2007, pp. 54-73.

¹⁶Antonio Gramsci, *Aydınlar ve Toplum*, trans. V. Günyol et al., Alan Publishing, İstanbul, 1985, pp. 25-31.

¹⁷Michel Foucault, *Entelektüelin Siyasi İşlevi*, trans. I. Ergüden et al., Ayrıntı Publishing, İstanbul, 2005, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸Edward Shils, "The Intellectuals and the Powers: Some Perspectives for Comparative Analysis", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1958, pp. 5-22.



practices specific to their field of expertise, analyzing the local mechanisms of power that produce and impose “truth.” In this sense, rather than instructing the masses on what to do, the intellectual collaborates with those under domination, listening to and articulating their problems¹⁹. This entails rejecting the role of the intellectual as a provider of solutions offered by major political parties or ruling powers, and instead focusing on the local struggles within power/knowledge relations.

It has been argued that the aydın type is far more common in Türkiye, while the Western intellectual type is almost absent.²⁰ Within this framework, it is possible to situate the voices that expressed highly critical views on moral education in a distinct category. However, despite their critical perspectives, it can be said that almost all of these figures ultimately formed part of the broader picture drawn by political authority and contributed to the functioning of the system.

Şerif Mardin, who adapted the aydın-intellectual distinction to the Turkish sociopolitical context, focused particularly on the aydın type. Within Mardin’s Center-Periphery model, the aydın in Turkish politics functions as an extension of the bureaucratic elite at the center²¹. This aydın embodies rational and secular values imported from the West and assumes a constructive and authoritarian mission. Accordingly, Mardin’s aydın represents an elite group integrated with power, whose aim is to “enlighten,” transform, and guide the traditional, religious, and populist periphery in line with the ideology of the center²². For Mardin, this pro-authoritarian stance sharply distinguishes the Turkish aydın from the intellectual, who possesses the potential to approach social problems with scientific distance and to act as a critical daemon (inner drive). This sociological perspective thus supports the argument that, during the Early Republican period, even those aydın who appeared critical were, in the end, participants in the larger political project set forth by the state. This study deliberately employs the Turkish term “aydın” to denote the state-affiliated, enlightened elite, contrasting it with the term “intellectual” which is reserved for figures who demonstrate the critical, distanced engagement defined by Shils and Foucault.

Given the phenomenon of constructing public moral education, which holds deeper significance than it might first appear, it is important to reveal through detailed research the practices of political authority, the discourses of aydın and bureaucrats of the period, and the nature of their interactions. Despite its importance, the issue has not been sufficiently studied in the relevant literature, and there remains a need for research offering different perspectives. This study aims to contribute to an understanding of moral education policies in the Early Republican Period from the perspectives of both political authority and aydın. For this purpose, it investigates what was meant by the concept of “secular morality” (laik ahlak) in the Early Republican Period, how it was defined, and what kinds of policies were developed on this issue. Moreover, it examines the views of the aydın of the period concerning the Second Education Council, which was a significant initiative for constructing the ideal morality envisioned by the political authority, as well as the moral education report published at the end of the Council. In doing so, the study considers not only the standard pro-government views but also the critical discourses.

This research thus seeks to answer how the policies of moral education were shaped by political authority in the Early Republican Period and how this process was perceived by the aydın of the time. Accordingly, the study is designed as a history of education research based on the method of document analysis. Its main data set consists of press sources and official records of the period. The press sources include articles

¹⁹Michel Foucault, *Entelektüelin Siyasi İşlevi*, trans. I. Ergüden et al., Ayrıntı Publishing, İstanbul, 2005, p. 302.

²⁰M. Zeki Duman, “Türkiye’de Düünden Bugüne Aydın ve İktidar”, *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2018, pp. 59-79.

²¹Şerif Mardin, “Türk Siyasasını Açıklayabilecek Bir Anahtar: Merkez-Çevre İlişkileri”, *Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset (Makaleler 1)*, 11th Edition, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2003, pp. 35-77.

²²Şerif Mardin, “Tanzimat ve Aydınlar”, *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 1985, pp. 46-54.

on moral education published throughout the 1930s and 1940s in various newspapers and journals of the period, particularly those published before and after the Second Education Council convened in February 1943, which provide significant insights for this research. The Beyazıt State Library (Istanbul), which houses a large collection of newspapers and journals from the period, was the most utilized location during the data collection process. In addition, searches were conducted in the newspaper collection of the Istanbul University Library and Documentation Department, the National Library (Ankara), and several internet-based digital archives²³. Alongside press sources, official documents were obtained through searches in the archives of the Republic of Türkiye The Ministry of National Education Board of Education (Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı)²⁴, the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Republican Archives (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi), and the Republic of Türkiye Grand National Assembly (TBMM) Official Records (Meclis Tutanakları)²⁵. All collected data were classified and prepared for analysis, then examined using the method of thematic analysis.²⁶

1. Secularization in Education and “Secular Morality” Detached from Religion

Although moral education in the late Ottoman period was addressed within the framework of religious instruction, with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 a new conception of public education - detached from religion and shaped in parallel with developments in the West- began to emerge through a series of reforms and revolutions. In this context, the Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu (Law on the Unification of Education), enacted on 3 March 1924, brought all educational institutions under the authority of the Ministry of Education, thereby establishing administrative and institutional unity in the field of education. Within this framework, madrasas were placed under state control and soon lost their educational functions. Dervish lodges and zaviyas, however, were not closed directly by this law but were abolished through separate legal regulations enacted in 1925. From this point on, religion courses that had continued to be taught in formal schools were made optional by a local law enacted in 1927. In this law, related to the local administrations of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), it was stipulated that education was “non-religious/secular (lâdinî),” that religious education belonged to religious communities, and that religion courses could be offered in schools outside the official curriculum if parents requested it.²⁷ In 1928, the phrase “The religion of the state is Islam” was removed from the 1924 Constitution, separating religion and state affairs and affirming the guarantee of freedom of religion and conscience. In 1929, in order to further strengthen the principle of secular education, the compulsory status of religion courses was completely abolished, and these courses were made elective. Amendments to the Primary Schools Regulation (İlk Mektepler Talimatnamesi) removed religious education content and some religious practices from the curriculum. A circular issued in 1930 stated that although religion courses were classified in legislation as elective, they were no longer applied in practice beginning with the 1930–1931 academic year. In effect, religion courses were excluded from the education system until 1949.²⁸

²³“Gaste Arşivi'ne Hoşgeldiniz!”, (Online), <https://www.gastearsivi.com/>, March 9, 2025.

²⁴The decisions of the Scientific Committees (Heyet-i İlmiye) from 1921 to 1926, along with all the decisions and documents from the Education Councils, are available for digital access. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Millî Eğitim Şûraları*, (Online), <https://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/www/gecmisten-gunumuze-mill-egitim-sralari/icerik/328>, January 28, 2025.

²⁵For access to the library collection, see: TBMM, “Zabıt Ceridesi / Tutanak Dergisi”, (Online), <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kutuphane-tutanaklara-erisim>, January 28, 2025.

²⁶Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2006, pp. 77-101.

²⁷TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 33, 4th Session, 2nd Term, 82nd Meeting, June 25, 1927, p. 727. Erkan Kanbolat, *Harf Devriminden Köy Enstitülerine Türkiye İlköğretim (1928-1940)*, Unpublished Dissertation, İstanbul University Institute of Atatürk's Principles and Revolution History, İstanbul, 2015, p. 168.

²⁸Erkan Kanbolat, *Harf Devriminden Köy Enstitülerine...*, pp. 169-172.

