

**EDUCATIONAL POLICIES BY THE AKP GOVERNMENT AND THEIR
IMPACT ON EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical background of manipulated education in Turkey, the latest educational reforms by the AKP government, and how these reforms lead to polarization.

Turkey is an ethnically mixed and diverse country related to its geographical location in the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia, as well as the heritage of the multinational Ottoman Empire. In the meantime, most of the Turkish governments preferred to use the "nation-building" strategy according to their preference and educational policies have been an essential part of nation-building. While Ataturk's educational policies included the aims of Westernization and secularization, Erdogan's educational policies aim to Islamization of Turkey. In this matter, Erdogan's political ideas and politics of political Islam contradict the ideas of Ataturk's secularism, which creates disputes and misconceptions between Kemalists (Ataturk's supporters) and conservative nationalists (Erdogan's supporters).

In today's Turkey, educational reforms by the AKP government are therefore increasing polarization due to the fact that education is used as a basis for revenge by the Islamists vis-à-vis previous secular governments. The restructuring of education aimed to remove secularism from schools and to create a new identity against secular identity. As a result, latest educational policies serve a widespread of Erdoganism which has triggered polarization in Turkey. The thesis aims to determine how polarization started and developed in Turkey under Erdogan's rule, and how the use of education as a political tool by AKP has caused polarization in Turkey.

Keywords: polarization, Turkey, education, Erdogan, reforms, identity building, ideological tendencies

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My deepest gratitude and love is to my grandmother, who did everything possible to get my education in Finland. I owe her a lot because she always believes in me.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cumhuriyet -Republic

Hürriyet - Freedom (newspaper)

Milliyet - National (newspaper)

AKP - Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

CHP - Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)

FP - Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi)

MHP - National Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)

OHAL- State of Emergency (Olağanüstü Hal)

TBMM - Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi)

YÖK - Higher Education Board (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu)

MONE - Ministry of National Education

TÜBİTAK - Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey

1 Introduction

This thesis addresses social polarization in light of education reforms in Turkey, an ethnically mixed secular state. It is geographically located in the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia with a distinct heritage of the historic multinational Ottoman Empire. A turning point in modern Turkey's history was the founding of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) 2001 by Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan's way of governing the country is likely to be a new official ideology for Turkey, as Akyol says that Kemalism has existed for almost a century. Kemalism is the political, economic, and social principles advocated by Turkish general and statesman Kemal Atatürk and designed to create a modern republican secular Turkish state out of a portion of the Ottoman empire. The Kemalist elite saw the achievement of the revolutionary aim of modernization and became part of the Western, 'civilized' world by secularizing the political system and excluding religion from the public sphere. In a new Turkey, however, the idea of modern, secular, and national youth is replaced by Erdoganism through education.

Erdoganism has been crystallized in the past three years, making Erdogan the most powerful Turk since Atatürk. Akyol (2016) compares Erdoganism with other populist authoritarianism, such as Peronism in Argentina, Chavism in Venezuela, and Putinism in Russia. Erdoganism has already turned Turkey into illiberal democracy where liberal values weakened despite free elections. (Akyol,2016)

The AKP's government's neoliberal economic and conservative social policies cause concern in Turkey. Some researchers claim that the AKP's policy aims to control the future by reshaping the young. Nevertheless, education is the area where high expectations and concerns are common in Turkish society, given that it is adversely affected by the AKP's policies. Therefore, analyzing the last educational reforms is essential for understanding social polarization in Turkey. Education needs a social consensus. It is important to give social consensus on educational issues such as the purpose and content of the education and how resources should be distributed. It is also important that this understanding is participatory, inclusive, and rights-based. Exclusive content and unfair distribution of resources in education, however, aggravate social polarization in Turkey. This thesis

argues that AKP's educational reforms (from 2011 to present) increase “othering” and social distances among people.

This thesis primarily focuses on the third term of the AKP government (2011-present) because gradual Islamisation of curriculum has dramatically been intensified in this period. In addition, Erdogan’s “One man State” has also come true in this stage after the 2017 referendum that is why the third term can also be called the period of “a new Turkey”. The signs of Erdoganism, such as manipulated education, efforts for the elimination of secular identity, and creation of pious generation can be detected in education reforms. According to Lukuslu (2016), The Ministry of National Education (MONE)¹ is a key institution to impact on Turkey's national identity and pass on a new identity to the youth. (Lukuslu, 643)

In order to understand Erdoganism and its impact on education, it is important to review previous events before the foundation of the AKP government. It is not the first time the dominant party has manipulated education. It also has been used for the implementation of different political purposes by the different governments in Turkey.

1.1 Aim and research question

The primary aim of this thesis is to examine educational reforms introduced by the AKP government as a way of promoting Erdoganism. The central research question for this thesis is: How has education been restructured to include Erdogan’s ideology into Turkish education system? The focus will be on educational reforms introduced by the AKP government and will be analyzed in a historical and political framework. Education is chosen as the context of the study because educational reforms are one of the main reasons for the intensifying social polarization in Turkey.

Education system in Turkey is identified as an instrument for implementing Erdoganism. Turkey has the most highly centralized educational system of any OECD

¹ The Ministry of National Education in Turkey oversees one of the largest education systems in Europe. Administrative regulations and supervision of formal and non-formal education (except higher education) are implemented by the Ministry of Education, see <http://stem-pd-net.eu/en/mone/>.

member state. Aksit shows that the MONE mainly regulates schools. The ministry makes all political decisions, organizes all aspects of the formal curriculum, and reviews all implementations through the provincial offices (N. Aksit , 2007 p.135). Further, the education system is seen as a tool for raising nationalist and pious youth. Therefore, to review some major challenges before the AKP government will be crucial to understand today's situation. Educational reforms introduced by the AKP government, such as the 4+4+4 reform as well as the Islamization of curriculum has strengthened the conception of "us and them" in Turkey.

Moreover, Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution and how AKP interprets this article in its policy will be discussed. Even though Article 24 states that apart from mandatory religion classes, other religion classes are subject to people's own choices, and religious classes of minorities have to be organized according to their legal representatives. However, there are mandatory Sunni classes and extra-curricula activities for Alevis. Thus, this educational policy is a way of imposing Sunni faith on Alevis.

1.2 Research Methodology and Material

In this research, a descriptive method, which is one of the qualitative research methods will be used to investigate the effects of Erdogan's ideology and identity on Turkish education policy, which is one of the most essential parts of public policy. "Descriptive method is a scientific research method describing available situations and cases without considering relations between variables" (Ayan and Tütüncü,2016).

Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). It often uses visuals to help the reader for the understanding of the data distribution. (AECT 2011) For example, in this thesis, the table of Religion Courses was prepared to understand the historical development of religion courses and how the situation is at present. Descriptive studies target at discovering "what is," while analytical research tries to determine why this is so or how it became (Wiley and Sons, 2004; AECT 2011). It should also be stated that descriptive studies have an important role in educational research. They have significantly increased our knowledge of what is happening in schools (AECT 2011).

Initially, I defined the central concepts by reading some research about dimensions of polarization in Turkey that were conducted by Bilge University and KONDA. Those research were the initial step to understand which factors lead to increasing polarization.

Following this, I checked education reports by the OECD and Egitim-Sen (Education and Science Workers' Union Turkey) to get outlooks of education policies in Turkey.

In the next step, I formulated the topic through connecting educational policies by the AKP government and social polarization in Turkey. Therefore after formulating the topic I began to collect materials.

Educational reforms between 2012 and 2020, which form the basis of this research, have been downloaded from <http://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/page/about>.

TÜBİTAK ULAKBİM (Turkish Academic Network and Information Center) provides “online hosting services and an editorial workflow management system for academic journals” published in Turkey via the DergiPark platform. Another important data source of the research is the Turkish constitution and the English version of the Constitution is available in the official website of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (TBMM)

Likewise, books and articles about the root and nature of Erdogan's policies, Erdogan's new identity building through education, the root of polarization in Turkey, etc. were downloaded from <https://abo.finna.fi/?lng=en-gb>, <https://scholar.google.com>, and <https://www.academia.edu>.

Furthermore, I used textbooks of 7th grade and 8th grade to get a brief overview of the underlying problems in education before the AKP government. Examples from the mentioned textbooks were obtained from the books of Füsün Üstel and Gürkaynak.

I focused on an analysis of the nation will discourse of Erdogan. I watched Erdogan's speech, which he used at the AKP's meetings. Videos of the AKP's meetings are available on this YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Gei3mbMcIM>.

Lastly, I also used pro-Kemalist, Erdoganist, and Gulenist media and publications as a source in order to be critical.

For example, reports by the Hizmet Studies were carried out by the Center for Hizmet Studies that highlights events related to the Gulenist movement. One of the most popular daily newspapers; Hürriyet and Milliyet, state-run news agency; Anadolu News, etc.

I used sources in English and Turkish, and provided translations of the Turkish materials for this thesis.

1.3 Previous research

In a modern world, it is not uncommon to come across various groups that have distinct cultural values, attitudes, traditions, ways of living within one society. In case those values become contradictions with one another, acceptability of the difference decreases for those groups. Social polarization is one of the most harmful impacts of such a situation (Ağırır, 2008).

According to Rubin & Pruitt (1994), who names the situation as Community Polarization, once a conflict arises as the result of such segregation and becomes hard to handle, different individuals are obliged to make choices regarding which group to support. This phenomenon is one of the main elements in the process of rising conflict. Additionally, the absence of an impartial side worsens tension since there is not any side left that would contribute to mitigating the conflict with an unbiased attitude (Rubin et al., 1994).

Increasing polarization has a dramatic impact on societies. As Tom Atlee states in *Exploring the Dynamics of Polarization* (2004), polarization tricks us into dehumanizing the other side - ignoring their uniqueness, their diversity, their humanity, their resources, their potential fellowship toward shared goals (2004). In this sense, polarization strengthens bias and conception of "Us & Them". Moreover, it only respects one's values and increases intolerance in society.

"Polarization is the increasing concentration of groups, forces or interests around two conflicting or contrasting positions" - Us and Them, the right way and the wrong way, Tom Atlee states. Polarization, therefore, is based on the division into groups and contradicted views. He adds that the conception of "Left vs. Right" is a good example to describe political polarization. These terms are designed to organize forces for political war more than for greater human understanding, Atlee (2004) argues. These terms are shown as examples of how specific notions target to cause political war, and it is no coincidence that politicians generally use terms of "us and them", "right and left" in the political wars to polarize countries.

Polarization in Turkey has a long-lasting history. Signs of polarization are back to the period of the Ottoman Empire, but as Kiris states, competition between the Republican People's Party (CHP) and Democratic Party (DP) can be considered as the beginning of polarization. While the mainstream polarization in Turkish politics, the CHP-DP opposition, is generally defined as the center-periphery opposition, has gained a new dynamic since the 1960s with the establishment of the right and left concepts. Starting from the 1970s, the emergence of new political currents and more extreme views in the political arena apart from these two main currents have been the factors to increase the polarization (Kiris, 2011, p.33).

Polarization between political parties intensifies social distance between supporters of political parties. The concept of polarization has different definitions, and some claim that it is only at the elite level; the population is not so polarized. Others say that distance only increases between the right-left or liberal-conservative axis. People can support different parties, however this does not require a person to be an enemy. Nevertheless polarization is such the fact that party preferences are transformed into identities; a person begins to see himself in a group with those who choose the same party (Semerci, 2019) Kiris shows that this type of identity-based and values-based polarization gained prominence in the Turkish party system. 1991, 1995 and 1999 general elections held during this period were influential in the direction of polarized pluralism. The religious and the secular, the center, and the periphery, the left- the right, Alevi-Sunni, Kurdish-Turkish are the main sides of polarization in Turkey (Kiris, 2011, p.33).

