

History and civic education in Turkey

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Abstract

The contemporary era has witnessed a remarkable expansion in the accessibility of information, including historical data. This ease of access to information has not only transformed the landscape of history education but also influenced the broader field of education. Since the advent of the 20th century, the evolving understanding of history has profoundly impacted the discipline, initially challenging the narrow perception of history as solely political and subsequently prompting the incorporation of methodological concepts beyond the basic tenets. These methodological concepts can be expressed as historical thinking skills. Upon examination of the basic documents related to history teaching in Turkey, it becomes evident that historical thinking skills are strongly emphasized. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the practical implementation of these skills. The primary link between history education and citizenship education in Turkey is the development of individuals who are capable of critical thinking and questioning. Citizenship education, on the other hand, is largely left to the discretion of the social studies course. In Turkey, where the education system is highly centralized, the same history curriculum is used throughout the country. In addition to the curriculum, textbooks are also determined by the Ministry of National Education. Although history education begins in the eighth grade of secondary school, it is mainly taught in high school. The fact that history-related questions are included in both high school entrance exams and university entrance exams demonstrates the importance of this course. History is taught with a hybrid approach, integrating both thematic and chronological methodologies. This pedagogical approach reflects the inherent tension between the teaching of historical content and the development of critical thinking skills, which is a significant challenge in the context of history education in Turkey.

Keywords: Turkish education system, History education, Citizenship education

Introduction

Turkey is a country located in western Asia and eastern Europe, with borders to Bulgaria and Greece to the west, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran to the east, and Iraq and Syria to the south. The country encompasses territories in both Asia and Europe. According to 2023 data, the population of Turkey is just over 85 million (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024a). The 0-17 age group constitutes 26 percent of the total population (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024b). Despite the country's continued population growth, Turkey's population growth rate has been on a steady decline. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (2024c), the population growth rate was 1.1 per thousand in 2023. In 2023, 93% of the Turkish population resided in provincial and district centers, while 7% lived in towns and villages.

Structure of The Turkish National Education System

The Turkish education system has a centralized structure organized at national level. Not only public schools, but also private schools must operate according to the Basic Law on National Education and the regulations issued by the Ministry of National Education. First of all, no educational institution can be opened without the permission of the Ministry of National Education (Regulation of the Ministry, 2017). The Ministry of National Education determines the courses to be taught in all educational institutions, including schools, and the curricula are also prepared by the Ministry (Regulation on the Board of Education, 2022). All public-school teachers are civil servants. The Ministry of National Education decides which teacher will work where. The Ministry of National Education has directorates in each province and district center. The main task of these directorates is to ensure that the system runs smoothly throughout the country. Decisions made centrally by the Ministry are implemented unchanged throughout the country under the supervision of the provincial and district directorates. There is also a hierarchical relationship between the provincial and district directorates. Provincial directorates have the authority to make minor adjustments to local needs throughout the province, and the district directorates do so within the district. Teachers' salaries, school maintenance and repairs, and any other conceivable needs are met by the

central government (Basic Law of National Education, 1973). The duration of a lesson in secondary schools is 40 minutes. Rest periods between classes are determined by the school administration.

The Turkish education system starts with a non-compulsory kindergarten education. This is followed by 12 years of compulsory education. Students study for 4 years in primary school, 4 years in middle school and 4 years in high school in this education system. Students who have completed primary education attend general or religious middle schools, and students who have completed middle schools attend vocational high schools, general high schools known as Anatolian high schools, science high schools and social science high schools, depending on the results of their exams. Apart from these high schools, there are also art and sports high schools, which are attended by very few students according to the General Directorate of Upper Secondary Education (2021).

The place of history teaching in the Turkish National School System

Although students are exposed to historical content in “Knowledge of Life” and “Social Studies” courses from primary school, the first course they take under the name of “history” is “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” in grade 8 (ISCED level 2) in middle school (Ministry of National Education, 2021). In high schools, history is a compulsory subject in all high schools in grades 9, 10 and 11 (ISCED level 3). The history of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism is also reintroduced as a compulsory subject in grade 12 in all high schools, with a more comprehensive content than in grade 8.

