

# An Overview and Comparison of Turkish Public Schools and Private Schools

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## Abstract

Human beings are social in nature and need acquisition and possession of knowledge for self-actualisation. This need can only be fulfilled in educational institutions. Turkish educational system is composed of pre-school, elementary, secondary and higher education. It is now evident that governments alone cannot meet the high demand of information and knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Public schools and private schools are required to step in interchangeably when one falls short or fails.

This study offers a short evaluation of the status of private schools in Turkey, a comparison of public and private schools, recommendations on public-private school balance and history of private schools, their structure and function and demands of parents. The study elaborates on governing factors in choosing a private school and how public schools can adapt to demands.

**Keywords:** public sector, private sector, differences in education, Turkish educational system, schools

## 1. Introduction

It is beyond doubt that education has been of the major powers governing human history. The power of education is most felt in modern times. Thanks to economic, social and cultural developments, the importance of education is better understood day by day. Because human being has an important role of being cornerstone and driving force of the developments that can not be filled. In order to fulfill this role he has assumed duly, proper attention have to be given to his education. This fact alone is adequate to prove significance of education (Taytak, 2007). Education serves both individuals and societies. Better job opportunities, higher income, better life styles, and contribution to cultural and civil life are a few of the many benefits of education (Coombs and Hallak, 1987). Governments have to respond cultural, economical and technological changes and transformations. Public expenditures keep increasing due to such changes and transformations and growth of population. However there is generally a gap between public expenditures and income, which forces governments to reserve fewer budgets than required. This is where private sector steps in. Global domain of private sector in educational investments has been dramatically expanding (Taytak, 2007). This study includes an overview of literature on the balance between public and private sector in education.

The significance of education is beyond doubt. It is through education that an individual can improve and contribute to society. Major contributions of education are as follows:

- \* economical development of individual and society
- \* contributes to social stability
- \* contributes to technological advancement and effective use of technology
- \* contributes to democracy
- \* decreases crime rates
- \* contributes to population control
- \* decreases expenditures on health
- \* contributes to raising leaders and entrepreneurship
- \* contributes to quality and quantity of service

Considering social progress and development taking place in society each of these contributions bears particular significance.

## 2. Private Schools

Private schools are educational institutions founded, conducted and maintained by private groups or individuals, native or foreign, complying with Private Educational Institutions Act and subject to inspection by Ministry of National Education and charging tuition (Subaşı and Dinler, 2003:18).

Private schools are founded and run by private individuals or private organizations under Law of Private Educational Institutions No. 5580. Private schools in Turkey fall into four categories:

- Private Turkish Schools (Schools founded by Turkish citizens).
- Private Minority Schools (Schools founded by Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities under Lausanne Convention).
- Private Foreign Schools (Schools founded by American, German, French and Italian citizen under Lausanne Convention. Turkish students may enrol).
- Private International Schools (Only for foreign students).

### 2.1 Brief History of Private Educational Institutions in Turkey

Turkish history of private educational institutions starts with Tanzimat (Reformation) in 1839. In Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi (Statute of General Education) of 1869 categorizes schools as Mekatib-i Umumiye (Government Schools) and Mekatib-i Hususiye (Private Schools) (Kulaksızoğlu, Çakar and Dilmaç, 1999). Private schools are recognized with the Article 15 of Ottoman Constitutions of 1876 (Education is free. Every Ottoman can attend public or private schools on condition of conforming to the law) and Article 16 (All schools are under state supervision) (Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999). In Ottoman Constitution of 1876 three types of schools are defined:

1. Schools majorly founded by Muslims
2. Schools founded following Tanzimat (Reformation)
3. Foreign and minority schools (Tunç 2006). With the Law of Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat) in 1924:
  1. Schools instructing in Arabic were replaced with schools instructing in Turkish.
  2. All private schools including foreign and minority schools secured by Lausanne Convention were unified. (Subaşı and Dinler, 2003:19).

Governing factors that led foundations of private schools:

- 1- Increasing demand for higher quality in education
- 2- Incapacity of government schools
- 3- Interaction and competition (Attempts by Turkish educators and scholars to match quality of schools founded by non-Muslims (Şimşek, 2014).

Following the declaration of Turkish Republic, Atatürk, in his inaugural address at Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1925, promoted private schools. This was followed by three private schools by Turkish Education Association (Türk Eğitim Derneği) in Ankara, Kayseri and Zonguldak (Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999).

Private schools and public schools were supervised by Ministry of Education (Maarif Nezareti). In 1864, a department supervising private schools was founded. Private schools are currently supervised by Directorate of Private Educational Institutions (Özel Öğretim Kurumları Genel Müdürlüğü) (Tunç 2006).

Modern schools were founded following the reformations during by Ottoman governments. However these schools failed due to lack of qualified teachers and resistance from the society. This failure gave way to private schools. Another reason was the demand for better education from Ottoman bourgeoisie (Şimşek, 2014).