Increasing identity-based polarization is also related to the strengthening of "re-identification" or "identification of differences" after 1980 related to some important political events, and it influenced Turkey, as well. Unal points out that the considerable period of change began not only in Turkey but also in the world during the 1980s. The most significant change brought about by the political, economic, and cultural developments in the world was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s (Unal, 2013 pp.1-3). Some scholars call this process a "re-identity" or "identification of differences" in terms of the revival of ethnic, religious and cultural identities, or the period of identity rise. Therefore, the identification of differences got power and was one of the essential political tools in a multi-party system.

Correspondingly, once different political parties used this situation, it also has led to polarization in Turkey.

Thus, tension among these parts has always been a key factor in Turkish politics. Lack of intraparty democracy and some elections like and the referendum had led to continued social polarization by Turkish political organizations. Populist politicians from the left and the right have used polarization as a political tool rather than phenomena that need to be solved, and in turn, this systematically triggers the fear and hate toward the other (Mustafa Erdogan, 2018).

In today's Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is identified as a populist politician, some scholars argue. According to scholars, there are three main phases of the AKP government that are being lead by Erdogan.

At the beginning of the AKP governance, a peace dialogue with the Kurdish movement started, which was an important event in the history of Turkey, and reforms packages for freedom of expression and cultural rights were accepted. In addition, Turkey developed relations with neighboring countries and achieved significant economic growth. Therefore, AKP took an important step for the democratization process, and that is why the first term of the AKP called the "golden era" (Zavaglia, 2016).

The second term of the AKP (2007-2011) was featured as a beginning of the "de-democratization" period. In 2010, several government amendments to the 1982 Turkish Constitution. Since then, as Zavaglia defines, a "shift toward authoritarian maneuvers" has begun with a dramatic increase in political imprisonment and restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of the press (Zavaglia, 2016).

The third phase of the AKP government (2011-present) is incompatible with the previous reform period. Therefore, the process of democratization has come to a complete halt and the government has moved to a hybrid regime. Zavaglia defines the hybrid governance as "a regime no longer considered in a state of transition toward democracy, but rather finding itself trapped halfway in between authoritarianism and democracy." After gaining the center of the political situation, the AKP finally managed to monopolize power by removing its opponents. The protection of civil liberties and the increasing

restriction of fundamental human freedoms have been a serious phenomenon (Zavaglia, 2016).

Today, Erdoganism is also a crucial feature of Turkey's important public policies, including education policies. Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018) characterize Erdoganism as a political regime which "electoral authoritarianism as an electoral system, neopatrimonialism as an economic system, populism as a political strategy, and Islamism as a political ideology." The regime divided society into 'us' and 'them' and managing through polarizing. In this division, Erdogan introduces himself as the representative of the nation will. The regime divided the society into 'us' and 'them' according to the distinction between its conservative and nationalist allies and secular, leftist, Alevi, non-Muslim and Gulenist critics (pp.1821).

Supporters of his national will are, therefore "us" or "people", and who are against his will, they are enemies of the state, in other words, they are "them" or "non-people." Non-people's intention is to divide the country. The notion of danger and the construction of an enemy have always been used by the states to justify their disciplining and controlling techniques as well as legitimizing their use of violence. The focus on securitization in terms of the exercise of the state surveillance provides the classification and categorization of the individuals around the criteria of "criminality/causing danger." Therefore, when opponents of the current government are being arrested, this action is declared as a protection of Turkey's security and prevention of further risks against the government. (Yilmaz and Bashirov,2018 pp.1821).

Kazim Ates (2017) also states that The AKP inherited religious-conservative populism, which is embedded in the political culture of the Turkish Right. He adds that the AKP governments framed all social demands and political problems in an Islamist discursive formation and re-interpreted them through the Islamic prism. As part of this, the education system was reorganized by opening new Imam-Hatip schools, adding new "compulsory elective" religion courses to the curriculum, and mandatory courses in religious culture and ethics.

However, education is in itself a human right and a necessary means of realizing others rights. As a right to empowerment, education is an essential tool for economically and socially excluded adults and children to save themselves from poverty. Education has

an important role in supporting women, protecting children from exploitation and dangerous labor, and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy. Increasingly, education is being recognized as one of the best financial investments that states can make. Importantly, education is one of the best financial investments states can make. “But the importance of education is not just practice; a well-educated, enlightened and active mind able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence” (CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education, 1999).

On the contrary, The AKP’s reforms have widely expanded the religious content of the curriculum only on the basis of Sunni faith. Cornell shows that Turkey is in direct breach of a 2007 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, which held that Turkey’s compulsory religious education classes violated minorities rights because classes are organized solely based on Sunni Islam. The government renamed the class to “Religious Culture and Moral Values” in order to expand its scope, but in practice, this regulation was not applied. (Cornell, 2005)

To conclude, education is one of the most important factors influencing the future of individuals and societies. The strategic importance of education is clearer in the age of globalization. Turkey's future depends on how well it can integrate into the world economy and transform itself into the information society. A high-quality education system is needed for development, industrialization, democratization, and security today and in the future (Güven, 2007, p.376).

2 JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (AKP)

The chapter aims to explore the background of AKP and its becoming dominant political power in the country. By the year 2001, Turkey experienced one of the worst financial crises in its history, followed by public frustration with the Kemalist army that had a significant impact on the public. These conditions lead to the rise of the Justice and Development Party in national politics. In the election campaigns, Erdogan and the AKP's platform abandoned National Outlook's agenda and announced their "conservative" and "democratic" agenda. A year later, the AKP won the election and came to power (Ozeren et al., 2020).

2.1 The rise of Erdogan

Back to the root of “conservative and democratic agenda”, Recep Tayyip Erdogan first was a candidate for Istanbul from the Welfare Party², and he was not elected in 1986 parliamentary elections. Then, Erdogan was a candidate for Mayor of Beyoglu in the local elections held on March 26, 1989, he failed once again and could not be elected. After two years, Erdogan entered the general elections on October 20, 1991, as the main candidate of the Welfare Party in the 6th district of Istanbul.(Shadi Hamdi, 2004, pp. 3-4)..

Later, on January 15, 1994, party president Necmettin Erbakan announced that Erdogan would be a candidate for Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and Erdogan won the election. However, Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP) was also sealed like the Welfare Party that was the previous party of Erbakan, and following this, the national vision movement was divided into "traditionalists" and "innovators"(Shadi Hamdi,2004, pp. 3-4).

The notion of Political Islam begins from Necmeddin Erbakan period that has a great influence on not only today’s Turkey policy but also on the policies of other Muslim majority countries. According to Shadi Hamdi, “Erdogan was appointed deputy prime

² Welfare Party, or Refah Partisi, is a Turkish political party known for its Islamic orientation. It was founded in 1983 by Necmettin Erbakan and became the first religious party in Turkey to win a general election in 1995. “The party’s pro-Islamist policies brought it into conflict with the army and other secular elements in the country, and it left power in 1997. It was subsequently banned.” Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welfare-Party>

minister, making him one of the first Islamists in the world to exercise the responsibilities of government”(Shadi Hamdi, 2004, p.1). Thus, Erdogan was selected as a man who considered preserving the policy of Erbakan.

Nowadays, there are a lot of familiar aspects of Erbakan and Erdogan’ policy. Like Erdogan, running the government with own ideology was also more critical for Erbakan’s internal and foreign policy than the development of the government. For example, Erbakan was also against the political relationship of Turkey with Israel and tried to make allies with Arabian and Muslim counties. This foreign policy shows how Turkish foreign policy changed during Erbakan prime ministering and how Erdogan proceeded most of his policy nowadays. In addition, Erbakan also tried to raise political Islam in Turkey, however the military did not support him, and this is one of the main differences between Erdogan and Erbakan. Erdogan gained the trust of the military or changed the structure of the military in contrast to his ideological father. That is why Erbakan failed to redesign the political situation in Turkey, but Erdogan achieved. As a result, even though Erbakan could not restructure the state, Erdogan did.

Nevertheless, political connections between Erbakan and Erdogan were ended when traditionalists established the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP) and the innovators established the Justice and Development Party. As mentioned above, even though the signs of Erbakan’s ideology have considerably seen in most of Erdogan’s reforms and projects, Erdogan always argued that they have own way with the AKP, and they are not a part of any previous movements and ideology anymore.

Hence, it is necessary to differentiate the concept of Islam and Islamism from each other. Because, according to many scholars, religious movements in Turkey are related to the rise of Islamism rather than Islam. There is a big difference between Islam and Islamism; Kahraman (2002) defines Islam as an epistemology and Islamism as a paradigm. So, there is an epistemology paradigm tension, and many of conflicts based on this tension in Turkey. According to him, Islam brought an alternative to the world-universe perception and was born as an epistemology. Later, it became an ideology by integrating with political power and introducing various limitations. This approach has limited its meaning, it has become conservative, prevented Islam from appealing to a broad audience, and Islam converted into paradigm (Kahraman, 2002, pp. 9-11). Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018) define

Islamism as “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives. They argue that Islamism “provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.” (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018, p.1822) For this reason, AKP's policy, which includes educational reforms, stems from Islamism, not Islam.

2.2 Populism in Turkey under the AKP Government

Populism has always witnessed in Turkish politics. However, Erbakan was the first politician who used religious populism most effectively in Turkish politics.

Although the founders of the Justice and Development party initially expressed that they took off “national opinion t-shirt” and they promised that they would not pursue a policy based on the political use of religion, time showed that the real purpose of the AKP was very different from what they presented outside. In particular, the AKP and its leader Erdogan seem to have decided on an authoritarian policy understanding and practice supported by religious populism since 2011 (Mustafa Erdogan,2019).

Populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. According to Mudde (2004) populism is a ‘thin-centered’ ideology since the particular ideas under its command are of limited scope, complexity, and ambition when measured against ‘full’ ideologies (Cas Mudde, 2004, p.543).

Moreover, populist politicians see themselves as the representative of the nation. Nonetheless, they tend to categorize people as People and Non-People, Outsiders and Insiders, Us and Them. Those who do not share the same idea are considered as non-people for populist politicians. Therefore, in most cases, populist politicians do not accept the notion of the opposite party or opposite people. People who do not support their ideas, populist conception begins to “othering” those people, and this paves the way for

polarization like Turkey. Most importantly, populist politicians or parties do not want to do only their responsibilities, they want to take over the government and manipulate everything, and structure education according to their political goals. In short, they want to be the owner of the country. Also, some who do not accept those owners, are representative of the foreigners or external forces. Yilmaz and Bashirov argue (2018) that populism also uses personalistic and paternalistic leadership. The populist leader usually represents divine characteristics: He is possessed of the national will and the common good. His authority and judgement are certain (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018, p.1820). All these symptoms of populism mentioned above can be found in Erdogan's policy. In addition, he uses this populist approach as a strategy to polarize and manage the country.

Moreover, the intensity of religious populism in AKP politics has increased considerably in the last few years. Erdogan intensifies not only his religious populism but also right-wing or national populism. Butler (2018) says:

Erdogan has said one of his goals is to forge a “pious generation” in predominantly Muslim Turkey “that will work for the construction of a new civilisation.” His recent speeches have emphasised Turkey’s Ottoman history and domestic achievements over Western ideas and influences. Reviving Imam Hatip, or Imam and Preacher, schools is part of Erdogan’s drive to put religion at the heart of national life after decades of secular dominance, and his old school is just one beneficiary (Butler, 2018).