General high schools, where the majority of students are enrolled, also offer elective history courses. In Anatolian and Science high schools, “Contemporary Turkish and World History” and “Turkish Culture and Civilization” are elective history courses. These courses are compulsory in social science high schools (General Directorate of Upper Secondary Education, 2021). However, in order to limit the content of this article, the curricula of these courses will not be discussed here, but only the ones of the history courses (9th, 10th, and 11th grades) and the history of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism courses, which are common compulsory courses taken by all students.

Structure and Content Selection in the History Curriculum

The first issue to be addressed regarding the structure of the history curriculum is to determine whether it is chronological or thematic in nature. According to the statement in the curriculum, “Chronological and thematic approaches were taken together in the preparation of the History Curriculum” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: 8). This approach was used in most, if not all, parts of the curriculum. First of all, it is clear that the curriculum focuses on chronology. The curriculum begins with the prehistoric period and ends with the ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods. This is a clear indication of the attention given to chronology. On the other hand, there is an attempt to study some topics within these periods. For example, when dealing with the Middle Ages, agriculture and trade, the lifestyles of societies and law in the Middle Ages are dealt with separately (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: p.21). It should be noted, however, that the thematic approach integrated into the curriculum is still in its infancy. For example, a separate treatment of foundations in Ottoman society could be seen as a theme within the chronology. However, for a complete thematic approach, foundations would have to be considered as institutions operating from the past to the present, and certainly during the Ottoman period. This concept could have been used as a scaffolding from which a window could have been opened on all historical topics from the Middle Ages onwards. However, due to the dominant chronological tradition and the sense of responsibility to educate citizens, i.e. to create a national identity, this does not seem to have happened. In summary, it would be appropriate to characterize the history curriculum as a chronological curriculum that has been given a thematic appearance from time to time.

The curriculum consists mainly of political history. However, social and cultural history is also given ample space. The curriculum tries to avoid teaching about wars, peace and political conflicts as much as possible. However, it is believed that they could not fully realize this due to the established tradition. While historical thinking skills are emphasized in the explanations section of the curriculum, it is unclear how to gain these skills in the achievements section (Şimşek, 2016). Moreover, the period covered is so long and the geography so wide that it seems impossible to give less space to political history.

Some selected examples of how social and cultural history is incorporated into the curriculum are listed below:

Students will be able to:

- Explain the changes in human history brought about by the invention of writing.
- Analyze the socio-cultural impact of the Turkish migrations to Anatolia.
- Analyze the activities of science, culture, arts and crafts in Ottoman geography and the resulting changes in social life (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

Other social science disciplines have been used in the curriculum where appropriate. Many outcomes in the curriculum require an interdisciplinary approach. Some of these outcomes are presented below as examples.

Students will be able to:

- Analyze the critical impact of geography and climate on the lives and livelihoods of people in the First Ages
 - Relate the sources of political power in the early period to the forms of political administration.
 - Explain the religious and human sources that were effective in the formation of early legal systems. (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

Central Control Over the Historical Content

The history curriculum published by the Ministry of National Education clearly and precisely states what teachers should teach. It is not possible for teachers to go beyond this curriculum. Not only are the topics to be taught given in general terms, but the way in which these topics are to be treated is also described. For example, in the 11th grade curriculum, students are asked to “analyze the efforts to prevent the dissolution of the Ottoman state administration and social order”(Ministry of National Education, 2023b p.33). But it does not stop there; it also describes how this analysis should be done. The only freedom given to the teacher is to choose the appropriate teaching method.

When we look at the issue of having a detailed list of compulsory dates, characters, topographical items in the curriculum, we see that the curriculum makers were very pragmatic. If the curriculum writers had aimed to teach a detailed list of people, events, dates, or places, they would have contradicted their own philosophy. For they them-

selves stated that the focus of the curriculum was to teach historical thinking skills. On the other hand, the fact that the events, people, and dates of the previous curriculum were not included in this document could also lead to criticism. For this reason, an eclectic approach was chosen, and it was requested that important events and dates be shown on a timeline at the beginning of each unit, but that there should be no detailed teaching on this subject and that dates should not be memorized. “There should be no lecture on the events and facts listed and they should not be memorized” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: 32). However, the curriculum states that the lives and careers of historical figures should be taught in relation to the achievements in the program.