### 2.2 Founding a Private School

Approval of Ministry of National Education is required in order to open a private school. Responsible authorities for the supervision and inspection of private schools are Ministry of National Education and General Directorate of Private Educational Institutions (Tunç 2006). Act no. 3035 of July 11, 1984 states that private schools cannot be founded solely for profit (Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999). The development of private schools may be based on three major factors (Bolay, 1996:205 Cited:Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999):

- 1- Incapacity of public schools against increases in population.
- 2- Decrease in quality

### 3- Demands from parents for better education

#### 2.3 Admission to Private Schools

Admission to private schools is subject to same legislation as with public schools. Private primary and elementary schools accept students in accordance with candidate registration system. When the number of applications exceeds the number of seats in classes students are selected in a draw under supervision of a notary. Entrance exams are not required for admission to primary section of private schools. But, for secondary education in a private school, students need to attend the central exam (TEOG), Transition from Primary Education to Secondary Education Exam held by Ministry of National Education. Transfer to another school is possible in accordance with regulations regarding transfers of Ministry of National Education (Tunç 2006).

#### 2.4 Administrative Structure of Private Schools

Administrators and teachers in private schools are subject to same requirements as their counterparts in public schools.

Private schools present a different organizational structure from public schools. Organizational structure of a private school is generally composed of chairman of the board, founding principal, vice principals, academic board, chief financial officer, public relations, heads of departments, advisors, research and development. Private schools have to submit their organizational regulations to the Ministry of Education for approval (Akdoğan, 1995, Quoted in Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999).

#### 2.5 Curriculum in Private Schools

Curriculums of private schools are subject to same regulations as public schools (Tunç 2006).

Minority schools are allowed to include classes for their native languages and religions in their curriculums. International private schools submit their own curriculums conforming to the Turkish state's security and interests (Kulaksızoğlu et al. 1999).

#### 2.6 Tuitions

Tuitions are set by organizations and announced through newspaper ads in May. Ads include annual tuition, modes of payment and discounts, if any. Organisations have to announce all extra services and corresponding charges (Private Educational Institutions, Regulations on Tuitions, Article 5).

Tuitions for preparation classes and first grade are set every year by organisations. Tuitions for students at higher grades are based on previous year's tuition. Maximum increase is 10% added to annual wholesale index price determined by Turkish Statistical Institute. However, corresponding regulation allows private school owners to determine tuitions liberally (Tunç 2006).

#### 2.7 Social Activities

Social activities, particularly those of arts and sports, are most prominent distinguishing features of private schools. Many private schools today offer facilities such as swimming pools, ice-skating rinks, tennis courts, music studios and sculpture workshops in addition to conventional facilities. There are also schools offering fencing, climbing and horse-riding activities (Çelikten, 2010).

Private schools pay equal attention to students' personal development as with their academic achievement. This requires investment in infrastructure and personnel. Some schools offer music classes where students can specialize in an instrument of their choice. Students in private schools are offered a much wider selection of activities. (Çelikten, 2010).

#### 2.8 Expectations of Parents

Expectations of parents from private schools vary. It is never one single reason that attracts parents to private schools. Çelikten's study based on interview with parents and staff at private schools offers a list of criteria:

- Foundation year of the school
- Reasonable tuitions
- Location
- Academic quality of teachers
- Originality of curriculum
- Students achievement level at SBS (level test) or ÖSS (university entrance exam)
- Quality of exam preparation classes
- Quality of English language instruction
- Second foreign language
- Quality of counselling services
- International memberships (such as IB, CIS)

- Quality of music instruction
- Quality of visual arts instruction
- Quality of sports activities and instruction
- Variety of social activities
- Accomplishments of sports teams
- Social responsibility projects
- School's world vision
- Administrators with good communication skills
- Socioeconomic status of neighbourhood
- References from other parents
- Right advertising policy
- Quality of classroom environment
- Quality of physical infrastructure
- Technological infrastructure
- Social facilities
- Security
- Quality of communication with parents and parents' involvement
- Realistic vision and mission
- Hygiene
- Quality of food
- Transportation
- Student uniforms (Çelikten, 2010).

### 2.9 Private Schools in Turkey and Around the World

The number of private schools in Turkey has grown from 9640 to 18,360 (by 91%) between 2009 and 2011. The number of students at private schools has increased by 110% from 2,084,102 to 4,379,561. Most of the increase is due to the growth in the number of students in pre-schools, with the number of institutions increasing from 637 to 1,054 and the number of students from 14,585 to 100,424. According to 2012-2013 statistics of Ministry of the number of formal public schools is 55,648 and the number of private schools is 5,942. The number of students in public schools is 15,239,207 and 613,064 in private schools (Bakioğlu and Kirişçi Sarıkaya, 2013).

