

THE TRANSFORMATION OF KURDISH EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This article discusses the current transformation of Kurdish Education in Turkey. Thus, the removal of restrictions on education and broadcasting in Kurdish, have encountered the most political resistance. Yet, for theories of international political economy, especially the neo-realist perspective, Turkey's reluctant to comply with EU norms presents a puzzle. But, in spite of all challenges the Turkey has been continuing to meet the benefit of Social, cultural and Educational reforms including the Kurdish Language and Culture and it is in progress.

Keywords: *transformation, education, norms, reforms, progress.*

To understand the current situation of Kurdish and its education in Turkey, we should go back to the 20s. The Turkish Republic as a state was found in 1923 and was based on Turkish nationalism. In spite of the fact that there are many nations, languages and cultures, the state disallowed the other languages and cultures to flourish and improved its own culture and traditions. The main policy of the state was single nation, single flag, single state and single language. Additionally, there were many laws and rules existing to guarantee full application of their policy.

The founders of the state aimed at the complete assimilation of all non-Turkish people. Furthermore, it can be said that the significant obstruction to the policy of the assimilation have been the Kurds. While there are many other nations, languages and cultures in Turkey, the majority belongs to the Kurds. According to this, one of the first steps for the assimilation policy was to forbid the use of the Kurdish language. After 1925, by the infamous education law *Kanuni Tevhidi Tedris*, the Kurdish language got forbidden (Zinar, 1998) and by the same law the Madrasas, the traditional educational foundations, got forbidden, too.

We must mention here that the Madrasas predominantly was based on religious education. They were still important because the language of education was Kurdish. The foundation of Madrasas was carried out. Due to the legal loopholes, it ran without state support and the period of education was between eight to ten years (Işıkdoğan, 2012) The Madrasas education made a big contribution to the improvement of Kurdish language and culture. As an informal school it existed in many villages, towns and cities. The special political situation challenged the development of Kurdish culture and language. Based on this, many Kurdish books have been written and many famous and competent persons became known in literature, language, philosophy etc. Some of the products of this process reached to today but due to the banning period after 1925, many books and products got burned or lost somehow.

While the Turkish state accepted some rights of non-Muslims (even in practice it is not very applicable) by signing Lausanne Agreement, the state excludes the Kurds from this agreement, ignores the human rights and blocks out the requests of the Kurds. Although the International laws and agreements guarantee the individual and collective rights of people, the Turkish state still hesitates to sign the laws of these articles (Derince, 2012) So the Kurdish language has been banned for a long time. During this period of banning, if anybody who called himself Kurd was mistreated and could be the object of many insults and defamations. Even those who spoke Kurdish, had to be fined 5 penny per word (Hassanpour, 2005) Because of all this, the Kurdish language is badly influenced by these long processes.



Fig.1. After a long forbidden period of time it is the first book ever published for Kurdish selective lesson for secondary first class.

Due to the raising of Kurdish nationalism in the 90s, many parties, unions and cultural centres were founded. There were some Kurdish studies in these cultural centres illegally implemented. On the other hand, the government partially kept some laws that forbid the Kurdish. They released the ban on the Kurdish speaking and music. (Kubilay, 2004) but still Kurdish education was forbidden. In the beginning of the 21st century the Kurdish university students submitted petitions to their university administrations and demanded a Kurdish lesson in their university. But about 1700 students got arrested and were under investigation (TIHV, 2003) Part of them were imprisoned. Nevertheless, many students were forced to withdraw and give up their defence.



Fig. 2. The book for secondary school and second class.