Periodic Focus

The curriculum covers periods from prehistory to the 21st century. The content of the history course begins in grade 9 with the study of prehistoric times. The first unit is called “The Early Periods of Humanity. In the next unit, the study of antiquity is approached primarily from a global perspective. The curriculum aims to enable students to recognize the main civilizational basins of the ancient world. Then, in the unit entitled “The Turkish World in the Early and Middle Ages,” Turkish national history in antiquity and the early Middle Ages is discussed. 4 of the 6 units of the 9th grade curriculum, excluding units 1 and 2, are devoted to the Middle Ages. This includes not only Turkish and Islamic history, but also European history (the fall of Western Rome, the Hundred Years’ War, the Black Death).

The teaching of the Middle Ages continued in the 10th grade curriculum. Although the focus is on Turkish history, developments in medieval Europe are also covered in this period.

With the 11th grade subjects, we are now approaching the modern periods. The 11th grade curriculum always deals with the same topic under different titles: the situation of the Ottoman state in the face of the developing world and Europe. This grade ends with an examination of the socio-economic life of Ottoman society in the 20th century.

However, the history topics do not end there. At the end of the history curriculum, students in 12th grade take another course called History of Turkish Revolution and Kemalism. This course covers Turkish history from the beginning of the 20th century to

the present. In fact, 12th grade History of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018b) have common topics with the 8th grade History of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018a). However, the 12th grade curriculum also includes contemporary periods to the present day.

The final learning achievement of the 12th grade course requires the study of the Central Asian republics that gained independence from the Soviet Union; EU-Turkey relations; the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina; developments in the Middle East, including the Gulf War and the Arab Spring; the September 11 attacks; and the refugee problem caused by developments in Iraq and Syria. The last topics of the textbooks are also in line with the curriculum. The last topic of the textbook prepared by the Ministry of National Education (Çevik, Koç, Şerbetçi, 2021) is titled “Syrian Refugees”. The last topic of the textbook prepared by Semih Ofset Publishing House (Erdoğan, 2019) is titled “Developments in Syria”.

Hungary in the Curriculum

Hungarians appear in the curriculum both as a brotherly nation and as a formidable enemy. For example, in the 9th grade curriculum, the Hungarian nation is presented as a sister nation with a common origin with the Turkish nation. On the other hand, in the 10th and 11th grades, where the struggle of the Ottoman Empire against the Europeans is discussed, it is portrayed as one of the nations that most strongly resisted Turkish expansionism (Kaplan, Can, Karakaya, 2023).

In Unit 4 of the 9th grade curriculum, which is a unit on the origins of the Turks, the phrase “The change of political structures in Asia and Europe with the migration of tribes is shown on the map and Turkish states and communities (Avars, Bulgarians, Khazars, Hungarians, Oghurs, etc.) are briefly introduced” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b p. 22) is included. But in the 10th grade curriculum, the battle of Mohaç is mentioned and this time the Hungarians are the enemies. Finally, the 11th grade curriculum includes the statement: “Examples of the impact of the intellectual movements that emerged with the French Revolution on the political life of the empires (Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire) will be mentioned” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b p.34).

The textbooks give more space to the Hungarians than the curriculum. For example, in the 9th grade history book published by Tuna Publishing House (Tüysüz, 2019), there is a short chapter on Hungary among the various nations discussed under the title “Other Turkish Communities”. On page 127 of the same book, it is stated that the Huns are one of the elements that make up the ethnic structure of the Hungarians. This statement is important because the Turks see the Huns as part of their national past. The general attitude among Turks is that the Huns were Turkish and Turkish-speaking people like themselves. Therefore, the statement that the Huns are one of the elements that make up the Hungarian identity is actually meant to emphasize that there is a kinship between Turks and Hungarians. The 10th and 11th grade textbooks (Yılmaz, 2019; Yılmaz, 2022; Yüksel et al., 2021) also contain information about Hungary. Most of this information is about the Ottoman wars with the Hungarians and Austrians.

Key Competencies in the Curriculum

At the beginning of the history curriculum, as in the curricula of all other subjects, reference is made to the Turkish Qualifications Framework (Ministry of National Education, 2023b). According to this framework, students should acquire competence in eight subjects. These are (1) communication in the mother tongue, (2) communication in foreign languages, (3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science/technology, (4) digital competence, (5) learning to learn, (6) social and civic competences, (7) initiative and entrepreneurship, and (8) cultural awareness and expression.

According to the history curriculum, the main competency that students should acquire through the study of history is the ability to think historically. The historical thinking skills are listed as follows: 1) chronological thinking, 2) historical understanding, 3) historical analysis and interpretation, 4) research based on historical investigation, 5) historical problem analysis and decision making, 6) historical empathy (Ministry of National Education, 2023b; 12). How these competencies should be understood is explained in detail in the curriculum.