The early Republican regime's distanced stance toward religious instruction and its effort to establish a system of moral education independent of traditional religious teachings were clearly reflected in curricula and textbooks. In this process, moral education was sometimes structured as an independent subject and at other times embedded as a central theme within other courses. Indeed, in the 1924 Primary Schools Curriculum, this approach was embodied in the course titled "Musahabat-ı Ahlakiye ve Malumat-ı Vataniye." This course was taught under the title "Musahabat-ı Ahlakiye" in the first, second, and third grades, and as "Malumat-ı Vataniye" in the fourth and fifth grades. Thus, moral content was presented in the lower grades in the more direct form of "moral conversations," while in the upper grades it was linked to civic knowledge and situated within a broader social and civil framework. For example, İbrahim Hilmi's 1918 work *Malumat-ı Ahlakiye ve Medeniye*²⁹ and Orhan Fuad's *Malûmât-ı Vataniye ve Musâhabât-ı Ahlâkiye*³⁰ were among the principal textbooks used in the field of moral and civic education during the early years of the Republic.³¹

In the 1926 and 1936 curricula, independent moral education courses were combined under the name *Yurt Bilgisi* (Civic Knowledge). In the 1926 program, *Yurt Bilgisi* was taught two hours in grade 4 and one hour in grade 5. The main aim of this subject was to raise good citizens by encouraging younger generations to adapt to their environment and internalize practical moral rules. The 1936 Primary Education Program elaborated these aims further, emphasizing the training of strong Republican, nationalist, populist, statist, secular, and reformist citizens; supporting intellectual, physical, and character development; and equipping students with knowledge to succeed in material life.³²

As Kanbolat has noted, the period between 1930 and 1949 was defined as an era in which neither religion courses nor independent moral education courses were officially taught.³³ In this gap, a "humanist culture" approach was applied through various subjects to instill a secular-social understanding of morality. Thus, moral education was integrated into courses such as *Yurt Bilgisi* and later *Yurttaşlık Bilgisi* (Citizenship Knowledge), presented not as religious but as a civic duty, serving as a means of raising productive, thrifty, honest, responsible individuals loyal to the nation and the Republic.

The transition from a religion-based conception of morality to a modern, secular moral education in Early Republican education policies can be traced in various sources. The secular educational approach of the period was clearly articulated in an article titled *İnkılap Terbiyesi* (Education of the Revolution), published in *Ülkü*, the periodical of the People's Houses (Halkevleri). The author, Mehmet Saffet, defined secular moral education as: "Not mentioning religion at all means providing the primary basis for secular education. Questions should be answered by explaining the meaning of freedom of conscience."³⁴ This definition reveals that the intention in schools of the period was to construct a morality entirely detached from religious references. This approach parallels the pursuit of "secular morality" detached from religious sources advanced by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim.

As a Western-origin approach advanced by philosophers such as Émile Durkheim and Immanuel Kant, the idea of "a moral understanding that excludes religion and is based on human reason" was debated among

²⁹İbrahim Hilmi, *Malumat-ı Ahlakiye ve Medeniye*, İbrahim Hilmi Matbaası/Press, İstanbul, 1918.

³⁰Orhan Fuad, *Malûmât-ı Vataniye ve Musâhabât-ı Ahlâkiye: Dördüncü Sınıf*, Kanâat Kitabhânesi, İstanbul, 1928.

³¹Seval Yınılmez Akagündüz, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarından Günümüze Ders Kitaplarında Ahlak Eğitimi", *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 13, No. 26, Fall 2017, p. 174.

³²Seval Yınılmez Akagündüz, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarından Günümüze Ders Kitaplarında Ahlak Eğitimi", pp. 174-177.

³³Erkan Kanbolat, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Kurumlarında Laikleşme Süreci ve Ahlak Eğitime Dair Tartışmalar", *Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2018, pp. 985-994.

³⁴Mehmet Saffet, "İnkılap Terbiyesi", *Ülkü*, Vol. 2, No. 8, September 1933, p. 114.

Ottoman aydins particularly during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918).³⁵ While some figures like Emrullah Efendi defended religion-based moral education, others such as Satı Bey and Prince Sabahattin emphasized individual freedom and autonomy, advocating for a secular moral education.³⁶ Indeed, moral education became a historical phenomenon reproduced from period to period, shaped not only by personal views but also by ideological struggles.³⁷ The understanding of secular morality that began to germinate among Ottoman aydins developed more distinctly in the Early Republican Period. Influenced by the prevailing views on education and science, aydins reached a consensus on the necessity of constructing a morality based on reason and science, independent of religious dogmas. The principle of secularism, enshrined in the founding philosophy of the Republic, was established among the fundamental characteristics of the state and enabled reforms in a wide range of areas from education to law and from social life to politics. In this process, building moral education upon secular and universal values was adopted as an approach encouraging individuals to think freely and critically. Aydins of the Early Republican Period shaped this new conception of morality in line with the goals of modernization and Westernization and considered it an essential part of social transformation.

In his studies on social structure and moral education, Émile Durkheim emphasized that the traditional social order had lost its validity and that modern systems should replace its old sources of inspiration.³⁸ According to him, this new system should reflect the collective consciousness of individuals and be based on the shared values and rational principles of society. Yet Durkheim also acknowledged the risks of this transition. He considered it dangerous that with the removal of religion as the main basis of moral education, no solid and universal morality had yet been established in its place. He argued that this gap could have negative consequences for social order and moral behavior and might weaken social bonds. To overcome this situation, he advocated for strengthening moral values and social solidarity through education.

During the debates on the Law on the Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu), intense discussions were held on the foundations of education and morality. Thinkers such as S. C. Antel³⁹ and K. N. Duru argued that, as in secular states, moral education should be based not on religious or metaphysical elements but on rational, social, and human values. Antel, in particular, argued for the complete removal of religion courses from the education system⁴⁰, while Nâmi contended that religion courses contradicted the principle of secularism⁴¹. Although these views provoked considerable debate in the social and political climate of the period, a circular issued by the Ministry of Education emphasized that education would be shaped according to the methods of Western civilization, and children would be raised in line with the fundamental values of the Republic, including the protection of freedom of religion and conscience.⁴²

³⁵It is important to examine the influence of Western-originated modern moral teachings/discourses on the formation of a secular public education system, independent of religion, in Türkiye. Mustafa Gündüz, *Maariften Eğitime, Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Eğitim Düşüncesinde Dönüşüm*, Doğu-Batı Publishing, Ankara, 2016, pp. 554-570.

³⁶Safiye Kesgin, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Örgün Eğitim Kurumlarında Ahlak Eğitimi", *Ankara University İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 2011, pp. 209-238.

³⁷Çiğdem Oğuz, *Osmanlı'da Ahlak Buhranı -Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Toplum, Siyaset ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet*, trans. Ertan Akkaş, Fol Kitap Publishing, Ankara, 2023, p. 29.

³⁸Emile Durkheim, *Ahlak Eğitimi*, trans. Hüseyin Portakal, Cem Publishing, İstanbul, 2016; İbrahim Aksakal, "Durkheim'in Ahlak Eğitimi ve İdeal Vatandaş Modeli", *Atatürk University Kazım Karabekir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, No. 42, 2021, pp. 511-529.

³⁹Bahri Ata, "Marksist Siyaset ile Durkheimci Pedagoji Arasında Bir Türk Aydın: Sadrettin Celâl Antel ve Tarih Öğretimi", *Education & Science*, Vol. 39, No. 175, 2014, pp. 247-40.

⁴⁰Sadrettin Celal Antel, "Terbiyenin Esasları", *Son Telgraf*, No. 51, R. 6 August 1340/H. 4 Muharrem 1343, p. 2.

