

School Library Development in Turkey

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In this paper we examine the development of school libraries in Turkey. We have also included general information about the Turkish Education System and the Ministry of National Education which is responsible for improving and developing the status of school libraries in Turkey. Based on the results of a questionnaire and interviews with students, teachers and administrators, we review the highlights of the school library development in Turkey.

In the 75.200 education institutions run by the Ministry, there are 518.450 teachers and 14.275.281 students at all levels (TBMM, 1994: 47). The tremendous pressure of this large student population on the education budget of Turkey will bring into sharp focus of providing school library services in an economic sense.

A Brief History

During the period of the Ottoman Empire, there were several educational institutions in elementary, secondary and higher levels (mosque schools, *madrasa*, *enderun*). They were mostly incorporated in waqfs, an institution that was behind all philanthropic movements within a given community (Cumhuriyetin, 1973: 5-16).

The history of school library services in Turkey goes back to the 1700s (Soysal, 1969: 19). With the establishment of the Ministry of National Education in 1857, schools were put under the administration of that Ministry (Cumhuriyetin, 1973: 13). Thus, school libraries also reported to the Ministry of National Education. However, unlike modern school library services offered by many schools today, services offered during those times were limited. School libraries were traditional institutions and they were not functional.

School Library Development During the Republic Period

During the Struggle for Independence, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, on May 2, 1920, under Law No. 3, established 11 ministries, one of which was the Ministry of National Education (Cumhuriyetin, 1973: 19). With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the national planning had a direct and indirect impact upon the education system.

The Law of the Unity of Education, passed on March 3, 1924 (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu, 1924) whereby all schools were attached to the Ministry of National Education was a major step to unify both liberal and religious education in Turkey. Some of the principles and targets specified in this Law have been adopted in the Fundamental Law of the National Education which went into force in 1973 (Milli eğitim, 1973).

Basic education is compulsory for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Secondary schools comprise students in the 15-17 year age group. Within this framework, school

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libraries exist on a national basis and, are governed by the structure of the Ministry of National Education.

Objectives specified in the National Policy of Education at all levels cannot be fulfilled without well-stocked, well-organized and easily accessible school libraries and qualified staff. Though provision was made in the national policy for school libraries, not much development was recorded between 1924 and 1973. Many researchers and scholars (Dewey, 1952; Thompson, 1952; Göndem and Alaylıoğlu, 1954; Rufi, 1956; Soysal, 1969) emphasized the importance of school libraries. Yet they observed that many schools were without libraries or they were not up to the standards.

The National Education Councils and the State Planning Organization became interested in the provision and development of school libraries.

The first legislation on school library services ("Bye-law of School Libraries") came into being in 1959 (Okul, 1959) which was revised in 1976 (Okul, 1976).

In 1981, a new branch was set up for school libraries under the Department of Publications within the Ministry of National Education. Since then, various training programs for teachers, librarians and officials were organized by the School Libraries Branch in cooperation with the Department of In-Service Training within the same Ministry.

Suggestions were also made to improve school library services based on modern information technologies.

The State of the Art of School Library Services

As far as the school library development was concerned, it appeared that planners, scholars and practitioners were either too late to implement their plans or they had trouble convincing the decision-makers to put the new ideas into practice.

We felt that information to be obtained through a case study, a questionnaire and interviews would illustrate the state of the art of school library services in Turkey. Between February 1994 - June 1995, we designed a questionnaire form and sent it to 147 school libraries located in 44 cities (out of 78). Of those 147 libraries, 46 were primary, 17 middle and 84 secondary school libraries. The response rate was 100%. We also interviewed the students and staffs in some of those schools

Our survey reveals the following:

- Even if there is no specific legislation for school libraries, every school has a library.
- School libraries are under-funded. Pocket money that comes from small grants for incidental expenses through the School-Parent and School Development Associations is not enough.
- The financial provision for resources is insufficient, the most serious aspect of the available funds. Due to the inattention and lack of knowledge, library grants for books are spent without the critical appraisal of professional experts or critical reviews, without considering the balance of present collections, and without comparing titles with other materials in the collections.
- School libraries have inadequate collections in both print and non-print materials to meet the educational, informational, recreational and cultural needs and interests of the users.

- Collections of most school libraries are not systematically organized. The first level of Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules is used for descriptive cataloguing. Most school libraries assign classification numbers from the abridged editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification.
- Access to some library materials is limited; they are available on request only.
- All schools have some kind of space or room for the library. Newly-established schools usually have specific space or a room specifically allocated for the library, but in the older schools library space may range from a storeroom to converted classrooms or any spare space anywhere in the school. In addition, library furniture such as shelving and catalogue cabinets is supplied.
- School libraries are closed over weekends and during school holidays.
- Library statistics show that majority of the students (87%) visit their school libraries only once or twice during the year. Some never visit the library at all.
- Many students said they preferred to use the public libraries for various reasons (suitable opening hours, existence of useful and enjoyable collections, and professional help.)
- Although some schools recognize the need for professional librarians, many tend to assign this duty to a teacher (usually a Turkish or literature teacher).

Conclusion

Turkish school libraries have a long history. In comparison with the notable achievements over the past two decades in the development of school librarianship, Turkey has only partial success to offer. Despite some efforts during those years, the level of school library development in Turkey has not reached what could be considered as a recognized minimum level in staffing, resources, facilities or buildings. Nor are they universally recognized as being a vital and an integral component of the education system. There is much more to be done if the Turkish school libraries are to play an important role in the future of our education system.

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