To conclude, Erdogan frequently emphasizes that Islam and being a Turk are closely connected. In this sense, he generally uses Ottoman Empire and historical facts of Turkey in his national populism. He introduces religious values as an important part of being a real Turk. Therefore, national populism affects Turkish education increasingly through restricting minorities' right to education.

3 EDUCATIONAL REFORMS BY THE AKP GOVERNMENT (2011-present)

This chapter will examine what education aims in today's Turkey, what educational reforms are the main steps to realize the aim of Islamization of education, and how educational goals lead to polarized society.

Schools in Turkey consist of 8 years of primary education and four years of high school education. Secondary education consists of general, vocational, and technical curricula. However, high school is not a preparation for specific vocations but is meant to prepare students for higher education. "There are four types of high schools in Turkey: fine arts, multi-curricula, evening, and private" (Aydin, 2018, p.279).

Education is the activity of transmitting the scientific, artistic, religious, and moral knowledge created by humanity for thousands of years from the previous generation to the next generation. There are different approaches to the methods and ways to be followed in this transfer. Accordingly, a fundamental distinction is whether education should be based on subjective or local values such as religion, faith, and tradition, or based on positivist and universal values such as scientific knowledge. On the other hand, he adds, it is possible to make many different definitions of education. According to this, education is the phenomenon that causes permanent behavioral changes in the desired direction. (Kilic, 2016) As a consequence, the answer to the question of what is a desirable citizen or what is aimed by education determines the content of the education.

Throughout history, education has been at the center of individual, social, cultural and political goals in every society because education is a permanent way to embed a new ideology or vision. After Erdogan came to power, the main aim of education has been the construction of pious generation through educational reforms. As a result, Islamization of education reached its highest level in the AKP government period.

Reforms by the AKP government affected many sectors in Turkey, and education is one of them. It changed its aim and has been restructuring under the AKP rule. In particular, schools have been shaped to educate children appropriate to Erdogan's politics. Educational reforms have been designed to create a pious generation and desirable citizens for the dominant party. Even though educationalists criticized his educational reforms, but

Erdogan says there will be no back step in government's education reforms. The AKP government began to implement central educational politics after the formation of the third government in 2011. Moreover, after the third AKP government, Erdogan got power and clearly expressed his purposes in building a New Turkey through the elimination of the secular identity of Kemalism and to build a new national identity. In this sense, he eliminated his opponents one by one who can cause a threat to his dominance, and education has been a main political tool in this way.

Moreover, two steps can be defined concerning the implementation of educational reforms in the AKP government. The first step begins from the foundation of the AKP in 2002 and lasts until the formation of the third government in 2011. The first step is characterized by the introduction of a neoliberal policy and the continuation of the previous education policy and its underlying principles. Thus, there were no dramatic changes in education in the first stage. However, most of the fundamental educational policy occurred in the second stage, which restructured education under Erdoganism. The second step of the AKP's educational policies began in 2011 and continues to the present. (Durakpasa and Karapehlivan, 2018, p. 70)

This chapter argues that educational reforms under the AKP rule are polarizing. After a general review of education in Turkey educational policies will be presented in chronological order.

3.1 Education before the foundation of AKP

The last years of 1990 were critical in Turkish education because Turkey intended to be a member of the European Union and did some reforms in education relating to human rights. Before the declaration of candidacy for the EU in 1999, human rights classes were added to curricula.

The post-1980s are the period when Turkey more and more integrated into the worldwide free-market economy and applied many reforms as a part of the effort to be an EU member. Turkey has additionally enforced many reforms to bring its legal structure in

conformity with international agreements and human rights regimes. For example, in response to the appeal by the United Nations for the implementation of human rights education at the national level, a National Committee on the last decade for Human Rights Education was formed in 1998. During the same academic year, "Democracy and Human Rights", which was a new voluntary course, was added to the curriculum for 10th grade (Cayir and Gurkaynak, 2007 p.53).

Furthermore, adding “human rights” to curricula was an essential reform however, there were some problems. What kind of human rights were taught at the schools?

A section from “Citizenship and Human Rights Education” textbook published by the Ministry:

Turkey has a very important geopolitical situation in the region and in the world. Because of this reason, many countries have several aims in our motherland. That is why Turkey is a country always under risk. The places that harbour destructive terrorist organizations are neighboring countries which we think are our allies” (Author of translation: Cayir and Gurkaynak, 2008).

First of all, for the first time in Turkish education history, human rights classes has been added to the curricula. It was an important step for the EU membership of Turkey, and at least basics of human rights had been taught in the grade 7th and 8th. However, the negative side of education has been its particularistic approach to the conception of citizenship. To some extent, textbooks that were prepared with the intention of teaching human rights were intensely patriotic, nationalist, and exclusive for neighboring countries.

3.1.1 Nationalism through creation of the threats at the schools

Various forms of threats were presented in the 8th-grade textbooks: such as internal, external, and current threats. External threat is related to the geopolitical position of Turkey. Thus, some countries, especially neighboring countries, do not want the development of Turkey, that is why Turkey is at risk. Those arguments take further steps and it is indicated that many anti-Turkey terror groups have been organized in those countries.

By far, xenophobia in the official textbooks can be seen easily. Under the name of national security, students were taught to perceive bordering countries as a threat.

Three kinds of threats were introduced in the textbooks; current, internal and external threats. Neighbouring countries were included in external threat; opponents of Kemalism in a country were considered as an internal threat. The current threat was described as the combination of internal and external threats in the official books of schools.

Fusun Ustel (2016) shows some parts of the official textbooks in *Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet'ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi*. In the textbook, it is stated that the common point of destructive, divisive and reactionary organizations is against the principles of Atatürk. That is why expressions of “we are against the official ideology” are indicative of their opposition to the fundamental qualities of the Turkish state established by Atatürk. Moreover, people who consider Atatürk's opinions as “the imposition of the state's official ideology” want to disrupt the integrity of the country, destroy the state and establish an outdated system in which their views are valid through separation of the nation into races, classes, sects (Fusun Ustel, 2016, pp.306-307).

Therefore, people who do not support the dominant ideology had been considered as the current threat to Turkey. Officials began to introduce “others” as separatists in the last years of the 1990s.

3.1.2 The headscarf banning

Another chaotic situation and one of the most controversial issues has been a ban on headscarves. Some parts of society argue that the scarf is a symbol of an Islamic system that challenges secular. Others argue that the scarf is a requirement of their religious faith, and its use is a democratic right. (Cinoglu, 2016, p. 677)

To give an example from the research titled *The Picture of Polarization in KONDA's findings* (2010), the answers to the covering of female students show that society is divided into almost two parts (see Figure 1). The number of cases in which female

students 'headcover in primary and secondary education is“ false ”or“ completely false” is 49.6 percent. While 49.1 percent consider the cover-up of officials such as judges, prosecutors and teachers to be right, 39.3 percent consider it wrong(Agirdir,2010,p.32).

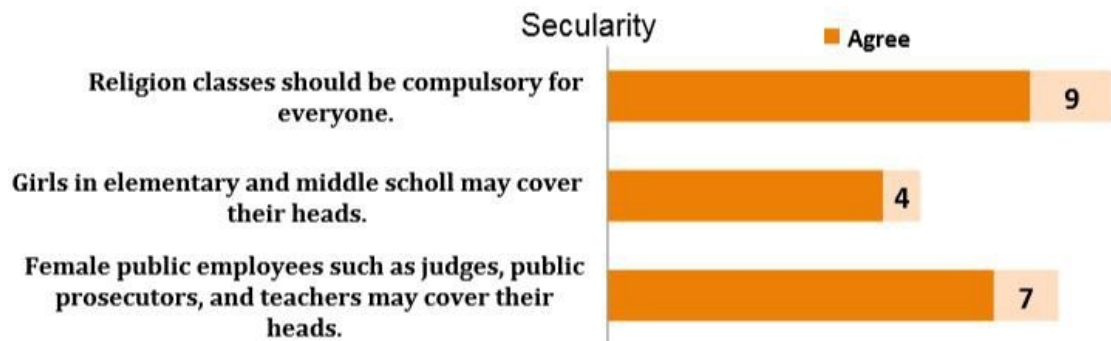


Figure 1: The headscarf controversy in Turkey

Source: Religion and Secularity. Reprinted from “*Polarization in Politics and the Society*”, by Agirdir, B., 2010, June 13 - 16. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2zG14Vd>

Back to the foundation of Cumhuriyyet, there was no ban for wearing headscarf, but there were no workers with headscarves in the institutions, as well. Toruk (2011) points out that the discussion of the headscarf started after the 1960s' with the increase in the number of students who were wearing headscarf at universities (Toruk, 2011, p.485). And this is one of the main breaking points in the issue of headscarf.

A ban on wearing headscarf at the universities was accepted after the 28 February, 1997 coup. Ibrahim Toruk (2011) writes that the headscarf was again banned when Kemal Gürüz, who was appointed as the chairman of YÖK (Council of Higher Education) on February 28, and he instructed the rectors of the university not to allow students to enter the universities with a headscarf (Toruk, 2011, p.487).

Besides, it should be emphasized that one of the most important days in Turkish education was the 28th of February that is also called a “Postmodern Coup or the February 28 process. The military intervened in politics indirectly on 28th February 1997, and it was the period when the headscarf ban reached its peak. This postmodern coup has a high impact on education in Turkey. The postmodern coup paved the way for the generational and ideological cleavage and reorganization within the Islamist movement that gave birth to the AKP (Ozel, 2003, p.89). According Ozel, the AKP’s success has proximate as well as structural causes. He argues that some series of events have shocked the Turkish people

over the past six years, and one of them was the postmodern coup, which was initially set in train by the military on 28 February 1997 (Ozel, 2003, pp.86-87).

The postmodern coup dramatically influenced Turkey and its education system. A ban on headscarf was accepted by the government after the coup. Ibrahim Toruk (2011) writes that the headscarf was again banned when Kemal Gürüz, who was appointed as the chairman of YÖK (Council of Higher Education) on February 28, and he instructed the rectors of the university not to allow students to enter the universities with headscarf.

This caused a lot of protests and chaos in Turkey. In 1998, almost three thousand students who did not follow the rule about headscarf ban were suspended from school, and many were warned and expelled. In 1999, while the ban on open education and theology faculties included students, the headscarf was forbidden at Cyprus universities. In 2000 and 2001, including the Imam Hatip schools, a ban was implemented on all public and private universities in Turkey. According to Celik and Gurkaynak state that “ever since its introduction, the headscarf ban faced massive opposition from the general population. The most notable attempt to abolish the ban took place when AK Party and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) deputies sponsored a constitutional amendment in 2008 (Celik&Gurkaynak, 2008)

On the other hand, apart from major problems in education that mentioned above, the series of events and disasters in the last years of the 1990s that mentioned above emerged a need to have a new system. As Ozel states not only did these developments take place during major dramatic economic, social and political changes, they also had a sufficient impact on changing the course of Turkish policy (Ozel, 2003, pp. 86-87).

3.1.3 Education system in today's Turkey

“Education, which is defined as the process of making intentional and terminal changes in an individual's behaviours by way of his life” (Gun and Baskan, 2013, p.229). Education has sometimes been an important tool for people to adapt to social change (economic reform) and to change society (e.g., nation-building) (Arnd-Michael Nohl, 2008, p.15).