⁴¹Recai Doğan, "Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Tevhid-i Tedrisat Çerçevesinde Din Eğitim-Öğretimi ve Yapılan Tartışmalar", *Cumhuriyet'in 75. Yılında Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi İlmî Toplantısı (İzmir, December 4-6, 1998) Tebliğler*, ed. Fahri Unan, Yücel Hacıoğlu, Türk Yurdu Press, Ankara, 1999, p. 254.

⁴²Recai Doğan, "Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Tevhid-i Tedrisat Çerçevesinde Din Eğitim-Öğretimi ve Yapılan Tartışmalar", p. 255.



This demonstrates Türkiye's determination at that time to embrace a secular and modern understanding of education.

In his article titled "An Essay on Morality" (Bir Ahlak Denemesi), published in *Yeni Türk Mecmuası* in 1936, Z. F. Fındıkoğlu offered a critical perspective on the fundamental problems of moral philosophy and various conceptions of morality.⁴³ The article focused particularly on the limitations and contradictions of metaphysical and religious conceptions of morality. Metaphysical morality, often associated with philosophers such as Plato and Kant, asserts that moral principles are universal and immutable, existing a priori (independently of experience) as abstract realities awaiting discovery. Fındıkoğlu argued that this approach overlooked human moral qualities and genuine moral experiences. Religious morality, on the other hand, bases moral principles on divine commands, equating obedience to moral law with obedience to God, and thus rendering them sacred duties for believers. However, Fındıkoğlu contended that this perspective tended to place morality solely on a metaphysical foundation, thereby misinterpreting its true nature.

2. Critiques of "Secular Morality" by Aydıns and Bureaucrats

In the Early Republican Period, secular morality denoted a set of moral values defined and disseminated by the state, independent of religious references. This concept foregrounded a morality grounded not in religious authority but in the secular principles of the nation-state to regulate individual conduct. While some aydıns and bureaucrats accepted this understanding as an unquestionable requirement of the Republican regime, others criticized it. Serving as President of the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Education Board of Education (Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı) in 1928, Mehmet Emin Erişirgil⁴⁴ discussed secular morality with reference to the works of J. Dewey and É. Durkheim, a move that reflects the profound transformation then under way in educational and moral thought. Erişirgil emphasized that any new secular conception of morality replacing religious morality had to rest on solid foundations suited to the needs of society.⁴⁵ Drawing on Durkheim's warnings about potential moral vacuums arising during secularization in France, he raised the concern -within the Turkish context- that secularized schools might expose new generations to such a vacuum. This highlights both the importance of adopting the principle of secularism in education and social morality, and the need to remain alert to the challenges of the transition. It also underscores that the content and methodology of secular moral education must be carefully planned and implemented with social consensus.

The points raised by Peyami Safa in his article titled "From Religious Morality to World Morality" converge with Erişirgil's critiques. In his piece dated 10 February 1938, Safa explores how moral education could be shaped independently of religious foundations.⁴⁶ He notes that in the West, the idea of morality remained intertwined with religion for a long time; only after the triumph of secularism did a search for an independent moral conception gain momentum. In Türkiye, however, he argues that post-revolution educators did not articulate the necessity of moving from religious morality to a "world morality." Safa revisits the debates in France after the 1789 Revolution over separating moral education from religious education -whether moral education should be inspired by religious principles or derive from a natural inner illumination rather than a mystical spirit. Citing Paul Alexandre René Janet, he stresses the importance

⁴³Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, "Bir Ahlak Denemesi", *Yeni Türk Mecmuası*, Vol. 4, No. 47, November 1936, İstanbul Devlet Matbaası, pp. 604-605.

⁴⁴M. Cüneyt Kaya, "Erişirgil, Mehmet Emin (1891-1965)", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Encyclopedia*, Vol. Ek-1, Ankara, 2020, pp. 416-417.

⁴⁵Mehmet Emin, "İki Kitap Bir Netice", *Hayat Mecmuası*, December 20, 1928, p. 4-6. As cited in: Erkan Kanbolat, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Kurumlarında Laikleşme Süreci ve Ahlak Eğitimi Dair Tartışmalar", p. 988.

⁴⁶Peyami Safa, "Din Ahlakından Dünya Ahlakına", *Cumhuriyet*, February 10, 1938, p. 3.



of moral education and the need to teach children their duties toward family, homeland, and God (Allah), asserting that the outcome of moral education should be the child's knowledge of God and that every action ought to be both moral and religious. Referring to a circular sent by Jules Ferry, the French Minister of Education, he notes that the state in France prioritized moral education and left religious education outside school. In Türkiye, by contrast, while the separation of religious education from schooling had been achieved, the resulting gap, he argues, had not been filled with a robust program of moral education. Safa's critique thus emphasizes the absence of a structured approach to moral education in Türkiye and the need for concrete steps in this area.

Dr. H. Ertez voiced views similar to Safa's. In his article dated 7 February 1938, Ertez acknowledged secularization in education as a successful step but drew attention to the failure to fill the ensuing void appropriately.⁴⁷ In his view, society was facing problems caused by excessive materialism, revealing the necessity of a fundamental restructuring of the education system. Other critiques echoed these concerns. Vâlâ Nurettin pointed to the insufficiency of primary-school curricula and textbooks in terms of religious content; M. Birgen argued that, in line with the principles of the ruling Republican People's Party, a new understanding of spirituality and morality had to be developed in education.

In this context, İ. Hakkı Baltacıoğlu's perspective is noteworthy. Rejecting the criticism that secular morality was entirely severed from religion and therefore "immoral," Baltacıoğlu contended that in a modern society the source of morality should be reason and conscience rather than religion. For him, secular education (laik terbiye) aims not at a morality grounded solely in religious commandments but at one founded on scientific and philosophical bases, equipping the individual with a "discipline of humanity and Turkishness" and thereby rendering them beneficial to society.⁴⁸ This view suggests that any perceived gap in moral education at the time should be addressed not by a new spiritualism but by an approach centered on rationality and social utility.

When one surveys the critical remarks of certain aydın and bureaucrats of the period, one observes a shared quest for a moral education detached from religion; yet there was no consensus on the foundations and scope of the new approach. Still, the fact that these issues were raised by aydın and bureaucrats drew the attention of political authority. Indeed, as questions related to moral education came to the fore ever more frequently in the TBMM toward and after the 1930s, the government initiated -and/or accelerated- both theoretical and practical efforts aimed at constructing secular morality.

3. Debates on Moral Education in TBMM

In Early Republican Türkiye, moral education and the role of secularism in education were also debated among politicians in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). One such example occurred during the 1928 budget discussions when Kocaeli Deputy Kılınçoğlu (Kılıçzâde) Hakkı⁴⁹ voiced concerns about students' moral condition⁵⁰:

"Today, both in our middle schools and in our high schools, morality and discipline are somewhat neglected... The greatest danger is to grant students more freedom than is proper. I do not mean that schools should resemble barracks, but the places a student goes to should be somewhat determined, the people they meet

⁴⁷Hikmet Ertez, "Terbiye Sistemimizin Islahı Bir Zarurettir", *Cumhuriyet*, February 7, 1938, p. 3

⁴⁸İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Laik Terbiyenin Kendisini İstiyoruz", *Yeni Adam*, No. 261, 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁹Resul Turan, "Kılıçzâde Hakkı (1872-1960)", *Atatürk Encyclopedia*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2021, (Online), <https://www.ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr>, January 31, 2025.