Embracing national identity is another competence that the history curriculum wants students to acquire, but it is not directly stated. For now, it should be noted that in the 12th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018b), the link between history education and citizenship competences is more

explicit. According to the curriculum of this course, the task of the History of the Revolution courses in the dimension of citizenship education is to educate individuals with national identity, national unity and solidarity, patriotism, knowledge and use of their rights, sensitivity to national history and culture, and interaction with other cultures in the world.

Another striking point in the curriculum is that there is not much reference to multiculturalism or inclusive education. Of the total 13 objectives in the history curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b), 6 are related to historical thinking skills, 6 are related to national identity, and only 1 is partially related to multiculturalism and inclusion. Thus, it can be said that the aims of the history curriculum are generally based on historical thinking and national identity. The history curriculum contributes to citizenship education in two dimensions. The first dimension includes national identity, social unity and solidarity, and sensitivity to cultural heritage, while the second dimension includes critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Selection of Textbooks

Textbooks are selected nationwide by a single authorised institution. This institution is the Board of Education under the Ministry of National Education. The Ministry of National Education can procure textbooks in four different ways. The first and most common method is to form a commission of teachers and have them write a textbook. The second common method is to use books produced by private publishers according to criteria set by the ministry. Thirdly, the ministry may have textbooks printed by commissions, institutions or organizations. Finally, and perhaps it is the least frequently used method, the Ministry can purchase books written or translated in Turkey or abroad (Ministry of National Education Regulation Textbooks, 2021).

The Ministry of National Education has determined 5 books for the 8th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism course, 4 books for the 9th grade History course, 2 books for the 10th grade History course, 3 books for the 11th grade History course, 5 books for the 12th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism course, 2 books for the Contemporary Turkish and World History course and 1 book for the History of Turkish Culture and Civilization course to be used in the 2023-2024 academic year (Board of Education 2023).

Students, teachers, principals and parents have no say in the choice of textbooks to be used in the classroom. At the beginning of the semester, school principals report the number of students in their schools to the Ministry of National Education through the district and provincial directorates of national education. The Ministry buys the books on its own initiative and sends them to the schools for distribution to the students.

Place of History Course in Exams

In Turkey, there are no exams for the transition from primary to secondary school, but there are exams for the transition from secondary school to high school and from high school to university. It should be noted that participation in both the secondary education transition exams and the university transition exams is entirely voluntary. A student who does not take the university entrance exams is considered to have waived his or her right to university education and is therefore unable to study at any private or public university. Conversely, a student who has not taken the high school transition exam can enroll in the high school closest to his or her home and with an empty quota. Students take the high school entrance exam in order to enroll in high schools that are designed to offer a more rigorous academic curriculum, such as science high schools. Both the university entrance and high school entrance exams consist entirely of multiple-choice questions. The weight of the history course in both the upper secondary and university entrance exams is as follows:

In the high school entrance exam, there are 10 questions on the history of the Turkish revolution and Kemalism. There are no questions on general world history or other periods of Turkish history in this exam. The reason for this is that students have only taken the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism course during this period. (Ministry of Education, 2023a). The university entrance examination, on the other hand, consists of two stages. The first stage is a basic skills test. 5 of the 120 questions at this stage are history questions. The second stage consists of four tests with a total of 160 questions. 26 of the 160 questions at this stage are history questions (Board of Higher Education, 2023). In conclusion, it can be said that the history course has a quite important place in both the high school and university entrance exams, especially for candidates who prefer verbal subjects.

The Place of Citizenship Education in the Curriculum

As discussed above, the history curriculum is not completely isolated from citizenship issues. However, when analyzing the Turkish education system as a whole, the basic subjects related to citizenship education are taught in the course Human Rights, Citizenship and Democracy in the fourth year of primary school at ISCED 1 level and in the social studies courses in the fourth year of primary school and in the fifth, sixth and seventh years of secondary school at ISCED 2 level.

The Social Studies course is the main course that takes responsibility for citizenship education. In the curriculum, 18 objectives are listed as specific objectives of the course, and all of these objectives are related to citizenship education (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). It is noteworthy that in defining the objectives, it is emphasized that students should “grow up as citizens who love their homeland and nation as citizens of the Republic of Turkey, know and use their rights, fulfil their responsibilities and have national consciousness” (p.8), which shows the determining role of citizenship education in the social studies course.