Average number of students in OECD (2010) countries is 15%. In Netherlands, Ireland and Chile it is over 50%. In Turkey, Iceland, and Norway more than 98% of students go to public schools. 98% of students in Russia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Romania, Montenegro, Latvia, Serbia, Singapore, Tunis, Croatia, and Bulgaria go to public schools. In China, Macau and Hong Kong more than 90% of students are enrolled in private schools. More than one third of the students in Dubai, Indonesia, Argentina and Taipei go to private schools (Bakioğlu and Kirişçi Sarıkaya, 2013).

In U.S.A 90% of students go to public schools. Research on general achievement has shown that public schools and private schools do not differ in terms of general achievement and that family is the most prominent factor students' achievement (Jyoti, 2013).

While privatisation of education has been expanding there have also been concerns on equality of opportunity, class distinctions, materialization of education (Bakioğlu and Kirişçi Sarıkaya, 2013).

### 3. Comparison of Public and Private Schools

Yılmaz's (2005) study shows private schools students' school life satisfaction ( $X = 52,77$ ) is higher than students' in public schools ( $X = 50,80$ ). This finding indicates a correlation between the satisfaction index and types of schools.

The amount of investment per student by private schools is higher than public schools. World Bank's study (2002) shows that expenditure per student is \$516 in public primary schools and \$1,524 in private primary schools, \$876 in public high schools and \$1,587 in private high schools (Çokgezen and Terzi, 2008).

Due to the advantages of private schools overall performance of students is higher compared to students in public schools. In terms of academic and social performance private schools in Turkey are generally among the highest-ranking institutions.

Private school students perform better in nationwide exams, TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) Science Olympics and international competitions and exams (Çelikten, 2010).

Among 1 million exam takers in 2009 SBS exam first ten students with highest scores were from private schools. Private schools also rank high in terms of school averages. 100 highest-ranking schools are private (Çelikten, 2010).

The table below compares achievements of private and public school students. PISA 2003 results show that private

school students perform better in all sections of the exam than public school students do. Performance of private schools is higher than private and public schools in OECD countries (Çokgezen ve Terzi, 2008).

Table 1. PISA 2003 Private and Public Schools Performance

	School Type	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Problem Solving
Turkey	Public	437	418	430	403
OECD	Public	488	493	494	493
Turkey	Private	557	569	563	536
OECD	Private	517	526	521	524

Source: Akşit (2007)

Private schools are also prominent in sports competitions. In recent years private schools have been winners of Turkish championships and represent Turkey in international sports events (Çelikten, 2010).

Taşdan and Tiryaki's (2008) findings show higher job satisfaction among private primary school teachers. The mean of total scores of the private primary school and public school teachers is respectively 156,82 and 128,05.

Depending on these findings it may be inferred that private school teachers also perform better in terms of productivity.

Administrators at private schools have more managerial liberty compared to their counterparts at public schools with restraints from government. Private schools also have the liberty to hire teachers conforming to their own standards, which is not the case for public schools. Students of private schools are generally of higher socioeconomic standards.

#### 4. Conclusion

Resolving educational issues both through governmental and non-governmental organisations is a characteristic of a modern liberal democratic state. A productive government is expected to distribute the load. Private schools' contribution to economical, cultural, scientific and democratic quality of a state is beyond dispute. Another advantage of presence of private schools in a country is contribution to positive competition in private and public sectors. Private schools alleviate the investment load on behalf of governments. Private schools also assist governments by reducing the excessive number of students in public school classrooms. These direct and many other indirect benefits make it mandatory for governments to encourage private schools (Taytak, 2007).

#### 5. Recommendations

- Private schools should be encouraged for scholarships.
- Vouchers system could be facilitated.  
Vouchers (government sponsorship) could be issued by governments for use of parents to use for private or public schools (Acar ve Gül, 2007).
- Private school tuitions must be under close supervision of governments.
- More scholarship opportunities should be offered for students of low-income students and families.
- Investment in public schools must be increased making them more attractive for parents.
- Investment in infrastructures should be increased.
- Teacher and administrator training must be carried out in association with public and private organisations.
- Public school administrators should attend administrative training programmes.
- Improvements to increase job satisfaction levels of public school teachers must be implemented. Teachers' salaries must be increased to attract qualified teachers to public schools.
- Public schools must have simpler bureaucratic structures to increase efficiency.
- Public school principals must have more authority to take initiatives.
- Centres could be facilitated to share educational materials.
- Co-operation between public and private schools must be facilitated through meetings, workshops and exchange of educational materials and facilities (TÖDER, 2009).
- More sports activities should be involved in curriculums of public schools to increase students' satisfaction.
- Inspection mechanism of public schools should be improved.

In conclusion, public schools must be more competitive by improvements in classroom population, educational materials, staffing, training programmes, national examination system and budgets of schools.

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