Despite all these negative things, Turkey made some laws and paved the way for teaching Kurdish in special courses under the constraints of the European Membership Process. This step was the first in the history of Turkish Republic that a person could learn Kurdish officially. In terms of the assimilation process it was a big breaking point. Although it has many advantages, these courses closed one by one because they were too special and not for free. They still played a big role for legitimacy of Kurdish language. After that process it was easier in the other Kurdish cultural centres to organize informal education courses. A good example of this process is Kurdî-Der that founded in 2006 and with its many branches in many cities. They delivered courses for many people. To have an overview of the persons who were affiliated and took certificates, the numbers are as shown below:

Table 1. The year and number of the participant that educated in the Kurdî-Der (Tan, 2014)

year	student	certificated
2009	543	27
2010	1623	750
2011	1397	1006
2012	1985	450
2013	1084	604
total	5248	2076

We should focus here especially on the year 2009. It was the first year in which a state university founded a department of Kurdish language. It is the result of the Kurdish initiative process in the government and a very important stage for official Kurdish education. So the Institute of Living Languages in Turkey founded in 2009 by the decision of the government and the education process could start. By the request of the department of Kurdish language and culture, some programs of higher education have been started to be taught in Kurdish Language. After this important step, the Kurdish was firstly used in higher education. Due to the reform process, the government gave the right of selective lessons for the secondary school students. This step was significant but there were

no teachers to give lessons. So the the government authorities agreed with the Kurdish department to train teachers for the selective lessons. As a way of training the teacher, the department opened the program of Master without Thesis. In this program the teacher give lessons for one year and then he can graduate. On the other hand, the department has a normal master program that is two years and the participants have to write a dissertation. Below there is the number of participants in these two programs:

Table 2. The number of participants of Kurdish language and Culture Department.

year	Master	Master Without Thesis
2010-2011	23	-
2011-2012	20	-
2012-2013	30	507
2013-2014	45	380
2014-2015	43	124
2015-2016	20	84
Total	181	1095

Mentioning the situation of selective lesson, this is the biggest of all positive steps. The number of students who select the Kurdish lesson is not as satisfying:

Table 3. The number of students who select the Kurdish lesson and the number of assigned teachers

Year	Number of students who selected Kurdish	The number of teachers assigned
2012-2013	19 800.	-
2013-2014	18 847 (Hangi, 2003) (about 150,000 students selected (Vardar, 2013)	18
2014-2015	(150,000 students selected	10
2015-2016		20

There are some reasons for these numbers as follows:

1. The main reason is the policy that doesn't appoint teachers for the Kurdish selective lesson.
2. Kurdish politicians announced not to select the selective Kurdish lessons and they argued that the selective lesson is an obstacle to get the mother language education's right.
3. In spite of the rule, that states if there are ten students for a class it may be opened, some managers of the schools deliberately do not let the students select the lessons.
4. The efficacy of long term assimilation policy is powerful. Due to this, the majority of Kurdish students living in cities speak Turkish.

But on the other hand, the new democratic movement in the context of the modern social policy in Ankara (from 2003) was powerful and aimed the first steps to be taken towards the transformation including the legal recognition of Kurdish language and its identity in Turkey. While these are affirmative and positive steps, it is a shame that there are around 20 million people and they have no education rights regarding their mother language (Yıldırım, 2012). Moreover, the education is limited by two hours of selective lessons.



Fig. 3. The book for secondary school and second class.

The Kurdish and the other languages spoken in Turkey have to be supported and protected by the laws. The using of Kurdish as a mother tongue in education must be included within the schedules of primary school, secondary school as well as in university. By doing this, the situation will be improving rapidly. All in all, the mother tongue in education is very important for people. It is a shared common

opinion that it is highest good to learn one's own culture. And for that you need people of the same cultural background to teach this language and transfer traditions and language to the next generations.

CONCLUSIONS

1. By the request of the Department of Kurdish Language and Culture, some programs of higher education have been started to be taught in Kurdish Language. After this important step, the Kurdish language was firstly used in higher education.

2. This development and transformation in Turkish policy of Education could meet the benefit of Kurdish Education and Culture.

3. It is not just meeting the benefit of Education but also the social and cultural reforms in Turkey.

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