In Turkey, education is among the main tasks of the state. The Ministry of National Education also plays a vital role in fulfilling this task. The importance of access to education is stated in Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution. The Basic Law of National Education numbered 1739 defined the goals and principles of Turkish national education (OECD, 2005, p.16). The main principle of the National education is to raise individuals who adhere to Atatürk's principles and reforms, who adopt, protect and develop all values, and educate citizens who are aware of their responsibilities towards human rights and the Turkish Republic- which is a democratic, secular and social state. (OECD, 2005 p.16-17)

The Turkish national education system is divided into formal and non-formal education.

Formal education is the regular education determined for people of a certain age group and given in schools. It includes pre-Primary education, Primary education, Secondary education, and Higher education institutions. (Güven, 2007, p.363)

Pre-primary education is voluntary education for 3-5 years old children. The main aim of pre-primary education is to provide physical, mental, and sensory development of children and to prepare children for primary education. Pre-primary school education is usually given in the kindergartens and nursing homes under the supervision of the Ministry.

With a new “4+4+4” education model, since 2012-13, compulsory education has been divided into a 4-year primary school, 4-year secondary school, and 4-year high school.

Primary education includes children between 66 months and 10 years. It is free in public schools. These schools provide eight (4+4) years of education. After completing 8 years of primary education, students begin the Secondary education for 4 more years. Secondary education consists of general, vocational, and technical curricula.

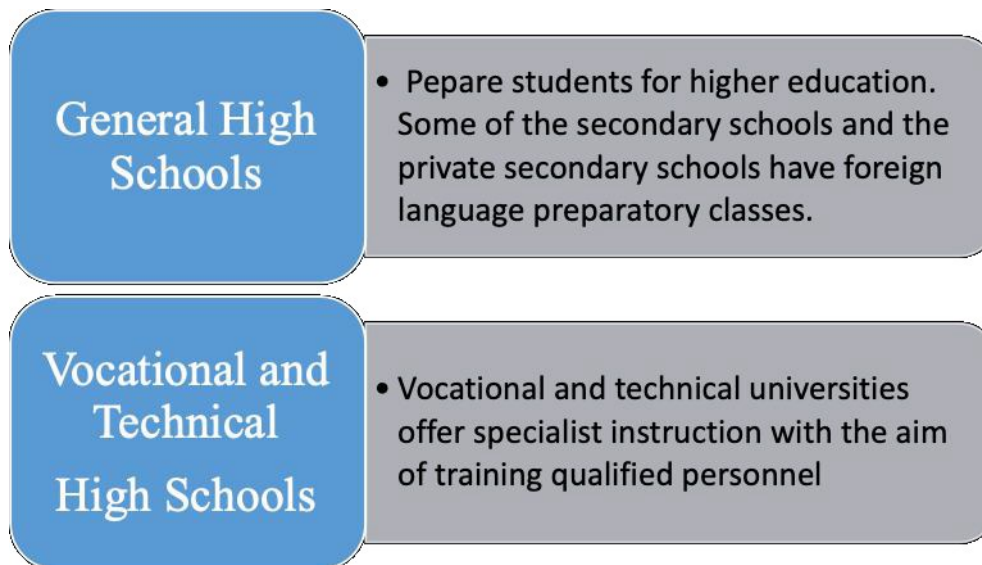


Figure 2: Secondary Education in Turkey

Source of information: Eğitim Sisteminin Büyüklüğü Hakkındaki Sayısal Veriler, “Ek-1, Türkiyede eğitimin mevcut durumu” by TÜBİTAK, (n.d.) p.1 Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/35ncvwK>

Higher education is organized in universities as four-year degree programs or in post-secondary institutions as two-year primary education programs. In addition, there are two-year pre-assembly degree programs that provide vocational training.

The aim of non-formal education in Turkey is to teach adults to read and write, to provide necessary information, to develop the knowledge and skills they have already acquired, and to create new opportunities to improve their standard of living (Güven, 2007, pp.363-364). The Ministry of National Education also oversees non-formal education in Turkey. Non-formal education services aim to teach reading-writing, help to continue education of students to finish their incomplete education, teach balanced nutrition and a healthy lifestyle, teach people from various professions the knowledge and skills they need to improve themselves, and so on. (TÜBİTAK, n.d.)

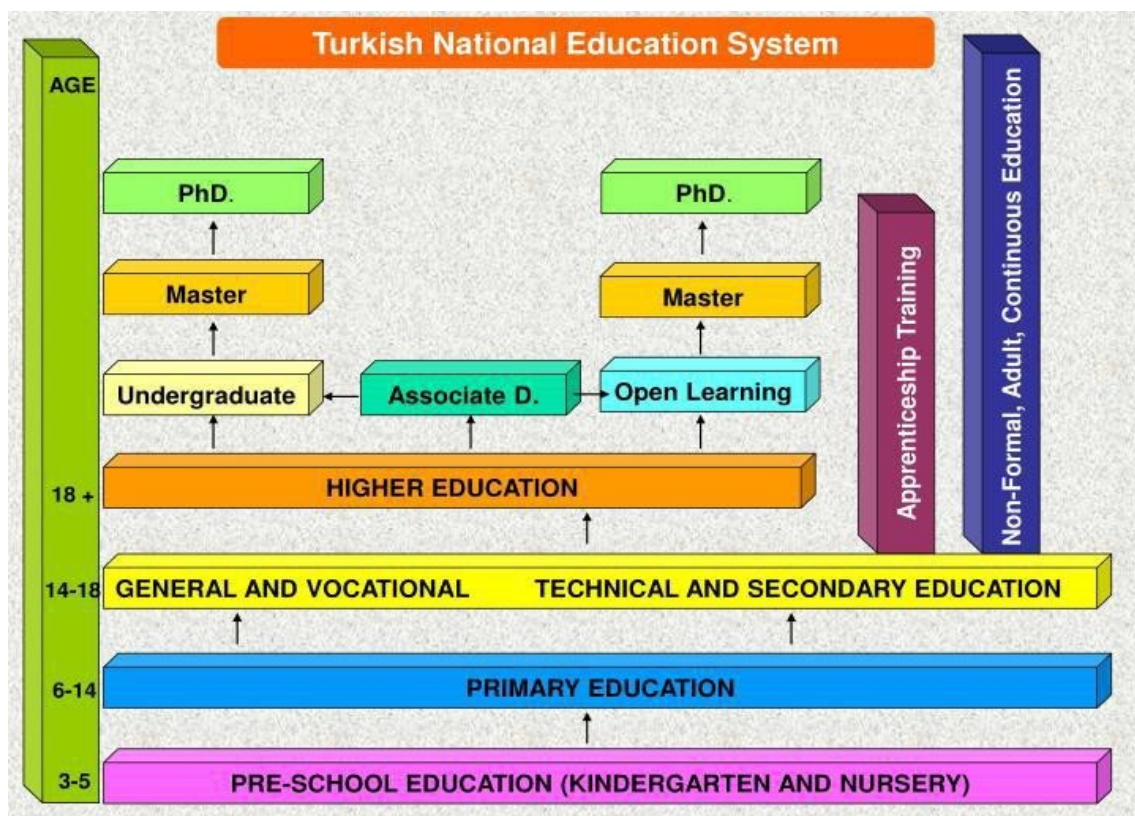


Figure 3: Turkish National Education System

Source: National Education System and In-Service Teacher Training in TURKEY, ARION Study Visit. 2007, September 24-28) p.7 Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2zJqyRz>

The basic principles of Turkish Education are as stated below:

- Generality and equality (educational institutions are open to all regardless of race, sex, or religion)
- Meeting the needs of the individual and society
- Orientation (individuals are directed towards programs or schools depending on their interests, talents, and abilities);

<p>Ensuring that everybody enjoys the right to basic education</p> <p>Providing equal opportunities</p> <p>Continuity (it is essential that the general and vocational education of individuals lasts for a lifetime)</p> <p>Conformity with Atatürk's reforms and principles, and Atatürk's Nationalism;</p> <p>Democracy education and Secularism</p> <p>The scientific approach and Planning</p> <p>Co-education and School-family co-operation</p> <p>Education everywhere</p>

Table 1: Principles of Turkish National Education

Source of information: Basic Education in Turkey/Background Report, REPUBLIC OF TURKEY MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION 2005, June) Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2SrMmHX>

As a developing country, Turkey has many educational problems. Girls' education, high illiteracy, religious education, curriculum, and multicultural education are some of the crucial issues. (Cinoglu, 2006 p.676) To improve the education system in Turkey, MONE has some important obligations to implement on behalf of the state.

Following the OECD report on Turkish educational system show critical tasks of the MONE:

i. The first task of the MONE is to protect the principles and reforms of Atatürk and to introduce historical, cultural, spiritual, moral, and national values in this direction.

ii. To raise active individuals who are responsible for society by becoming a balanced and healthy individual in terms of body, mind, morality, and spirit.

iii. To regulate all kinds of formal and non-formal education institutions, and also monitor education abroad for Turkish citizens.

iv. To work together to establish the curriculum, regulations, and educational equality levels for the institutions of secondary education connected to the Turkish Armed Forces (OECD, 2005, p.10).

For almost the last two decades, education has shifted away from scientific, secular, and modern education. Since 2002, Turkey has repeatedly faced a change in its education system. The Minister of Education changed seven times in the 18-year-old AKP government, and the system has had a chaotic structure. During the AKP rule, education became an important tool for making Erdoganism the dominant ideology and raising the pious generation.

3.2 REFORM: 4+4+4

After the foundation of the AKP government, both structural and curricular reforms were implemented that have considerably shaped education in Turkey.

One of these reforms that raise controversial public discussion is “4+4+4” introduced by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, “Primary Education Law no 6287” passed on 30 March 2012, and made a radical decision in Turkish education system. This law, publicly known as 4 + 4 + 4, which brought a sudden change in the Turkish education system. The aim of this reform was stated as making the Turkish national education system more competitive and meeting the standards of developed countries (Gun and Baskan, 2013, p.229).

According to scholars, 4+4+4 is an essential step to create “pious generation” and remove “Kemalism” from education. This reform is designed to include Erdogan’s ideology to education, in other words, it is an ideological reform.

To clarify, Bay and Turkan (2013) explain that the 4 + 4 + 4 model has led to significant changes in the Turkish education system. The previous “5+3³” model applied since 1997 has been replaced by the 4 + 4 + 4 model. Thus, primary schools were divided into primary schools, secondary schools, Imam Hatip secondary schools, and fifth-grade students entered the secondary school level. In addition, the age for starting school used to be 84-72 months and according to the 4+4+4 model, children can go to school when they turn 5 years old (60-72 months), and preschool education was not compulsory but left to the parents' preference (Bay, Turkan et al.,2013, p.37).

Data proves a number of Imam Hatip schools have increased since the 4+4+4 model applied. Nevertheless, the implementation of the new system intends to increase investment for Imam Hatip schools. Data, as indicated by Reuters (2018), also shows that the 4+4+4 system was designed to bring Erdogan’s ideology to education and intensify new identity-building processes that contradict with secular identity.

According to the Reuters’ 2018-report:

Government budget and investment plans show that spending on Imam Hatip upper schools for boys and girls aged 14 to 18 will double to 6.57 billion lira (\$1.68 billion) in 2018 - nearly a quarter of the total upper schools budget. Although the 645,000 Imam Hatip students make up only 11 percent of the total upper school population, they receive 23 percent of funding - double of what they spend per pupil at mainstream schools (Reuters, 2018)

The following figure shows how much money the AKP government provided to religious schools in 2018. Amounts were presented in Turkish lira.