⁵⁰TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1st Session, 3rd Term, 64th Meeting, April 22, 1928, p. 245.



should be somewhat determined, the books they read should be somewhat determined. If these are not supervised, if all children are left without chains, I doubt that they will receive a good education and sound morality."

Kılınçoğlu argued that the excessive freedom given to students could lead to moral decline and insisted that the Ministry of Education was responsible for remedying this. In response, Minister of Education Mustafa Necati⁵¹ asserted that Turkish children were being raised in accordance with national values and that their morality should not be doubted.⁵²

In the 1930s, debates on this issue continued to occupy the TBMM agenda. Kocaeli Deputy İbrahim Süreyya⁵³ stressed that children must be educated not only scientifically but also morally, and he asked whether there were policies addressing this matter, and if so, in what form. Minister of Education Cemal Hüsnü Taray⁵⁴ defended the policy based on "secular morality" and explained how secularism, one of the fundamental principles of the Republic, was operationalized in education⁵⁵:

"Our Ministry of Education certainly implements a system of morality and discipline. This system of morality and discipline is undoubtedly different from that of the past. It can be defined as leading the child freely to goodness by allowing them to exercise their will in accordance with the concepts of secular morality we have instilled in their management, consciousness, and self. Our teachers are equipped with these ideas."

In another speech delivered at the 1930 Conference of Regional Directors of Education (Maarif Eminleri Toplantısı)⁵⁶, Taray emphasized the importance of teachers instilling reason- and conscience-based values in children.⁵⁷ On the other hand, responding to Yusuf Akçura's critiques of individualism and materialism emerging among youth⁵⁸, Taray pointed out that these issues were not unique to Türkiye but were global in nature⁵⁹. In a separate article addressing complaints about students' moral condition, he highlighted that the moral tendencies of the new generation were part of a natural process tied to the social environment in which they were raised⁶⁰:

"There are complaints about students' moral tendencies and about their being more materialistic. Complainants may find it abnormal that some children do not think or behave like themselves. However, there are great differences between the environment in which the older generation grew up and that of the new generation. These complaints should not be given undue importance..."

⁵¹Fahri Kılıç, "Maarif Vekili Mustafa Necati Bey'in Yeni Türk Alfabesinin Öğretilmesi İçin Yürüttüğü Faaliyetler", *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları-Recent Period Turkish Studies*, Vol. 39, 2021, pp. 135-155.

⁵²TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1st Session, 3rd Term, 64th Meeting, April 22, 1928, p. 248.

⁵³Nejdet Bilgi, "İbrahim Süreyya Yiğit (1880-1952)", *Atatürk Encyclopedia*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı Publishing, Ankara, 2024, (Online), <https://www.ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr>, 31.01.2025.

⁵⁴Muzaffer Başkaya, "Atatürk'ün Genç Diplomati ve Türkiye'nin Milletler Cemiyeti'ndeki İlk Daimî Temsilcisi: Cemal Hüsnü Taray'ın Hayatı ve Diplomatik Faaliyetleri", *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, Vol. 11, No. 34, 2018, pp. 667-685.

⁵⁵TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 19, 3rd Session, 3rd Term, 60th Meeting, May 18, 1930, pp. 104-112.

⁵⁶As one of the unique educational projects of the Early Republican period, the "Maarif Eminliği" (Inspectorate of Education) system, which was implemented only between 1926 and 1931, established 13 educational regions. The inspectors appointed to each region undertook important roles in terms of regional education administration. Ayşegül Şentürk, "Maarif Eminliği (1926-1931)", *Türk Maarif Ansiklopedisi*, Türkiye Maarif Vakfı - TÜBA Yayınları, Ankara, 2022, (Online), <https://turkmaarifansiklopedisi.org.tr/maarif-eminligi>, 31.01.2025.

⁵⁷"Maarif Eminleri", *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, July 31, 1930, p. 1.

⁵⁸Mehmet Kaan Çalen, *Modern Türk Düşüncesinde Bir Derkenar: Yusuf Akçura ve Ziya Gökalp*, Ötüken Press, İstanbul, 2018, p. 81.

⁵⁹TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 19, 3rd Session, 3rd Term, 60th Meeting, May 18, 1930, pp. 104-112.

⁶⁰"Maarif Siyasetimiz", *Akşam*, June 3, 1930, p. 1.



In 1935, Minister of Education (later Minister of Culture⁶¹) Zeynel Abidin Özmen⁶² defined the duties of education and teachers as protecting the regime, instilling secular ideals, and raising citizens worthy of the Republic.⁶³ These statements clearly reveal that the education policies of the time sought to transmit the fundamental values of the Republic and secularism to students.

In 1938, Afyon Deputy Berç Türker declared in parliament that there was no course dedicated to moral education in schools and asked whether the Ministry of Education had any work on this matter. In response to such criticisms, Minister of Culture Saffet Arıkan argued that the Republican regime valued the individual's personality, that in the modernization process proper importance was being given to individual freedom and morality, and that the old discipline system based on fear would not be reinstated.⁶⁴

As seen, throughout the 1930s the complaints and criticisms in the TBMM regarding moral education were largely framed as references to "indiscipline in schools" and accusations that the old system had not been fully replaced.⁶⁵ In other words, critiques of the government's moral education policy centered on the claim that adopting a secular morality independent of religion created a void in grounding individuals' sense of morality, resulting in moral weakness among children and youth. Government officials, however, consistently rejected such criticisms. The principles and rules of moral education were not concretely established and applied within the education system. Thus, the discourse of secular morality -devoid of concrete content- was offered as a response.

Still, it cannot be said that government officials were entirely unaware of the perceived gap in moral education or made no attempts to address it. In the years following the proclamation of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republican leadership frequently emphasized morality in both oral and written statements. Some education officials also recognized the shortcomings in moral education and even took small-scale steps to address them. For instance, Minister of Education Esat Sagay⁶⁶'s circular of March 1931 can be seen as one such effort. The circular pointed to publications (periodicals) negatively affecting young people's moral sensibilities and emphasized that schools should take precautions against such influences.⁶⁷ Yet it was only during the term of Hasan Âli Yücel as Minister of Education that a comprehensive policy was formulated and concretized in the form of principles of moral education. Until then, the government had dismissed claims of a moral crisis among youth as unfounded, producing counter-discourses that everything was proceeding naturally, and consequently refrained from taking serious solution-oriented initiatives.

⁶¹In the government formed after the establishment of the TBMM in 1920, the name of the Ministry of Education was changed to the "Ministry of Culture" in 1935. At that time, Zeynel Abidin (Özmen), who was serving as the Minister of Education, had his title changed to "Minister of Culture". Following him, Saffet Arıkan served as the second Minister of Culture between 1935 and 1938. It is known that the title of Minister of Culture had legal status from 1935 to 1941. However, Hasan Ali Yücel, who took office in December 1938, used the title "Maarif Vekili" (Minister of Education) in official channels and press sources and was referred to by this title. Metin Celal, "İlk Kültür Bakanı kimdi?", August 18, 2021, (Online), <https://www.edebiyathaber.net/ilk-kultur-bakani-kimdi-metin-celal/>, January 31, 2025; Ömer Karakaş, *Atatürk ve İnönü'nün İki Millî Eğitim Bakanı (Saffet Arıkan ve Hasan Ali Yücel) Döneminde Kültür Siyaseti (1935-1946)*, Unpublished Dissertation, Ege University Graduate Studies in Social Sciences, İzmir, 2006, p. 162.

⁶²Özkan Orun, İrşad Sami Yuca, "Abidin Özmen'in Maarif Vekilliği ve Faaliyetleri (1934-1935)", *Tarih ve Gelecek Dergisi*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2022, pp. 1060-1078.