According to the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c), students should acquire 27 skills. Many of the skills listed in the curriculum overlap with the historical thinking skills that secondary school history courses aim to develop. Social studies skills such as ‘understanding time and chronology’, ‘research’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘awareness change and continuity’, ‘using evidence’, ‘decision making’ and ‘problem solving’ are fully compatible with the historical thinking skills. The main reason for this congruence is that both curricula share the same philosophy of citizenship education, i.e. the understanding of educating a citizen who can think and decide in a healthy way.

The content of the social studies course is organized into seven learning areas. While each of these learning areas addresses citizenship education, the classical sense of citizenship education, which involves students learning about the formation of groups, institutions, and social organizations and the mechanisms that influence and control them, is concentrated in the “Active Citizenship” learning area. (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

The Functioning of The Legal and Political System

The 6th grade social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.22) includes the statement “Explain the relationship between the legislative, executive and judicial powers in the Republic of Turkey”. In teaching this outcome, teachers are asked to “emphasise the principle of separation of powers and that each of the legislative, executive and judicial powers has its own powers and responsibilities” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c, p.22)

As regards the functioning of the political system, elections and political parties are mentioned. However, there is no detailed approach in the textbook (Yıldırım et al., 2019). For example, the qualifications required to be elected to the parliament or the application and election process for parliamentary seats are not discussed in detail. There is also no introduction of political actors. For example, the mandate of the president or the speaker of parliament is introduced (Yıldırım et al., 2019), but there is no information about the president himself or other political leaders. Similarly, other individuals who occupy important positions in the state apparatus are not introduced.

The Functioning of the Democratic State

The Social Studies course in Years 6 and 7 deals with the functioning of the democratic system (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). In Year 6, systems of government are introduced and compared with democracy. Students are introduced to the concepts of democracy and democratic government. It then focuses on the functioning of the legal and political system in Turkey and how individuals can participate in governance. According to the curriculum, the methods of active participation taught to students are political parties, non-governmental organisations, media and individuals (public opinion).

There is no specific section on the history of political participation in the curricula. However, elections and political parties, which are one dimension of political participation, are discussed. The 7th grade social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.25) aims for students to be able to explain “the emergence of democracy, its stages of development and its importance today” and “Atatürk’s contributions to the development of Turkish democracy”.

The rights and responsibilities of individuals in a democratic state are also included in the curriculum. The issue of rights and responsibilities is stated at the very beginning of the curriculum as the first objective of the course (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). It can be seen that the rights and responsibilities of the individual as a member of society are mentioned in the learning area of “Active Citizenship”. Apart from this, the issue of rights and responsibilities is also mentioned in different contexts, such as consumer rights and responsibilities in the learning area “Production, Distribution and Consumption” and rights and responsibilities in the communication process in the learning area “Individual and Society”. Therefore, the issue of rights and responsibilities is addressed in the curriculum on a line starting from school and family and extending to a constitutional point (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

Although there are references to democracy and democratic governance in the curriculum, the concept of ‘election’ is not mentioned at all. However, when we look at the textbooks, we see that there are many references to elections starting from the textbooks (Ayantaş 2023; Evirgen, Özkan, & Öztürk, 2019).

Financial Competencies

Although not included in the history curriculum, financial education is included in the social studies curriculum. In particular, the learning area ‘Production, Distribution and Consumption’ discusses economic activities in society and aims to develop students’ financial skills. The fact that ‘financial literacy’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ are among the skills to be acquired in the social studies curriculum gives an idea of the approach of the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

The curriculum for Grade 4 (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.15) aims for the student to be able to ‘distinguish between wants and needs and make conscious choices between them. In grades 5, 6 and 7, the curriculum requires the concept of financial literacy to be taught from the dimensions of production, career choice, citizenship and digital technology (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). On the other hand, it is also noticeable that practical issues such as obtaining bank loans and credit card transactions, which will be needed in everyday life, are not sufficiently covered.