³ The French model of state schooling (5+3 system) was adopted at the beginning of the Republic. This model provided for primary schools, teaching a five-year curriculum, after which children could either cease their schooling, or proceed to middle schools and, eventually, to high schools and universities. Technical and vocational schools were also provided at each of the three higher levels, for graduates of schools at the previous stage (Başaran, 1996: 64).

GOVERNMENT SPENDING PER UPPER SCHOOL STUDENT

Budget plans for 2018, by type of school. Amounts in Turkish lira.

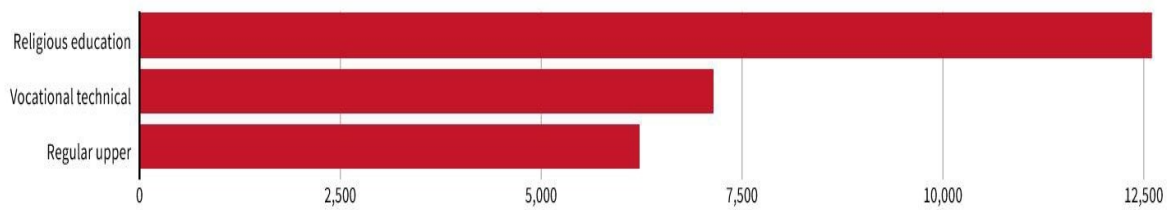


Figure 4: Government spending per upper school student

Source: Budget plans for 2018, by type of school, by Desrayaud, Hughes, and Butler, “A Pious Generation”. Reuters (2018, Jan.25) Retrieved from: <https://reut.rs/3d9Jbge>

In addition, figures indicate a rapid increase of Imam Hatip schools after the application of 4+4+4 reform.

Between 2012 and 2017, the number of Imam Hatip Lycees (upper secondary level) increased from 537 to 1,485 and the number of students attending those schools went up from 268,245 to 503,978. In 2016-2017 the total number of students in the lower and upper level of Imam Hatip schools increased to 1,291,426. This number was 71,100 when the AKP came to power Moreover, the statistics of the Ministry of National Education of the last two years show that there are more girls (56%) attending religious upper secondary level of Imam Hatip Schools than boys (44%) (Egitim-Sen Report, 2017-2018,p. 4, Author of translation Funda Karapehlivan, 2019)

Figure 4 and Figure 5 below indicates that The number of Imam Hatip schools and students attending Imam Hatip schools has increased significantly since 2012.

IMAM HATIP SCHOOLS

Number by school year

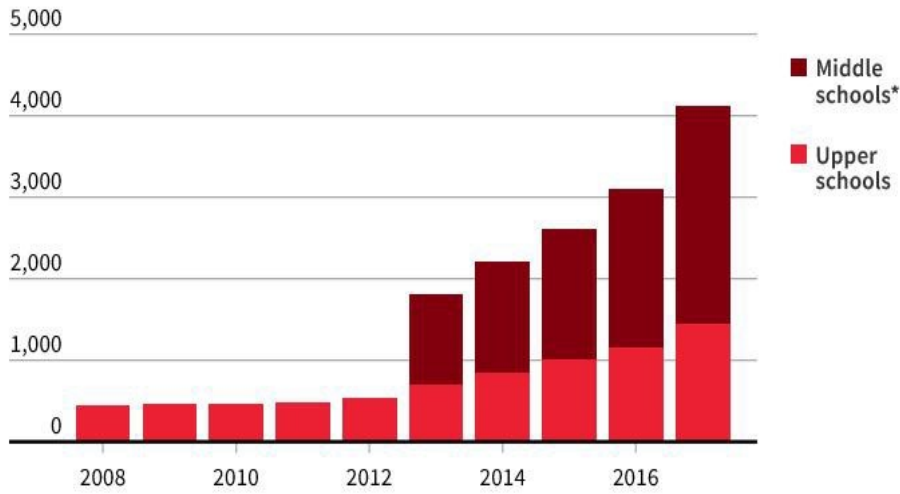


Figure 5: Religious education in Turkey: a number of religious schools

Source: Imam Hatip Schools, by Desrayaud, Hughes, and Butler, “A Pious Generation”. Reuters (2018, Jan.25) Retrieved from: <https://reut.rs/3d9Jbge>

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL STUDENTS

As a percentage of all Turkish students by school year

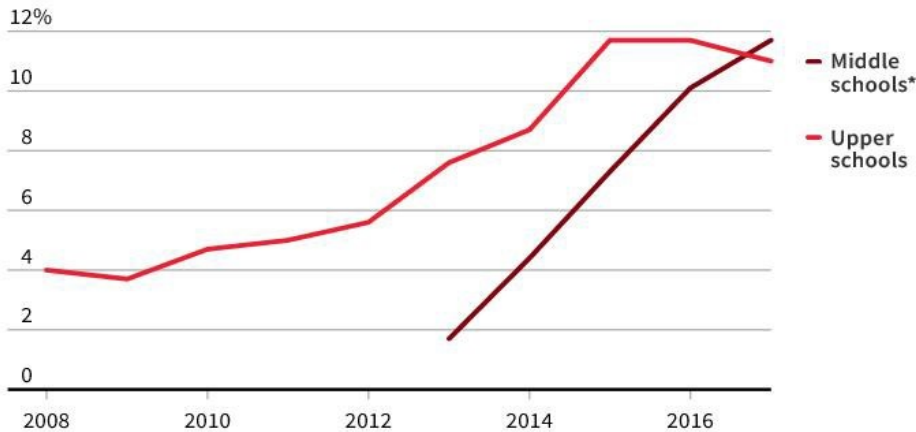


Figure 6: Religious Education in Turkey:A number of religious school students

Source: Religious School Students, by Desrayaud, Hughes, and Butler, “A Pious Generation”. Reuters (2018, Jan.25) Retrieved from: <https://reut.rs/3d9Jbge>

Further, both 5+3 and 4+4+4 have common sides. Both 5+3 and 4+4+4 education models have been applied to serve the ideology of governments that have been in power. What can be seen, both of models are examples of manipulated education. Lukuslu points

out that “education system that had been in place since the so-called postmodern coup of 1997 was a 5 + 3 years compulsory system, designed under the supervision of the country’s then almighty military guardians to stem the rise of Islamism in general and religious education in particular” (Lukuslu, 2018). Therefore, education policy (5+3) aimed to prevent the increasing of Imam Hatip Schools and according to Kaya (2015), 5+3 model intended to decrease the competitiveness of religious schools and make them undesirable for the society. (Kaya 2015, p. 57) In this sense, it is important to look briefly at what the Turkish education system achieved with the "5 + 3" model.

To some extent, the 5 + 3 model achieved the loss of influence of religious schools. Kaya examines,

By then, Imam Hatip schools were recruiting students after the fifth grade. The aim of the new law was to prevent families from sending their children immediately after primary school, with the expectation that a child who went through an eight-year secular education would be less likely to go on to an Imam Hatip School. Hence the 1997 law closed down the first three-year section of Imam Hatip schools (secondary level, years 6 to 8) while allowing the last four-year section to remain open (high school level, years 9 to 12). (Kaya 2015, 57).

Erdogan considers changing the education model to 4 + 4 + 4 as the end of pressure. However, the 3 + 5 model increased the attendance of girls at the schools. In addition, thanks to the 1997 reform, the number of early marriages has decreased significantly. It should be noted that child marriage is a severe problem in Turkey, and it is expected that the 4 + 4 + 4 model will facilitate early marriages due to the possibility of not letting girls go to school after the first four years.

According to a study by Istanbul’s Koc University and Tusiad, the Turkish business federation, the proportion of girls married at the age of 16 fell 46 percent in the succeeding years. Some business leaders voice concerns that the latest change could reverse this trend. Umit Boyner, Tusiad’s chairwoman, has suggested the proposed new system of separate infants and middle schools could also encourage parents to keep their girls at home after the first four years. Tusiad adds that most developed countries do not have specialist education before 16 and that a broad education is important for a flexible labour force. (Daniel Domber, 2012)

Moreover, after applying the 4 + 4 + 4 model, the age of entry to primary schools was reduced, and many new students began their studies the same year. As a result, there were limited schools, and parents who preferred non-religious schools had to send their children to religious schools. As a result of this, a 4+4+4 model achieved to make Imam Hatip schools appeal to society again.

To summarize, the AKP government is striving for a new religious identity, and like the previous government, the AKP government has implemented this policy through education. To create a religious environment in Turkey, the AKP has implemented a 4 + 4 + 4 education model, in other words, an ideological education model. Furthermore, this model has led to an increase in the number of religious schools to reconstitute influence of Imam Hatip schools and to stimulate schools for Islamization and desecularization of Turkey when 4+4+4 educational reform caused the demand for more schools. In addition, a 4 + 4 + 4 education model is predicted to lead to an increase in “homeschooling” and a decrease in the number of girls in Turkey.

In all, taken into consideration, religious identity is one of the criteria for Erdogan’s desirable citizens, 4+4+4 model developed to enter his identity into education.

In addition, his intention to promote religious identity through this educational reform has been contradicted with previous secular identity, which in turn has driven polarization in Turkey.

3.3 Revision of curriculum: Forbidden Theory Evolution

The AKP government has chosen to ban the theory of evolution and remove it from the curriculum. Removing evolution theory is one of the reforms for the Islamization and desecularization of the curriculum, which for the first time added to the curriculum by Ataturk. That is why it is important to briefly review the history of evolution theory in the Turkish education system.

Peker, Comert et al. (2009) state that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, initiated to add evolution theory into the biology curriculum under the unification and secularization of educational systems. In 1931, the MONE published a book about Darwin written by a Turkish Darwinist. At that time, Darwinian evolution was considered as a valid scientific theory and an important part of the science curriculum. “The young republic’s positivist education philosophy was best captured in the famous dictum of Atatürk “the truest guide in the world is the science”, Peker and Comert added (2009).

According to Peker and Comert, there were no significant changes in the way evolution was taught between the late 1930s and early 1970s. From 1972, however, the number of concepts about evolution covered in biology textbooks decreased. (Peker, Comert et al., 2009, pp. 740-741) It is reported that at the end of the 1960s, current controversial priest Fethullah Gülen published a book entitled "The Truth of Creation and Evolution", which called for the creation of biology books that are compatible with the Islamic values and foundations of Islam. The "creation against evolution" debate was an integral part of the struggle between the two poles of Turkish society, namely the national conservative front and the left groups in the 1970s (140 Journos, 2017).

The most dramatic change was implemented after the 1980 military coup regarding evolution theory. In 1985, creationism was included in the biology curriculum by the National Ministry of Education. Peker and Comer state (p.741). Moreover, 140 Journos reports:

The 1980 coup d’etat, however, had established a more authoritarian regime under which academic freedom was restricted and religious conservatism was becoming more active in public life. the 1990’s saw the entry of creationism into biology textbooks as an alternative theory for origins of life (140 Journos, 2017).

Under the AKP rule, the evolution theory was removed from the current curriculum. Moreover, as a part of the highly expansion of religious education under the AKP rule, the concept of “jihad” was added as a part of Islamic Law. Ismet Yilmaz who was a former minister of National Education (2016-2018) emphasized that “Jihad is an element in our religion; It is in our religion... The duty of the education ministry is to teach every concept deservedly, in a correct way. It is also our job to correct things that are wrongly perceived, seen or taught” (Author of translation: 140 Journos, 2017).