⁶³TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 8, Session F, Term V, 29th Meeting, May 25, 1935, pp. 252-261.

⁶⁴Nadir Nadi, "Maarif Vekili Vaziyeti Nasıl İzah Ediyor?", *Cumhuriyet*, No. 4962, March 9, 1938, p. 3.

⁶⁵Erkan Kanbolat, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Kurumlarında Laikleşme Süreci ve Ahlak Eğitime Dair Tartışmalar", p. 989.

⁶⁶Tahir Dursun, *Esat Sagay'ın Eğitim Alanında Yaptığı Çalışmalar*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University, Bilecik, 2022, pp. 9-20.

⁶⁷"Talebeyi Eyi Eserler Okumağa Teşvik", *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, March 20, 1931, p. 1.

4. Media Reports on “Immorality in Schools”

The 1920s and 1930s, the formative years of the Republic of Türkiye, witnessed a profound transformation in moral education and social norms. Modern lifestyles and dress codes imported from Western civilization often clashed with traditional conservative values. This tension gave rise to newspaper and magazine debates under the headline of “immorality in schools.” Periodicals of the time frequently characterized certain behaviors observed among youth as “immoral” and made them recurring topics of public discussion. In particular, the clothing and behavior of female students, as reflections of social change and Westernization, provoked heated debate.

In 1928, for example, female students in İzmir wearing short skirts and flesh-colored stockings were sent home; in Istanbul, inspections of students’ clothing were described as a “strange practice”; and newspapers discussed whether girls’ skirts should be worn below the knee.⁶⁸ These reports illustrate how the media framed debates about morality in schools. In continuation of such controversies, in 1936 the İzmir Directorate of Education held a meeting with the principals of all schools in the province and adopted a series of decisions regulating the conduct of female students outside school. These included: students should not go to the cinema alone; they should not speak with unfamiliar men on the street; they must always wear their school cap; they should avoid excessive makeup and jewelry; and they should dress simply.⁶⁹ These measures demonstrate that moral education was not confined to classroom instruction but extended to controlling students’ lives beyond school. Among the statements adopted was the declaration: “*The beauty of your child is most clearly signified by cleanliness, simplicity, dignity, and modesty, which are the hallmarks of Turkish womanhood.*” This formulation reveals how the official ideology of the time defined the “ideal Turkish woman”: unpretentious, simple, and virtuous. On the other hand, opposing views criticizing these decisions as excessively conservative also found a place in the press. Some columnists denounced such restrictions as a “reactionary mentality” that should not be embraced by educational administrators.⁷⁰

These debates highlight the impact of modernization on social norms and moral education. Efforts to adopt Western styles of living and dressing came into conflict with traditional conservative values. This tension can be linked to public complaints about discipline and morality in schools. Criticism that moral values were deteriorating may be understood as a reaction to the behavioral changes observed in students and thus offers an important perspective for understanding the social dynamics of the period. At the same time, claims that “family order and discipline” were degenerating and that an “ethical and social crisis” had become a problem of the age should be assessed with caution.

The views of A. N. Berkes in this regard are noteworthy. Writing in 1943, during the sessions of the Second Education Council, Berkes rejected the allegations that youth were in moral decline. Instead, he emphasized that young people were striving to fulfill their responsibilities under difficult circumstances. Asking the questions, “*Is Turkish youth truly in a state of moral disintegration? Is youth steadily declining?*” he argued that, in fact, youth remained committed to moral values and were responsible individuals. He stressed the social role of young people, noting that the majority lived in villages and small towns and participated actively in working life. For him, this indicated that youth had an active role in society and that their overall moral condition was sound.⁷¹

⁶⁸Erkan Kanbolat, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Kurumlarında Laikleşme Süreci ve Ahlak Eğitime Dair Tartışmalar”, p. 988.

⁶⁹“İzmir Maarif Müdürlüğü İsabetli bir karar verdi”, *Son Posta*, February 25, 1936, p. 5.

⁷⁰“Ahlak Bozuluyor Mu, Düzeliyor Mu?”, *Son Posta*, February 26, 1936, p. 3.

⁷¹Ahmet Niyazi Berkes, “Maarif Şûrası Dolayısıyla Gençlikte Ahlak”, *Vatan*, February 20, 1943, p. 2.



At the same time, Berkes discussed the relationship between youth education and moral development, underlining the important role of schools in shaping moral values but also the influence of young people's social conditions. He thus argued that the "youth problem" was, in essence, a broader social and cultural issue. The crises faced by youth did not stem from youth themselves but from the circumstances in which they lived. As he put it: *"The root of these problems lies not in the mass of youth, who are a part of society, but in the changes experienced by society as a whole and the events arising from these changes."*⁷² In this way, he underscored the need to understand the impact of social transformation on youth and the significance of these broader changes for moral education.⁷³

5. Minister of Education Hasan Âli Yücel and Moral Education Policies

The systematic educational steps taken during this era functioned essentially as a rational state reflex to alleviate the widespread public and media concerns regarding moral degeneration discussed in the previous section. In this context, the ongoing debates in the TBMM and the criticisms in the press regarding moral education became more concrete in the policies developed during the tenure of Hasan Âli Yücel as Minister of Education. Serving between 1938 and 1946, Yücel emerged as one of the most influential figures shaping Republican educational policy. His period in office is particularly noted for the Second Education Council (1943) and its attempts to redefine the place of language, morality, and history -the foundations of national culture- within education. The awareness on the part of the political leadership regarding the preservation and reinforcement of moral values in education began with Yücel's appointment as Minister of Education in 1938. As one initiative in this direction, in 1939 an effort was launched to introduce rules of social conduct (adab-ı muaşeret kaideleri) into schools, with provincial commissions formed to determine the specific social behavior norms to be taught in educational institutions.⁷⁴

Attention was also paid not only to students' moral conduct within schools but also to their behavior outside of school. In the same year, a directive signed by Yücel was published treating students' leisure time as a pedagogical matter.⁷⁵ This document demonstrated that education was not confined to the formal curriculum but was understood as a holistic developmental process encompassing students' extracurricular lives. It emphasized that children's development could not be considered apart from their socio-cultural environment and that teachers should encourage leisure activities -such as play, art, sports, and reading- according to students' individual needs. This approach paralleled concepts in modern educational theory such as social integration and character development. Thus, the directive demonstrated that educational policy at the time sought not only to transfer knowledge but also to raise productive members of society imbued with cultural and moral values. Such measures envisioned by the political leadership can be understood as an attempt to shape students' moral and social development through educational policy, thereby sustaining social order.

A more significant effort to establish a comprehensive policy on moral education emerged during the 1939 TBMM budget debates, when Yücel, as Minister of Education, faced harsh criticism from opposition deputies⁷⁶. These criticisms centered on concerns about the moral development of youth. Konya Deputy Osman Şevki Uludağ argued that the moral crisis stemmed from a deterministic search for an ideal morality

⁷²Ahmet Niyazi Berkes, "Maarif Şûrası Dolayısıyla Gençlikte Ahlak", p. 2.

⁷³Ahmet Niyazi Berkes, "Maarif Şûrası Dolayısıyla Gençlikte Ahlak", p. 2.

⁷⁴Erkan Kanbolat, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Eğitim Kurumlarında Laikleşme Süreci ve Ahlak Eğitimi Dair Tartışmalar", p. 988.

⁷⁵Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekilliği, "Talebinin Okul Haricindeki Boş Zamanlarını Ne Yolda Geçirecekleri", *Tebliğler Dergisi*, No. 8, March 6, 1939, pp. 34-36.