Environmental Issues

Environmental issues are included in the “People, Places, Environments” learning area of the social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Among the objectives of the course, students are expected to “recognize the general geographic features of the world and the environment in which they live, explain the interaction between humans and the environment, and develop their spatial sense” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.8) and “recognize the limits of the natural environment and resources, try to protect natural resources with environmental sensitivity, and have a sustainable understanding of the environment” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.8), which shows the importance of the subject in terms of social studies. In addition, one of the skills to be acquired is “environmental literacy”(Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

Regarding environmental problems, natural disasters and preparation for natural disasters are mentioned in the 4th grade curriculum, in addition to natural disasters in the 5th grade, the reasons for the emergence of environmental problems are investigated, and in the 6th grade, the value of sensitivity to the natural environment is gained (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). The concept of environmental problems and sustainability, which is not directly included in the curriculum, is included in the textbook (Açıl et al., 2019).

Digital Citizenship and Digital Skills

One of the skills that should be acquired by students within the framework of social studies at the secondary school level is the skill of “digital literacy”. Digital literacy is also one of the 8 skills identified in the Turkish Qualifications Framework, which is included in the first part of all curricula. Although it is not fully explained what digital competence is, if we look at the way it is addressed in the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c), it is understood that it includes the safe use of digital technologies, but the main focus is on digital citizenship. For example, it is stated that the development of digital technologies “has created new situations (digital citizenship, e-government, cyber commerce, social media, etc.) and problems (digital divide, identity theft, privacy of personal information, cyber fraud, cyber bullying, etc.) related to citizenship rights and responsibilities” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.9)

In high school history courses, the use of digital resources was mentioned when discussing the issues to consider when implementing the curriculum. Teachers are advised to diversify their resources, and to use digital resources in this context. They are warned against plagiarism but there is no mention of digital literacy (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

Media Literacy

One of the skills not included in the history curriculum but included in the social studies curriculum is media literacy. The 5th grade learning area ‘Science, Technology and Society’ discusses ‘the reliability of information in the media’, the 6th grade learning area ‘Global Connections’ discusses the impact of media tools on culture, and the 7th grade learning area ‘Individual and Society’ discusses the relationship between media literacy and students’ freedoms and responsibilities (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). In addition, students are expected to “exercise their rights” and “fulfil their responsibilities” when using communication tools, and it is stated that “the relationship between the right to privacy, freedom of expression and the right to accurate information and the freedom of mass communication will be discussed” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.22).

National Origin and National Identity in the Curriculum

The 4th chapter of the 9th grade history curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b) asks teachers to explain the meaning of the name Turk and show on the map the areas where the first Turkish states were dominant. However, there is nothing in the curriculum about how the Turkish nation came to be. For example, an approach such as the Angles and Saxons united in England and the present English nation emerged cannot be said for the Turkish nation. According to the curriculum, it is as if Turks existed from the very beginning. The same is true for the Turkish language. There is no such subject as which languages Turkish came from and in what combination, Turkish has always been there.

The acceptance of Islam by the Turks is mentioned as an important turning point in Turkish history. In addition, important turning points for the nation, such as the arriv-

al of Turks in Anatolia, the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, are also included throughout the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

The adoption of a national identity is a goal that is not explicitly stated in the history curriculum. The history curriculum argues that it does not focus on citizenship education, but rather, or in addition, on thinking skills (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). However, the underlying philosophy and general aims of the curriculum show that there is also a strong emphasis on identity building. (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). On the other hand, the secondary school social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b), while listing the objectives of the course, explicitly includes expressions aimed at gaining national identity.

If we examine the issue of patriotism and national defense, we can see that the concept of patriotism, which is mentioned only once in the history course in the context of the patriotism of Turkish societies in ancient times, is included in various areas of learning and as a value to be acquired in the social studies course (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Participation in homeland defense is not included in neither history nor social studies curricula.

Global Approach in Curriculum

First of all, it should be clearly stated that the curriculum does not include a supranational identity. This may be because Turkey is not part of a supranational organization such as the European Union. The only emphasis that can be perceived as transnational, besides the Turkish identity, is the statement that Turks are part of the Islamic world. But even in this case, Islam is not defined as a supra-identity.

The concept of interdependence is not included in the history curriculum. In the social studies curriculum, on the other hand, the “Global Connections” learning area addresses cooperation among nations and tries to give students a sense of being part of a global society (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Finally, the 12th grade “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism,” curriculum briefly mentions the creation of NATO and how Turkey became a member of it (Ministry of National Education, 2018b).