However, some teachers have contested the removal of evolution theory from the curriculum. A head of education and science workers' union (Eğitim-Sen) Feray Aytekin Aydoğın shared her opinion about the new curriculum:

We have become the second country on the face of the earth to exclude evolution from high-school curriculum, following Saudi Arabia. Even in the Islamic republic of Iran, the evolution theory gets mentioned in 60 pages and the theory of Darwinism in 11 pages in the textbooks, Aydoğın stated. In addition, the head of eğitim-sen also asserted that the new curriculum has nothing to do with the needs of the education system and everything to do with political power's '2023 vision' and its ambition to transform the totality of social relations according to its political-ideological views. (Author of translation: 140 Journos)

To conclude, in all areas of education, there is a radical change from the curriculum to the allocation of the general budget. Even scientific topics have been replaced by religious content. The abolition of the theory of evolution is a clear example of the gradual Islamization of the Turkish education system. That's an example of how MONE is reforming the curriculum based on Erdogan's identity.

3.4 Islamization of curriculum

The third AKP government declared its aim to create a pious generation during a speech in January 2012.

Erdoğan: There is the raising of a pious youth. [...] Do you expect us, from the AKP, which has a conservative identity, to raise an atheist generation? [...] We will be raising a conservative democratic generation, loyal to the historical values and principles of the nation, and the fatherland. That is what we are working on (Author of translation: Lukuslu, 2016, p. 640).

A few days later he added:

Do you want this generation to be a glue-sniffing (tinerci) youth? Do you want this generation to be a rebellious one against their elders? Do you want this youth to be torn apart from their national and moral values, to become a generation without a certain direction or any mission? (Author of translation: Lukuslu, 2016, p. 640)

In this way, revision of the curriculum such as application of 4+4+4 education model, dismissals of unwanted teachers and academics, elimination of opponents and closing of dersanes, increasing investment in religious schools, removing evolution theory from curriculum, adding lessons about Jihad, introducing three selective courses: Quran, Prophet Muhammad's Life, and Fundamentals of Religion, transformation of general high schools into vocational and technical high schools have been reforms under the AKP rule in order to proceed the Islamization of curriculum and impose Erdoganism,

On the one hand, hours for biology and philosophy were reduced, and MONE removed evolution theory from the textbooks. On the other hand, hours and content for Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge courses were increased and have become mandatory classes to attend. According to Kandiyoti and Emanet, adding new official school commemorations such as The Holy Birth Week, the celebration of the birth of the prophet Muhammed, scheduled on 24 April, totally overshadowed the republican celebration of 23 April Children's Day which marked the establishment of the first republican parliament were harbingers of the intensifying political struggle between the neo-Kemalist, secular constituencies, and the AKP. (Kandiyoti & Emanet, 2017, p.870)

Nonetheless, the transformation of general high schools played an important role in replacing general high school to religious schools and fasten the process of creating a pious generation. According to Kaya (2015) the transformation of general high schools into vocational and technical high schools, many of which are, in fact, religious schools was the most significant step for the creation of a more religious environment. Since the 2010–2011 school year, the ratio of vocational and technical high schools increased by 23%, and religious vocational schools increased by 73% (Kaya, 2015).

School Type	1924-1927	1927-1946	1948-1982	1982-2014
Primary	Compulsory Religion Class Period	Period of Removing Religion Class	↯ Elective Religion Course ↯ Compulsory Moral Course	↯ Compulsory Religion Culture Class and Moral Knowledge Class ↯ Three Elective Religion Courses (2012); The Holy Quran, Hz. Muhammad's Life and Basic religious knowledge Classes
Secondary	Compulsory Religion Class Period	Period of Removing Religion Class	↯ Elective Religion Course ↯ Compulsory Moral Course	↯ Compulsory Religion Culture Class and Moral Knowledge Class ↯ Three Elective Religion Courses (2012); The Holy Quran, Hz. Muhammad's Life and Basic religious knowledge Classes
High School	No Religion Classes	Period of Removing Religion Class	↯ Elective Religion Course ↯ Compulsory Moral Course	↯ Compulsory Religion Culture Class and Moral Knowledge Class ↯ Three Elective Religion Courses (2012); The Holy Quran, Hz. Muhammad's Life and Basic religious knowledge Classes

Table 2: History of Religion Courses in the curriculum of Turkish education

Source of information: Altaş, N. (2002). Türkiye’de Örgün Öğretimde Dinin Yeri, pp. 219-229
 Available at: <https://bit.ly/3fcQtI6>

To summarize reforms on education, the changes to curriculum aimed to remove a secular identity of Turkey and develop Islamic identity by adding much religious content in the curriculum. These reforms strengthened the dual structure of Turkish education and increased polarization in Turkey.

By far, it is possible to come across polarization in all countries. In particular, in the multiparty period, different ideas in societies stem from the fact that people support different parties, and this is normal. However, educational reforms that have been carried out by the AKP government make the situation quite extreme. Erdogan intends to shape education according to his identity, his ideology more important than the prevention of polarization like Erbakan, who used to be his predecessors. In this way, Erdogan also benefits from polarization while he raises the pious generation through educational reforms and opposes this generation to the secular generation.

4 EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLARIZATION

The right to education imposes on the state three levels of obligations: to respect, protect and fulfill. For this reason, states should avoid any measures that may impede the enjoyment of the right to receive education, such as closing a private school; States should take measures that prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of this right. For example, states should implement policy to provide that everyone benefits from this right, for instance, by taking positive steps to ensure that education is culturally appropriate for minorities and indigenous people. (Kaya, 2009, p.11)

Bennett defines multicultural education as a democratic values-based approach to teaching and learning that reinforces cultural diversity in culturally diverse societies, and the primary goal of public education is to contribute substantially to the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students to their highest potential (Bennett, 1999, p. 11). Despite these regulations by international organizations, the current Turkish government ignores all kinds of legal, conscientious, and ethical rules try to shape education in line with Erdogan's ideological goals.

In particular, the "polarize and rule" strategy has been dominant since the July 15 coup attempt. After the coup attempt, Erdogan's speech was based on the division of Turkey into Gulenists and Erdoganists. This polarizing attitude was also applied among students, teachers and parents, and they faced authoritarian state surveillance.

The next section looks at the political relationship between Gulen and Erdogan and how this relationship affected education in Turkey.

4.1 The Gulen Movement and its relation to Erdogan/AKP

Another example of using education as a way to impose ideology can be Erdogan and Gulen relationship. Erdogan used the education to defeat Gulen who is another influential

person in Turkey and used the situation to put pressure on people, whom he considers as “other”.

The political and societal alliance between the AKP and the Gulen movement deserves to be scrutinized in greater detail” (Kaya, 2005, p.51). However, due to space constraints, this section will examine their connection briefly to understand the current situation in Turkey.

Since the AKP rose to power in 2002, the AKP has benefited from the substantial support from Fethullah Gülen’s movement, with which it shares a moderate, liberal Islamic ideology. The alliance between Erdogan and Fetullah Gulen reinforced only in the aftermath of the 2007 e-coup when generals once again caused the fear to demolish a legitimately elected government. According to the secularist army, the election of Abdullah Gul to the presidency represented a red line. Turkey was still polarized on the headscarf issue these days, and Gul’s wife failed this militant test of Kemalist secularism. In the wake of AKP’s landslide electoral victory in 2007 and the constitutional court’s (another Kemalist stronghold) attempt to ban the AKP, the alliance between Erdogan and Gulen turned into a formidable coalition against the Kemalist establishment (Balci, 2014). Following this, after the AKP's landslide election victory in 2007 and the attempt by the constitutional court (another Kemalist stronghold) to ban the AKP, the alliance between Erdogan and Gulen developed into a formidable coalition against the Kemalist establishment. This alliance ultimately launched the Ergenekon investigation against militantly secularist generals in the armed forces. (Omer Taspinar, 2016)

According to Taspinar, Pro-Gulen elements within the military - largely at the level of colonels in 2008 - undoubtedly provided much-needed inside information and legal evidence for Ergenekon investigations, which cleaned up a lot of politically interventionist military officers. However, some evidence provided by the Gulenists was manipulated. This illegal situation led to politicization and ultimately de-legitimization of the Ergenekon investigation. Nonetheless, Erdogan and the AKP supported the Gulen movement and the Ergenekon investigation. (Omer Taspinar, 2016)

As soon as Erdogan defeated his enemy that caused a threat to the AKP government, the AKP-Gulen alliance began to break. The alliance came to a final point in 2013 when pro-Gulen judges alleged corruption against Erdogan. Shortly after the corruption crisis,

the AKP described the Gulen movement as a terrorist organization that aimed to overthrow the AKP government.

Kandiyoti and Emanet (2017) claim that the corruption scandal broke out against key persons in the Turkish government and participants who were differently associated with the ruling AKP on December 17, 2013. Criminal proceedings started for bribery, corruption, fraud, money laundering and gold smuggling. By December 25, resignations and rearrangements in the cabinet followed. The government decisively blamed Gulenists in the police and the judiciary, and the Jamaat was accused of attempting a "coup d'etat" in the judiciary. (Kandiyoti and Emanet, 2017, p. 872)

The AKP government implemented the state's oppression on academics with the title of cleaning the state from terrorists in order words from the Gulenists.

However, how did it come to call Gulenists as terrorists while they were very close until Erdogan was elected as prime minister?

The influence of the Gulenism increased on media, education, and many sectors year by year, and this process began to threaten AKP's government. To give an example from *Time*, the media organs run by pro-Gulenists criticized his clumsy handling of the Gezi Park protests. The closure of the dershanes would be an important step for the weakening of the Gulenist movement. In other words, dershanes were the most important thing that used to keep the Gulen movement alive (Zalewski, 2013). This situation shows how education is manipulated to instill ideologies and how it is the battleground between political organization (AKP) and religious movement (Gulenism). Therefore, as it was mentioned in "Time", Erdogan hit the Gulenists where it hurt. Zalewski argues,

In mid-November, the prime minister announced that he would close down the country's private exam prep schools, or dershanes, roughly a quarter of which are run by Gulen's followers. The schools, he said, are perpetuating social inequalities between those who can and cannot afford them, creating a parallel system of education. The government has since moderated its tone, emphasizing that dershanes would be allowed to operate until 2015, at which point they would be "transformed" into private schools. (Zalewski, 2013)

The aggression between Tayyip Erdogan and Fethullah Gulen peaked in May 2016, a few months before the coup attempt. Erdogan said in his speech that the Gulen movement would be considered a terrorist organization like the PKK.

R.T. Erdogan:

We made a new decision yesterday. We said that it [the Gülen movement] is an illegal terrorist organization. We made a recommendation decision regarding the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization. We have sent it to the government and we're now waiting for the cabinet decision. We will register it as a terrorist organization. It will be tried in the same category as the PYD [Democratic Union Party] and the PKK [outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party] (Source: Hurriyet_daily news, 2016).

Finally, the conflict between “two powers” ended up with a coup attempt.

On 15 July 2016, elements within Turkey's armed forces attempted a violent coup attempt, bombing the Parliament and other state and civilian infrastructure. More than 200 people were killed, and over 2,000 were injured. Few days later, a state emergency had been declared by the government for three months. A state of emergency was extended three times in order to counteract “terror organization” and protect national security. As a result of a battle between Erdogan and Gulen, not only people involved in an attempted coup but also Kurds and leftists who do not follow the Erdogan ideology were imprisoned, removed and banned from public service with the decree-laws, dismissals, resignation and retirement under a state emergency in Turkey.

Consequently, as Mustafa Erdogan states populist politicians used the polarization as a political tool instead of phenomena to be solved and successively, this systematically triggers the fear and hate toward the opposite.