⁷⁶TBMM, *Zabıt Ceridesi*, Vol. 2, Session F, Term VI, 17th Meeting, May 25, 1939, pp. 245-273.

and that solutions should be sought in practical, local approaches rather than scientific theories. Antalya Deputy Turan Örs stated that despite scientific progress, moral decline persisted and demanded the creation of a comprehensive moral program. Istanbul Deputy Ali Kami Akyüz also called for an investigation into the moral problems observed among students. In response, Yücel promised to take measures against specific complaints, such as girls wearing makeup, but he insisted that moral problems were not widespread and that it was wrong to judge the morality of Turkish youth based on isolated incidents. He emphasized that the program of his political party, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), effectively addressed issues of morality and discipline. Yücel argued that youth's entrepreneurial spirit should not be curtailed and that educators should treat them with compassion and kindness. Overall, he rejected the criticisms and refused to accept the idea that Turkish youth were morally deficient.⁷⁷

Muğla Deputy İzzettin Çalışlar argued in the Assembly that leaving moral upbringing solely to families was inadequate. Stressing that morality and spirituality were inseparable concepts, he asked what policy the Ministry of Education intended to pursue in this regard.⁷⁸ Responding to this criticism, Yücel denied that immorality was on the rise, asserting instead that it had decreased compared to earlier times. He then explained the government's policy of "secular morality", articulated in the TBMM in 1939.⁷⁹ This policy consisted of a set of moral principles reflecting the core values of the Republic and its secular understanding of education. The principles emphasized both individual and social responsibilities of students and can be summarized under the following headings: *honesty and integrity; legal and moral obedience; respect for teachers; national consciousness and fraternity; health and avoidance of harmful habits; and time management and leisure activities*. These principles aimed not only to teach students fundamental values such as truthfulness, respect, and responsibility, but also to cultivate them as responsible individuals within society. At the same time, they underscored national unity and solidarity, encouraging students to internalize a national identity and develop a sense of social responsibility.

Following Yücel's articulation of the core principles for a moral education policy, the second and more comprehensive attempt to institutionalize such a policy was realized in 1943, when moral education was taken up as the main agenda item of the Second Education Council.

6. The Second Education Council and the Commission on Moral Education

The Second Education Council was convened between 15–21 February 1943 at the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography in Ankara. The council was presided over by Minister of Education Hasan Âli Yücel, with İhsan Sungu, Rüştü Uzel, and Cemil Birsell serving as vice-chairs. Faik Reşit Unat was appointed as the general rapporteur.⁸⁰

⁷⁷TBMM, *Zabit Ceridesi*, Vol. 2, Session F, Term VI, 17th Meeting, May 25, 1939, pp. 245-273.

⁷⁸TBMM, *Zabit Ceridesi*, Vol. 2, Session F, Term VI, 17th Meeting, May 25, 1939, pp. 245-273.

⁷⁹"The Turkish student is expected to know and act in accordance with these moral principles: A. The Turkish Child is truthful. They detest lies. B. They obey the laws of the Turkish State, the moral rules of Turkish society, and the regulations of the school willingly and with love. C. They remain faithful to the Turkish tradition that holds teachers as sacred and revered as their own parents, and they respect their teachers with a sense of gratitude. D. They never forget that all of their friends, like themselves, are the children of the same great entity: the Turkish nation and the Republic. E. They do not destroy their health and strength, which are dedicated to the service of the country and the nation, with poisonous and harmful substances. F. They do not forget that they need a lot of time to accomplish good work and, in addition, to engage in restful and joyful activities. They stay away from gambling games, which waste time instead of saving it and lead people to bad outcomes. G. They spend their time outside of school with their families, on sports fields, at community centers, in the countryside, in gardens, and watching good plays and films. Places for drinking, venues where debauchery and misery are intertwined, and coffee houses that are dens of laziness are not places they can go". TBMM, *Zabit Ceridesi*, Vol. 2, Session F, Term VI, 17th Meeting, May 25, 1939, pp. 245-273.

⁸⁰Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekilliği, *İkinci Maarif Şûrası...*, p. 18.

In his opening address, then Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu emphasized that morality and knowledge should be organized not merely as matters of individual interpretation but in ways that ensured the unity and harmony of society. He stated that, until then, each teacher had instilled his own understanding of morality and knowledge, but now such efforts required coordination, clear direction, and common goals. Saraçoğlu stressed that the Education Council had been established for this very purpose. He also underlined several guiding principles: that decisions should align with the reforms of Atatürk and İnönü, that they should serve the benefit of Turkish children and society, and that moral principles should avoid both the narrowness of dogmatism and the looseness that might lead to disintegration.⁸¹

The Council adopted three main agenda items: (I) Improving moral education in schools, (II) Enhancing the effectiveness of native language instruction across all educational institutions, (III) Examining the methods and tools used in teaching history for the education of Turkish identity. Accordingly, three commissions were formed: Native Language, Moral Education, and History Education. Each worked intensively for a week, but among them the Commission on Moral Education drew the most attention. Chaired by Prof. Dr. Akil Muhtar Özden (first chair) and Prof. Tahir Taner, with Prof. Suut Kemal Yetkin and Yunus Kazım Köni (a member of the Board of Education) serving as rapporteurs, the Commission comprised 43 members in total, including 39 additional participants. It divided itself into two subcommissions: one responsible for defining moral principles, the other for considering their application. Minister Hasan Âli Yücel personally attended the work of the first subcommission, offering directives and clarifications.

The main focus of the Commission was the development of moral instruction in schools. Its work addressed:

- Identifying the social and individual principles of Turkish morality,
- Developing measures to ensure the implementation of these principles in primary and secondary education,
- Establishing specific principles of professional and occupational ethics for vocational and technical schools,
- Integrating the measures into educational curricula.

Additionally, the Commission examined the curricula of sociology and ethics courses in secondary schools, discussed ways to strengthen adherence to moral principles among university students, and considered regulations for supervising students' lives outside school.

The Commission's findings were compiled into a Report on Morality, which was presented and adopted in the general assembly on 20 February 1943. The report consisted of six sections: (I) of Morality, (II) Our Ideal: The Turkish Child, (III) Pathways Toward This Ideal, (IV) The Principal Social and Individual Principles of Turkish Morality, (V) Improving Moral Education in Schools, (VI) Requests. The report clearly articulated the desired behavioral patterns to be instilled in students and the measures required to achieve them. It emphasized that the new generation, in order to contribute to economic development, should embody virtues such as work discipline, sense of duty, responsibility, entrepreneurship, manual skill, independence, perseverance, accountability, and thoroughness in fulfilling tasks.⁸² To cultivate these qualities, the report recommended increasing the number of practical courses, especially arts and crafts, and introducing compulsory applied working hours in certain schools.⁸³

⁸¹For the opening address delivered by Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu at the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography on the occasion of the opening of the Second Education Council, see. *BCA*, 11-63-6/A6, 15 February 1943.

⁸²Serhat Kumbalı, Mehmet Temel, "Economy and Moral Education in Early Republican Period of Turkey", *European Scientific Journal*, Special Edition- August, 2016, pp. 180-198.

⁸³Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Maarif Vekilliği, *İkinci Maarif Şûrası...*, pp. 104-138.

7. Aydın's Views on the Second Education Council and the Report on Moral Education

Although issues such as secular morality, school-based moral education, and the philosophy of morality in education had already been hotly debated among aydins during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918), in the early Republican period these topics appeared only marginally in parliamentary debates and, as far as is reflected in the press, in the writings of a limited number of aydins and bureaucrats. However, the decision of the Second Education Council in 1943 to address moral education as a primary agenda item drew considerable attention from the aydın circles of the time. Aydın shared their opinions and assessments on moral education and related issues with the public through newspapers and journals.