Dilemmas

This chapter represented the most challenging aspect of our research. Prior to this chapter, we had adhered to the historical education curriculum in Turkey, which is based on the country's official historical sources. However, there are instances where discrepancies exist between the information presented in these sources and the actual practices observed in real life. For instance, Article 125 of the 1936 USSR Constitution, also known as the Stalin Constitution, asserts that citizens' freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly and demonstration are guaranteed. However, it is highly unlikely that citizens were able to exercise these freedoms during the Stalinist era. In Turkey, the significance and the source of this significance in the history curriculum may differ from the significance and the source of this significance in real-life history lessons.

History is a crucial subject that occupies a significant position in the curriculum, is reinforced by a variety of elective courses, and is assessed in central examinations. However, in this section, it may be necessary to go beyond the enumerated curriculum aims and principles and address the actual nature of history. In Turkey, the primary objective and fundamental rationale for the significance of education in general and history in particular has consistently been to facilitate the development of an individual's identity (Kirit, 2020). The concept of utilizing schools and history, and in the meantime history teaching, in the formation of identity, which originated in the Ottoman period, continued in the republican era (Akinci 2014; Vurgun, 2021). The frequent alterations to the curriculum are indicative of these attempts to foster identity. Almost every political party that has assumed power has initiated changes to the curriculum with the intention of fostering individuals who align with its worldview. The current ruling party has continued this practice. In conclusion, the significance of history education in Turkey is not intrinsic, but rather instrumental in the formation of identity. It is also important to note that there is a significant group of academics in Turkish universities who argue that history education should not be solely instrumental in nature, but should also aim to provide students with a basic understanding of historical concepts and skills. The curriculum was modified to include an emphasis on the development of intellectual skills, as previously discussed, due to the influence of this group. Nevertheless, the discrepan-

cies in practice and some inconsistencies in the curriculum are the consequence of the conviction that the conventional instrumental function of the history course in identity formation should persist.

Conclusion

In this study, the 8th and 12th grades History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism curriculum, the 9th, 10th and 11th grade history curriculum, and the social studies curriculum have been examined.

At the secondary level, students first encounter history topics in the social studies course in grades 5, 6 and 7. This course includes the teaching of history as well as civic education and citizenship. It can be seen that the social studies program emphasizes citizenship education, national consciousness, protection of cultural heritage, analytical, critical and historical thinking, questioning skills, values and democracy with an interdisciplinary approach.

The curricula of the History of Turkish Revolution and Kemalism courses (8th and 12th grades) state that the aim is for students to acquire the concepts of historical thinking and the concepts specific to the content of the course, and to grow up as citizens of the Republic of Turkey who love their homeland and nation, know and use their rights, fulfill their responsibilities, have national consciousness, and adopt national, spiritual, and universal values.

The history curriculum for secondary education (grades 9, 10 and 11) was updated in 2023 with an approach that combines chronological and thematic approaches (MoNE, 2023). The new approach emphasizes historical thinking skills rather than knowledge, and aims to help students develop skills such as evaluating evidence, critical thinking, and problem solving. The teaching of history in secondary schools covers a period from prehistory to the present day. Obviously, the focus of the course is Turkish history, but this history begins with the history of the Huns before Christ and ends with the history of the Republic of Turkey, covering a wide area from China to Central Europe, from Siberia to North Africa.

Although topics related to globalization receive attention in middle school social studies programs, such a perspective is absent from high school history programs. In addition, while digital citizenship and media literacy are emphasized more in mid-

dle school social studies courses, these topics are not found in high school history courses.

The aim of teaching history in primary, middle and high schools in Turkey is to provide students with historical knowledge, historical thinking skills and historical awareness in order to raise generations that have gained a sense of national unity and solidarity, are sensitive to national history and culture, and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. High school history programs, which try to teach the themes within a general chronology, aim at the development of historical thinking skills in addition to the acquisition of national identity. The best citizenship education is understood as the one based on the acquisition of thinking and decision-making skills.

In Turkey, curricula are changed or updated at short intervals. It is quite possible to encounter a brand-new history curriculum within a year or two. The authors of this chapter believe that the following four factors will determine the future of history education in Turkey. The first is how long the ruling party will remain in power. Second, the situation of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, especially Syria, will be crucial. Third, the future of history education will be determined by the issue of academic freedom in universities to freely discuss education in general and history education in particular, and finally, by the limits of the effectiveness of researchers who argue that the purpose of history education is not only to teach what happened in the past but also to provide intellectual skills. In the following, we will briefly discuss how these four factors may affect the trajectory of history education.