4.1.2 The impact of the split between Erdogan and Gulen on education

After ending coalition, Erdogan ordered to shut down private preparatory schools, many of which were run by Fethullah Gulen. There are many unknowns after the coup attempt on

July 15. Nevertheless, what is certain is that the Gulen movement was weakened by the closure of dersanes, because the Gulen movement promoted Fetullah Gulen's ideas through education, and in addition, those schools were a major source of income for Gulenist movement. On the other hand, Dersanes were very successful schools in Turkey when preparing students for secondary schools. Therefore education was significantly affected by the division of Erdogan and Gulen. Closure of private schools and 'cleansing' of schools from teachers that were suspected to have link with Gulenist movement have been one of Erdogan's main aims. The coup attempt was a good excuse for the AKP government to target teachers as supporters of terrorism. Thus, state surveillance on academies has been strengthened by the AKP government to keep education under control and following this, Erdogan's war has started on Gulenist schools all over the world.

Using the threat of "terrorism" is quite common in today's politics. That is why, if we check Erdogan's speech, "terrorism" has been widely used. The expression of "War on terrorism" is a way to justify the politics, reforms, implementations of the states. Thus, "war on terrorism" has also been a reliable gun of the AKP government against its opponents, which prevented the AKP's political dominance. Therefore, the threat of terrorism strengthened the state's educational surveillance. The *Guardians* states that Erdogan signed a decree to close 1043 private schools after the failed coup attempt (Letsch, 2016).

Consequently, closure of schools was fundamental step to provide political dominance. Toguslu (2017) argues:

The Hizmet movement with its education network and media was seen as a hindrance on his way to the executive presidency. At the beginning of this crisis, the rift with the AKP was not felt in the places where there are Hizmet-affiliated schools; however, as the AKP became stronger and won further elections in Turkey, it increasingly polarised society. It first took control of the judiciary, then the military. Erdoğan deepened the struggle with the movement by using the 15 July coup attempt as an excuse, blaming the coup on the movement and as a result uniting all his opposition against it. Next, Erdoğan began to take aim at the schools abroad. He began to make calls to presidents and heads of state heads to demand closing down the schools. Erdoğan has pursued this struggle abroad by founding

the Maarif Foundation and is now working on having the movement's schools abroad handed to the Maarif Foundation. It should be noted that according to this plan the schools are to be supported and run through pro-AKP Islamist associations.(Toguslu, 2017, pp.17–18)

A Turkish state-run education foundation has signed a memorandum of understanding with 26 African countries to oversee schools belonging to the people of the Gülen faith-based movement. “We have signed protocols with 26 countries in Africa, and 16 of them have so far transferred schools. We will continue to provide education to 8,900 students,” said Hasan Yavuz, a board member of the Maarif Foundation (SCF, 2018).

To clarify, on 17 June 2016, the AKP established the Maarif Foundation to host the administration of the controlling schools associated with the Gülen movement. “30 African countries have handed over the Gülen mobility schools to Maarif or closed them at Ankara's request.” (SCF, 2018)

Erdogan appoints himself as caliph, the leader of all Muslims in the world, and considers the Maarif Foundation as a tool in his investment efforts to reach non-Turkish Muslim groups. Just as he has directed billions of dollars allocated to secular public education for Turkey's religious public and private schools, Erdogan is trying to achieve the same abroad by investing heavily in schools, mosques and cultural centers abroad. He hopes that he can raise a generation of loyalists on foreign soil to attract new recruits. Just as he has redirected billions of dollars earmarked for secular public education to religious public and private schools in Turkey, Erdoğan is trying to do this abroad by investing heavily in schools, mosques and cultural centers abroad. (Bozkurt, 2017) It can be seen that replacing Gulenist schools does not aim to provide better education, it only aims to make Erdoganism dominant ideology, mainly, in Muslim countries.

The Maarif Foundation in Turkey is about to carry out Erdogan's effort to export a unique blend of its brand with an Islamist ideology that is polarizing, threatening, and hostile. Even an examination of the profiles of its top management suffices to conclude that this initiative may very well try to destabilize other nations, Bozkurt adds. (2017)

The figure below demonstrates how large Gulenist movement was before the July 15 failed coup.

HOW LARGE IS THE GULEN MOVEMENT?

Fethullah Gulen is a U.S.-based Turkish cleric and head of the Hizmet (Service) social and religious movement, which sponsors or is affiliated with schools, cultural centers, and universities in over 100 countries.

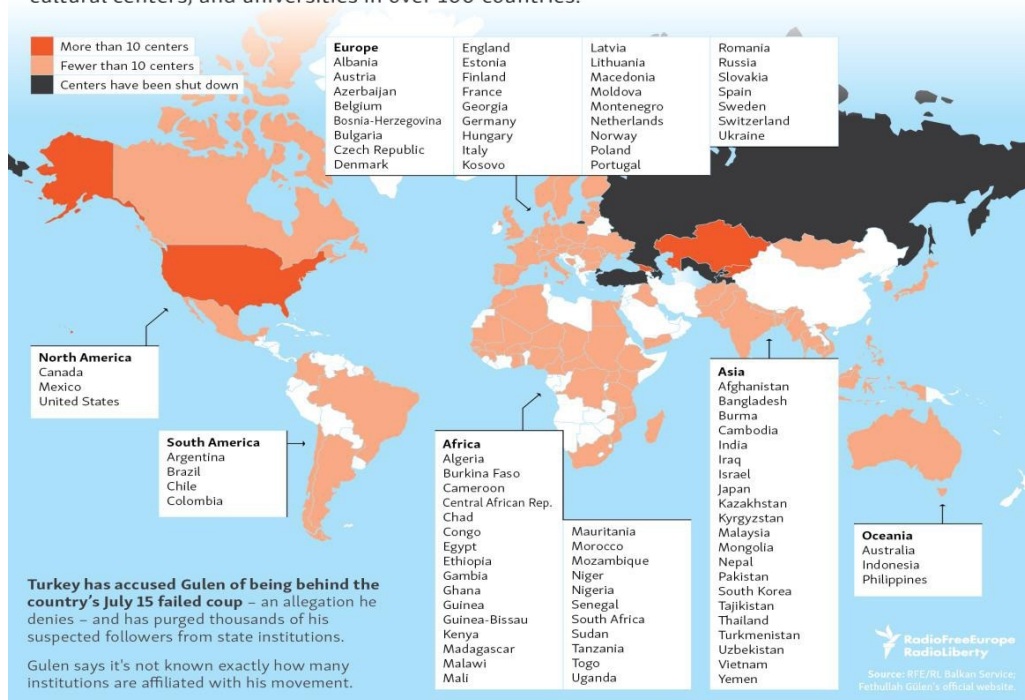


Figure 7: Gulen movement

Source: How large is the Gulen movement? Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.(n.d.) Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3d8zf6A>

To conclude, the AKP government used a state emergency as an excuse to cleanse universities, schools from unwanted teachers who opposed Erdogan's policies towards the Kurdish population and replaced them with "loyal" teachers. He closed all Dersanes after the failed coup that the process of closing the Dersanes had started before the coup attempt. Dersanes were very successful schools to prepare students for university entrance exams. Anadolu agency points out that dershanes were privately run low-cost prep schools and acting as supplementary educators for students who target to pass the entrance of higher universities. Students received intense curriculum coverage and learned testing techniques (Anadolu Agency, 2013). As soon as all of these were closed, they were replaced by Imam Hatip schools, while there was a high demand in schools and many parents had to send their children to Imam Hatips.

Nevertheless, government surveillance has increased after the failed coup d'état in education, as well as many other sectors. Like Gezi, protests, this event has also intensified

the process of creating desirable citizens for the AKP government and increasing polarization between desirable and undesirable citizens for the AKP government.

Consequently, as Mustafa Erdogan states populist politicians used the polarization as a political tool instead of phenomena to be solved and this systematically triggers the fear and hate toward the opposite (M., Erdogan, 2019)

In this way, the 2017 failed coup helped Erdogan to realize his intentions. Thanks to the failed coup, he played “the holy oppressed” and many important educational reforms that restructured education in Turkey, especially implemented after his victory over Fethullah Gulen. Moreover, “15 July” can be considered as a significant date to fasten to build a New Turkey under the AKP rule.

4.3 Minorities in the Education System of Turkey

Education, including religious education, is a key factor in increasing religious and social tolerance. Education also makes it possible to create empathy for people to whom authoritarian governments can target because of people’s religious beliefs. Therefore, education can be the shield against extremist ideologies, denominationalism, discrimination and all this can attract the sensitive threads of a country's social structure. That is why states must be careful about religious curricula in schools. They must prescribe that the curriculum characterizes alternative religions accurately and without generalizations, stereotypes, or languages that degrade or refer to the superiority of a particular religion over others. (Meral,2015,p.1)

However, the AKP government began attracting wide criticism due to its implementations due to political, regional, human rights, and religious matters. There have been increasing concerns that the party was currently maintaining a politically exclusive system, one rooted in a Sunni Muslim religious, national identity. Nowadays, religious freedom is a complicated issue in Turkey. Political polarization, the government's policies and measures since 2012 and rooted cultural wars create new complaints. People who do not hold Sunni Muslim traditions feel that they are under pressure to adopt or follow a particular political ideology, rooted in the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. (Meral, 2015, p.6)

Accordingly, polarization between Alevis-Sunnis have come into prominence due to the educational policy of Erdoganist regime. Under the AKP government, some mandatory religion classes were added to curricula that teaching Sunni Islam. Alevis accept this curricula as a way to impose Sunnah and this tendency raises aggression among three main axes. In particular, Since 2012, educational policies cause indignation of minorities, and this paves the way for social polarization in society.

Minorities differ from the majority according to their ethnicity, religious affiliation, or mother tongue. Among them, Alevis constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey. The Alevis differ significantly from the Sunni Muslim majority in terms of practice and interpretation of Islam (Minority rights in Turkey, 2010). Although the Alevi are the largest ethnoreligious minority in Turkey, due to lack of official census data, their number is unknown but estimated at between 10 and 15 percent of the total population. (Acikel&Ates, 2011,p.715)

In fact, In the Constitution of Turkey, Religion education does not aim to teach any rituals or any branch of Islam. As Kaymakcan emphasizes religion education curriculum aims to teach faith, worship, and ethics, thus ignoring the social and political dimensions of Islam. The reason for it is that such issues conflict with the Turkish understanding of secularism. Like Turkey, secular states prefer the teaching of doctrinal and ritual aspects that do not take part in secular government policies. It follows that Islam is not taught as a definite way of life (Kaymakcan, 2002). According to the Constitution of Turkey, none of the branches of Islam or specific religious movement are allowed to teach in schools.

...Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. Acts of worship, religious rites and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, as long as they do not violate the provisions of Article 14. No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious rites and ceremonies, or to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions. (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 2019, Article 24, p. 17)

Therefore, Religion Course does not have to teach how to pray or fast, these classes are for teaching universal values of Islam. However, last year, the content of the religion course was dramatically changed. Adding selective religion classes to curricula and forcing students to take those selective classes, changing content and aim of Religion classes are the core signs of misusing the Constitution under the AKP rule. Teaching how to pray according to Sunni rules, values of Sunni faith are the main of today's Religion Class. Despite Religion Culture and Moral Knowledge classes are only stated as compulsory, however, students are forced to take selective religious classes. This shows that the current government does not consider Article 2 (right to education), Article 9 (the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion), Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 24 (prohibition of abusing religious feelings) on educational policies.