A review of periodicals from the time, analyzed here as historical sources, reveals recurring themes and points of contention in the aydın discourse. One clear point of consensus was that moral education was essential for both individual and societal development. In the aydın's writings, moral education was consistently linked to the idea of the ideal citizen and the ideal society. They argued that moral education was indispensable for cultivating strong, responsible individuals and good citizens, which in turn would enable the realization of the desired social order. Writers such as A. E. Yalman⁸⁴, C. S. Ongun⁸⁵, S. Sönmez⁸⁶, S. Ertem⁸⁷, and K. Turan⁸⁸ particularly emphasized the notion of "national morality", presenting morality as something that must be nationalized, preserved, and developed.

Some aydins, along with much of the press, openly supported the state's project of shaping individuals and society through moral education. Numerous articles praised the significance of the Council in glowing terms. Certain writers positioned themselves as public advocates of the Council, expressing trust and enthusiasm for its mission. For instance, S. Sönmez described the Council in almost mystical terms, portraying it as the forum where the most knowledgeable and competent minds would identify and strengthen the enduring elements of morality, cleanse it of harmful influences, and propose lasting remedies.⁸⁹

Similarly, before the Council convened, İ. H. Baltacıoğlu expressed his belief that it would make a profound contribution to Türkiye's education and national morality, raising public awareness and stimulating cultural development.⁹⁰ S. Ertem predicted that the Council would define the moral outlook of the revolutionary Turkish nation and shape the spiritual character of the country.⁹¹ K. Turan praised the Council for focusing on the teaching of history and language as cultural tools to secure Atatürk's and İnönü's reforms by raising a moral youth.⁹² Y. K. Köni concluded that the Council had achieved its purpose, describing it as a model event characterized by scientific rigor, intellectual freedom, and consensus.⁹³ Aydın's such as

⁸⁴Ahmet Emin Yalman, "İdeal Türk Genci: Başvekil ile Maarif Vekilinin Nutuklarında Canlanan Tıp", *Vatan*, February 16, 1943, p. 1, 3; Ahmet Emin Yalman, "Mektepte Ahlak-Memlekette Ahlak", *Vatan*, February 17, 1943, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁵Cemil Sena Ongun, "Ahlâk Davası", *Varlık Dergisi*, Vol. 3, No. 233, March 15, 1943, p. 341.

⁸⁶Sabahaddin Sönmez, "Maarif Şûrası ve Millî Terbiye", *Ulus*, February 15, 1943, p. 2.

⁸⁷Sadri Ertem, "Maarif Şûrası", *Vakit*, February 15, 1943, p. 3.

⁸⁸Kemal Turan, "İkinci Maarif Şûrası", *Ulus*, February 16, 1943, pp. 1-4.

⁸⁹Sabahaddin Sönmez, "Millî Ahlâk Üzerine Çalışmalar", *Ulus*, February 19, 1943, p. 2.

⁹⁰İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Maarif Şûrası Millî Ahlakımız İçin Işıklar Saçabilir", *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, No. 421, January 21, 1943, p. 1; İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Şûra", *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, No. 422, January 28, 1943, p. 2; İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Buna nasıl ilim? Millî Hayat ve Olayları Karşısında Türk İlim ve Alimlerinin Menfî Durumu", *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, No. 424, February 11, 1943, p. 2.

⁹¹Sadri Ertem, "Maarif Şûrası", *Vakit*, February 15, 1943, p. 3.

⁹²Kemal Turan, "İkinci Maarif Şûrası", *Ulus*, February 16, 1943, pp. 1-4.

⁹³Yunus Kazım Köni, "Maarif Şûrası'nda Ahlak Meselesi", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Vol. 3, No. 36, March 16, 1943, pp. 4-5.



A. N. Berkes, H. Z. Ülken, and S. C. Antel also raised certain criticisms but nonetheless evaluated the Council overall in a positive light.

At the same time, other aydınlar expressed deep skepticism and criticism. A. E. Yalman questioned the extent of genuine intellectual freedom at the Council, suggesting that the Ministry of Education's rigid stance left little room for dissent, given its control over teachers' livelihoods and promotions.⁹⁴ P. Safa, in many of his writings, maintained a persistently critical stance toward the Council⁹⁵, while N. F. Kısakürek voiced sharp doubts about whether the Council's participants were truly capable of carrying out such an important task.⁹⁶ For him, moral education was a "cause" of utmost seriousness, and he distrusted those charged with defining national morality. Likewise, Baltacıoğlu insisted that issues of national culture and morality should be debated in independent, free forums, not confined to official congresses.⁹⁷ Burhan Cahit lamented that decisions from such gatherings often amounted to little more than lofty ideas and speeches, rarely implemented in practice.⁹⁸ Ertuğrul Şevket, observing the diversity of perspectives within the Moral Commission, doubted whether a unified "formula of morality" could be reached, describing the effort as nearly impossible amid the clashing views.⁹⁹

Following the Council, the aydınlar also commented on its shortcomings. Baltacıoğlu criticized the neglect of Turkish moral traditions, arguing that practical applications of morality should have been considered alongside theoretical principles.¹⁰⁰ Niyazi Berkes pointed to the lack of scientific preparation, claiming the issues had not been adequately studied or observed beforehand, leaving discussions superficial and lacking a scholarly foundation.¹⁰¹

The Moral Education Commission Report, published after the Council, also drew attention. Peyami Safa strongly criticized the report, claiming it did not merit the title of a moral report. He argued that the stated goals were repetitive and conceptually confused, lacking methodological rigor and offering misleading criteria that could confuse teachers and students alike. He accused the Commission of opportunism, noting that its attempt to reconcile conflicting views resulted in an eclectic and superficial outcome, little more than a compilation of well-known platitudes.¹⁰²

H. Z. Ülken acknowledged the Council's disciplined and productive proceedings but criticized the gap between theory and practice in the reports, as well as a tendency toward excessive compromise.¹⁰³ As a participant, S. C. Antel admitted that odd claims and clashing ideas had surfaced during deliberations, leaving certain deficiencies in the final report.¹⁰⁴ H. R. Öymen highlighted flaws in the preparation process

⁹⁴Ahmet Emin Yalman, "Dil Bir Anlaşma Vasıtası Değil Mi?", *Vatan*, February 15, 1943, p. 1, 3.

⁹⁵Peyami Safa, "Havada Kalan Şeyler", *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, February 24, 1943, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁶Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "Sadece Mevzu", *Son Telgraf*, January 17, 1943, p. 1. Kısakürek's other writings on the subject of the Council and the moral education are as follows: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "Yine Ahlak Rastgele Misaller", *Son Telgraf*, January 23, 1943, p. 1; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "Ahlak 3: Sadece Mevzu", *Son Telgraf*, January 19, 1943, p. 1; Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "Davanın Ruhu: Bize Düşen Ahlak Hamlesi", *Son Telgraf*, February 2, 1943, p. 1.

⁹⁷İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Büyük Bir ihtiyaç", *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, No. 439, May 27, 1943, p. 2. Although in his pre-Council writings he had portrayed the first Education Council in very positive terms as a liberal and scientific environment where ideas were freely discussed, and had expressed great expectations for the Second Education Council, his negative and critical evaluations after the Second Education Council are noteworthy.

⁹⁸Burhan Cahit, "Bugün Toplanan Maarif Şûrası'ndan Memleket Ne Bekliyor?", *Son Posta*, February 15, 1943, p. 2.