The ruling party has been in power in the country for the past twenty-two years. This party is a conservative party that incorporates Islamic values (Demirkol 2023; Özer, 2019). One of the key tenets of this political party is the concept of Neo-Ottomanism. Neo-Ottomanism is defined by İnanç and Haji as “Neo-Ottomanism is based on three pillars: Firstly, there is the matter of Turkey’s reconciliation with the Islamic civilization and its multicultural and multi-ethnic Ottoman past. The second objective is to overcome the inferiority complex that has been perpetuated by two centuries of Westernization and to move forward with confidence and pride, inspired by the glorious and magnificent Ottoman cultural and imperial heritage. The third pillar of Neo-Ottomanism is to continue to open up to the West while establishing a balanced relationship with it based on mutual equality and distance” (p. 155). This identity of the ruling party is a point of emphasis for numerous researchers, including Gülbay (2023), Kamalı (2018), and Os-

manbaşoğlu (2018). As with previous ruling parties, the Justice and Development Party reflects its own understanding of the education system and aims to raise individuals who share the same values as it does (Balci, 2021; Yolcu, 2022). This understanding has been reflected in the field of education through the prioritization of conservatism and Islamic sensitivity (Durubaşa & Karapehliven, 2018). Given the substantial allocation of time to Ottoman and Islamic history in history curricula, the existence of elective courses related to Islamic history and the prominence of religious education, it can be reasonably concluded that: As long as the Justice and Development Party retains its position in the government, the Ottoman state and Islamic values will continue to be accorded greater prominence in the history curriculum and history education. The extent to which this emphasis will be maintained is a matter that will become clear as events unfold.

Turkey is one of the most immigrant-receiving countries in the world. According to the Ministry of Interior's Directorate of Migration Management (2023), the number of Syrians under temporary protection decreased from 3,737,369 in 2021 to 3,259,853 in October 2023. Again, according to the Migration Administration, there are 1,115,246 Syrians between the ages of 5 and 18, i.e. school age. According to data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the year 2021, all of Turkey's immigrant countries are Muslim countries. This situation serves as a facilitating factor for the Justice and Development Party, which has adopted a more Islamic approach to education. The cultivation of individuals with heightened Islamic sensibility will both create the requisite psychological milieu for the acceptance of incoming Muslim immigrants and facilitate the anticipated future integration. As Kocabaş and Alpaydın (2021) observe, "when the goals and objectives of national education, as determined years ago, are compared with the trends of an increasingly globalized world, it becomes evident that Turkish national education requires newer and broader perspectives. It is similarly essential to reconstruct the human model targeted by an education system that has been able to digest the reality of migration in all its dimensions, considering the phenomenon of migration" (p. 33), a perspective that aligns closely with the views of the Turkish government.

The concept of academic freedom in universities is a topic worthy of further discussion. The future direction of history education is contingent upon a discourse concerning the quality of education and the trajectory it should pursue. However, the question remains as to whether and how this discussion can take place within faculties of education

and history departments. According to the Academic Freedom Index (2024), Turkey experienced a decline in academic freedom from 2013 to 2023, with a loss of 0.241 points, resulting in a score of 0.09 and a ranking of 166th out of 179 countries. In light of these circumstances, it appears that it is not feasible to develop a comprehensive vision for the future of history education in academic circles other than through the lens of the country's administration's policies.

Finally, as previously stated, there is a considerable body of scholars in Turkish universities who argue that history education in Turkish universities should extend beyond the study of political history and identity formation to encompass the acquisition of certain intellectual skills. For instance, Demirciođlu (2009), Kiriř-Avarođulları (2014), Vurgun (2014), Dilek and Dilek (2015), Safran and Ata (1998), řimřek (2016) Belenli (2021), and Karabađ (2017), among others, strongly advocate the inclusion of intellectual skills in history teaching. These endeavors have also influenced curricula, with a notable emphasis on the inclusion of thinking skills in the curriculum. Nevertheless, the impact of these thinking-based emphases in the section that explains the philosophy and aims of the curriculum is diminished in the achievements section. The longevity and extent to which this camp will maintain its effectiveness against the camp that advocates the teaching of political history for the purpose of gaining identity will be pivotal in determining the future of history education in Turkey

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