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In *ECHR Press Release* (2014) it is stated Alevi applicants complain that the content of compulsory courses in religion and morality in schools is based on the Sunni understanding of Islam. The Court observed that the Turkish education system, in particular in the field of religious education, still does not have sufficient equipment to ensure respect for parents' convictions. Referring to Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education), the applicants complained that the content of compulsory classes in religion and ethics in schools was based on a Sunni understanding of Islam (ECHR 257, 2014).

The reason why courses that are alleged to be voluntary importantly affect Alevis and trigger polarization between Alevis-Sunni rather than other minorities is that Christian and Jewish students can be exempt from those religious classes because they are

Lausanne minorities. Yet, as it is argued in the article titled *Forgotten or assimilated?: Minorities in the education system of Turkey*, Alevi children cannot be exempted from these classes because Alevis are non-Lausanne⁴ minorities, and Alevism is seen as part of Islam by the authorities. It is a particular belief encompassing very different religious practices which are not referred to in the textbooks. A young Alevi stated that in primary school, he was once asked by the teacher to pray in the class, refused to do so, and faced pressure and violence for this. (Kaya, N.,2009, p. 21).

Therefore, Religion Course does not have to teach how to pray or fast, this class are for teaching general values of Islam. However, last year, the content of the religion course was dramatically changed. Adding selective religion classes to curricula and forcing students to take those selective classes, changing content and aim of Religion classes are the core signs of misusing the Constitution under the AKP rule. Teaching how to pray according to Sunni rules, values of Sunni faith are the main of today's Religion Class. In spite of Religion Culture and Moral Knowledge classes are only stated as compulsory, however, students are forced to take selective religious classes. This shows that current government does not consider Article 2 (right to education), Article 9 (the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion), Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 24 (prohibition of abusing religious feelings) on educational policies.

Accordingly, polarization between Alevis- Sunnis has come into prominence due to the educational policy of Erdoganist regime. Under the AKP government, some mandatory religion classes were added to curricula that teaching Sunni Islam. Alevis accept this curricula as a way to impose Sunnah and this tendency raises aggression among three main axes. In particular, Since 2012 educational policies cause indignation of minorities and this paves the way for social polarization in a society.

Nevertheless, beginning to teach 'live the Qur'an and Sunnah' for Alevis is one of the examples of how interests of the current government have been realized through Ministry of National Education.

⁴ According to the Lausanne Peace Treaty, signed in 1923 between Turkish and Allied forces after the First World War, only three non-Muslim groups are accepted as minorities: Armenians, Rum Orthodox (Greeks) and Jews. Other Muslims, non-Muslims and other ethnic minorities, such as Alevis, Laz, are not officially recognized as minorities, which limits the exercise of some of the political and cultural rights of these groups.

(Source: Minorities and indigenous peoples in Turkey, Minority Rights, (n.d.) <https://minorityrights.org/country/turkey/>

According to the news of *Democrat Haber*, in Avcılar, where the Alevi population is densely populated, the District Directorate of National Education established an organization in order to teach morality and ethics in Sunni Islam. The "movement", which was approved by the Avcılar District Governorship, was decided to be implemented within a specific program in all educational institutions in the district from primary school to high school. (Diken, 2015)

Sunni implementation to be held in schools will not be accepted, said Gökhan Çimen, president of the Avcılar Cultural Association, the government has a policy to impose Sunni faith on Alevis. If our children are pushed to such an implementation, they will encounter a severe resistance, because Avcılar is a district where Alevis densely live, and Alevi institutions are organized. If the decision is carried out, the Directorate of National Education will plan to protest, to organize the signature campaign and mass actions are also on the agenda, he said. Education unions and Alevi organizations are also responsive to the decision. (Diken, 2015)

Mehmet Kirsanlilioğlu argues that at every stage of education, children's personality rights are systematically violated, and they are made the material of a certain ideological approach. It is not a coincidence that places like Avcılar were chosen for this. They are disturbed by the diversity in the social and cultural structure of Avcılar. They do not tolerate differences. They want to make everybody uniform. (Diken, 2015)

It can be seen from the above example that polarization occurs due to absence of equality to education. Article 24 states that Religion and Moral education are compulsory; other religious education will be dependent on people's own will.

...Religious and moral education and instruction shall
be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in
religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons
in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious

education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representative. (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 2019, Article 24, p. 17)

On the contrary, the AKP's reforms have widely expanded the religious content of the curriculum only on the basis of Sunni faith.

This proves that the ideology of the current government accepts diversity as a threat, and restricted diversity and absence of equality in education causes social polarization. Negative feelings and negative attributes to other groups

Nobody is permitted to misuse religious beliefs for the sake of individual or political aims or to use any religious principle at any scale as the base for the set up of governance in any context.

...No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political interest or influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets. (Constitution of the Republic of the Turkey: October 2019, Article 24, p. 17)

The Turkish Constitution, adopted in 1982, following the 1980 military coup, introduced a mandatory religious culture and ethics class for primary and secondary schools. The Constitution supports the teaching of Religion Education and it is stated in Article 24. Nevertheless, Turkey has been a secular country since 1937. According to the Constitution of Turkey, Religion Culture and Morals courses should take the form of 'teaching about religion' rather than 'teaching religion'. However, the AKP government does not follow the way of teaching religion as stated in the constitution and interprets statements according to its own interest, such as imposing pluralist ideology on minorities.

Consequently, education policies express the AKP's intentions towards minorities. Educational implementations do not respect diversity but one identity that is pursuing Erdoganism and desirable for the current government. These policies are perceived as assimilation strategies in order to impose a dominant ideology and Sunni Islam on minorities. This, in turn, leads to anger in a society that the AKP's understanding of freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction is limited to the demands and desires of its own constituency.

Nevertheless, the approach of considering supporters of other parties as non-people increases polarization and does not allow to solve this phenomenon. As Kaya (2009) points out, religious education is a controversial subject in Turkey, and there are different opinions regarding the decision. As a result, the ministry essentially needs to develop a participatory approach, work together on this issue and find common interests for a solution. Any proposed changes should respect the principles of secularism, objectivity, pluralism and respect for the beliefs and preferences of parents (Nurcan Kaya,2009,p.23). Otherwise, social polarization will continue if the dominant party designs educational policies with the aim of shaping identities and pursuing nation-building strategy according to Erdoganism.

To conclude, it can be seen from the above example that polarization occurs due to absence of equality to education. Article 24 states that Religion and moral education are compulsory, other religious education will be dependent on people's own will. On the contrary, The AKP's reforms have widely expanded the religious content of the curriculum only based on Sunni Islam.

4.4 Discussion

The dramatic increase in Imam Hatips is one of the indicators of the Islamization of education in Turkey. Taken into consideration, the majority of people are Sunni Muslims, it is, therefore, understandable that there are religious schools in the country. However, the current government invests too much money in religious schools as analyzed in chapter 4, and violates the rights of other people to education. Education policies express the AKP's

intentions towards minorities. Implementations do not respect diversity but one identity that is pursuing Erdoganism and desirable for the current government.

In addition, elective courses have to be voluntary, however, the elective system does not work well in Turkey. Alevis and other minorities do not have a chance to be exempt from “selective religious classes” and extracurricular activities. These policies are perceived as assimilation strategies in order to impose a dominant ideology and Sunni Islam on minorities. This, in turn, leads to anger in a society that the AKP's understanding of freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction is limited to the demands and desires of its own constituency.

Nevertheless, which movement you are a member of is increasingly determining your career. Many teachers and educationalists could not continue their careers because they were supposed to have a link with the Gulenist movement. The approach of considering supporters of other parties as non-people or even supporters of terrorist organizations increases polarization and does not allow to solve this phenomenon.

It is natural to have social clusters with different opinions, values and lifestyles in a society. However, if the differences of opinion between these clusters completely contradict each other, mutual intolerance and the disappearance of the will to live together go to a dangerous direction, towards social polarization (Agirdir, 2010, p.27). In this phenomenon, when the country's education is manipulated to impose certain ideologies, it seems that polarization is not happening on a single political issue or area, and there can be polarization in many dimensions.

5 CONCLUSION

Turkish society has faced a growing level of polarization since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rose to power in 2002. Not only the constitution of Turkey had been changed, but also educational reforms fueled polarization and social intolerance. This thesis focused on educational reforms to Islamization of curriculum have been implemented during the 2010s.

Education is one of the areas that has been influenced by the AKP policies a lot. The headscarf issue and nationalist curricula at the schools were the main controversial issues in education before the foundation of the AKP. During AKP rule, the main aim of education has been to promote Erdoganism. Because one of the primary purposes of Erdoganism has been constructing a new identity and pious generation through education. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's purpose caused a growing level of polarization. Not only the Constitution of Turkey had been interpreted according to Erdogan's policy, but also his educational policies fueled polarization and social intolerance.

Education changed its aim and schools have been restructured to educate children appropriate to Erdogan's politics. Therefore, the main aim of educational policies by the AKP government was to create a pious generation and desirable citizens for the dominant party. Education policies have been restructured on the basis of Erdoganism in which authoritarianism, political Islam, and populism are the main characteristics of his ideology. This thesis analyzed following changes in the education system:

Changing the structure of primary and secondary schools from 5+3 to a 4+4+4, closing dersanes (Fethullan Gulen's school) and increasing the number of Imam Hatip schools that serve a widespread of Erdogan's ideology, the addition of optional secondary school religion courses in 2012; the second and more extensive revision of the curriculum and textbooks in 2017-2018.

With these structural changes, the AKP integrates its conservative ideology into the education system. According to the Constitution of Turkey, Religion Culture and Morals course should take the form of 'teaching about religion' rather than 'teaching religion'. However, the AKP government does not follow the constitutional way of teaching religion

and interprets statements in its own interests, such as imposing pluralist ideology on minorities.

Initially, Erdogan favored a political alliance with Fethullah Gulen in order to fight with secular institutions. The AKP government used the power of Gulen movement when Erdogan wanted to get power against Kemalist establishments. In this sense, Erdogan allowed to increasing dersanes which was the main financial source of Fethullah Gulen. Attracting many students to dersanes, meant attracting many new followers for Gulenist movement. However, once Erdogan and Gulen's common enemies were defeated, the coalition was also ended. Erdogan wanted to be only dominant in Turkey, and dersanes were closed.

To conclude, the Turkish Constitution, adopted in 1982, following the 1980 military coup, introduced a mandatory religious culture and ethics class for primary and secondary schools. The Constitution supports the teaching of Religion Education and it is stated in Article 24. Nevertheless, Turkey has been a secular country since 1937. According to the Constitution of Turkey, Religion Culture and Morals courses should take the form of 'teaching about religion' rather than 'teaching religion'. However, the AKP government does not follow the way of teaching religion as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. In the meantime, the current government interprets statements according to its own interest, such as imposing pluralist ideology on minorities.

The implementation of 4+4+4 education model as well as the removal of evolution theory from the curriculum, adding new religious classes, organizing extra-curricula activities that serve to impose Sunni belief were analyzed in order to answer how polarization is traced in Erdogan's educational policies.

Moreover, Religious education is a controversial topic in Turkey, and there are different opinions on the decision. As a result, the ministry must fundamentally develop an inclusive education model, work together on this issue and find common interests in the solution. All proposed changes must respect the principles of secularism and objectivity. The content of the courses should be developed in collaboration to include all beliefs. Otherwise, social polarization will intensify if the ruling party devises educational policies to shape identities and implement a state-building strategy in line with Erdoganism.

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