⁹⁹Ertuğrul Şevket, "Maarif Şûrası Çalışıyor: Ahlak Encümeninde Münakaşalı Hava Esiyor", *Vatan*, February 18, 1943, p. 1, 3.

¹⁰⁰İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, "Türk Ahlak Gelenekleri", *Yeni Adam Dergisi*, No. 434, April 22, 1943, p. 2.

¹⁰¹Ahmet Niyazi Berkes, "İhtimai Davalarımızda İlmin Rolü: Maarif Şûrası İlmi Hazırlık Noksanlarını Açıkça Belirtmiştir", *Vatan*, March 30, 1943, p. 2.

¹⁰²Peyami Safa, "Ahlak Komisyonu Raporu", *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, February 25, 1943, p. 1, 2.

¹⁰³Hilmi Ziya Ülken, "Maarif Şûrasının Telifçi Havası Nazariyat ve Tatbikat", *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, March 25, 1943, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴Sadrettin Celal Antel, "Okullarda Ahlak Eğitiminin Gelişmesi", *Tan*, March 1, 1943, p. 3.

and emphasized the need for moral education to avoid rote learning, instead fostering cooperation and practical engagement.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

This study has examined how moral education policies were shaped by the state during the Early Republican Era in Türkiye, the central role of the Second Education Council in this process, and how these developments were perceived by aydın. The analysis of historical documents, newspapers, journals, parliamentary records, and the Council's report has provided a multi-dimensional understanding of the discourse on moral education in this period.

Findings show that in the course of the Republic's modernization, moral education was regarded as one of the fundamental components of nation-building and was reshaped in line with the principle of secularism. Yet the content and practice of secular moral education were subject to considerable criticism from different quarters. After the proclamation of the Republic, educational policies were gradually stripped of religious elements and reorganized within a modern, scientific, and national framework. The system assumed the mission of molding individuals according to the values of the new regime. However, this process did not advance in a uniform manner; it fluctuated depending on the political and intellectual climate of the time. Particularly in the 1930s, debates in parliament and criticisms in the press about secular moral education reinforced the perception of a gap in this area. The Ministry of Education dismissed these criticisms and for some time refrained from formulating a comprehensive policy.

Although religious content was progressively eliminated from the system, what should replace religion remained undefined until the appointment of H. A. Yücel as Minister of Education in 1938. Before this, criticisms by aydın and bureaucrats about the lack of moral education were often mild and non-confrontational, largely ignored by the state, which instead emphasized the slogan of "secular morality." While state officials often expressed, both orally and in writing, their views on the meaning and importance of morality, these pronouncements fell short of constituting a concrete and consistent policy. With Yücel's appointment, secular moral principles and policies began to take shape in a tangible form. Thus, morality -purged of religion- was redefined in line with statist, nationalist, and collectivist perspectives.

A more systematic and comprehensive initiative toward moral education emerged again under Yücel, when the Second Education Council (1943) convened with moral education as its primary theme. The Council's resolutions provided an important framework for defining and applying principles of moral education. Implementation was not long in coming: immediately after the Council, Kastamonu Deputy Tezer Taşkıran prepared and published the textbook *Principles of Turkish Morality* based on the Commission's report.¹⁰⁶ These textbooks, added alongside Civics (*Yurt Bilgisi*), emphasized children's duties toward themselves, their families, and humanity, underlining their significance for the nation's future. The strong emphasis on nationalism and social responsibility reflected the ideological inclinations of the period.

From these findings, it can be argued that moral education was not merely an educational matter but part of the broader effort to shape individuals and society in accordance with the ideological goals of the Republic. The effort to fill the 'vacuum' created by the removal of traditional religious instruction was not

¹⁰⁵Cavid Binbaşıoğlu, *Öğretmen Yetiştirme Açısından Türkiye'de Eğitim Bilimleri Tarihi Açısından Bir Araştırma*, Ministry of National Education Publishing, Ankara, 1995, p. 273.

¹⁰⁶Tezer Taşkıran, *Türk Ahlakının İlkeleri (İlkokulların IV. ve V. Sınıfları Yurt Bilgisi kitaplarına ek olarak)*, Maarif Vekaleti Maarif Matbaası Press, İstanbul, 1943; Tezer Taşkıran, *Türk Ahlakının İlkeleri (Orta okulların II. ve III. Sınıfları Yurt Bilgisi kitaplarına ek olarak)*, Maarif Vekaleti Maarif Matbaası, İstanbul, 1943. These textbooks, published immediately after the Second Education Council, can also be considered an indicator of the practical political effectiveness of the Education Councils.



merely a pedagogical gap-filling exercise; rather, it functioned as a profound ideological instrumentalization by the state to reproduce its own secular values. Furthermore, the fact that these top-down policies were sharply criticized by figures like Niyazi Berkes for lacking a solid scientific foundation clearly exposes the inherent tension between the political authority's social engineering ambitions and the critical scrutiny of the aydın. The principles of Turkish morality set forth in the Council's report functioned both as a political document presented to the public and as curricular material in schools. This illustrates how education was instrumentalized as a tool of political and ideological socialization during the Early Republican Era.

The Council's proposals on moral education were received with great interest in the press and among aydın, but they also attracted critical evaluations. This indicates that during Yücel's tenure (1938–1946), opposition to educational policies became more pronounced, and certain issues that previously could not be openly expressed began to be raised, albeit in limited ways. The fact that newspapers and journals published numerous commentaries despite the political climate demonstrates that aydın could act with a degree of courage when they wished. While the tension of World War II loomed large, the Council of February 1943 provided a platform where aydın expressed their views openly in print. Still, it is difficult to claim that a fully free, democratic, and transparent environment for debate vis-à-vis the state ever existed- by the very nature of modern state power. Moreover, whether those who voiced opinions in the press transcended the role of "aydın" to engage in genuine critical-intellectual struggle remains debatable.

Aydın's responses to the Second Education Council largely fell into two camps: one group supported the state's policies, viewing the development of secular and national moral principles as positive; the other argued that the Council's resolutions remained theoretical, lacking methodological rigor and practical applicability. The press reflected this divergence as well -some newspapers endorsed secularization and the creation of a national morality, while others criticized the system through issues like female students' clothing and school discipline, pointing to frictions between secular reforms and social norms, particularly among conservative circles.

From a broader perspective, moral education in the Early Republican Era functioned as part of a social engineering project. The state sought to cultivate the "ideal citizen" through education, positioning teachers, bureaucrats, and aydın as active agents in this mission. Through schools, the state's vision of morality - national, modern, disciplined, industrious, collectivist, and loyal- was instilled in individuals and society. In the end, the Kemalist educational paradigm, characterized by secularism, positivism, and nationalism, took on a distinct form that continued to influence subsequent periods.¹⁰⁷

In conclusion, the moral education policies of the Early Republic were the product of a process oscillating between modernization and tradition, state control and individual agency. This process undoubtedly left deep traces in Türkiye's social memory. Yet it cannot be judged as wholly positive or wholly negative. Instead of such normative evaluations, there is a pressing need in the literature for educational history studies that aim to understand historical events and phenomena as they were, free from ideological bias. Approached in this way, the historical trajectory of Turkish education -from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic and beyond- can be better analyzed through lenses such as moral education, values education, and sex education, shedding light on how modern power shaped social transformation through modern schooling.

¹⁰⁷Mustafa Gündüz, "Eğitim ve Siyaset", *Toplumsal Siyaset*, ed. Ayşegül Yaraman, Kinem Tokdemir, Sarmal Publishing, İstanbul, 2024, pp. 145-170.



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