Thoughts and Practices of Religious Education in Alternative Schools in Turkey

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Abstract

Operators, researchers and other social elements in the field of education, have long been discussing the outputs of education. Today what the educators in most schools attach importance to is the competitive sense rather than individual differences. Therefore, alternative education and alternative schools are progressively becoming common throughout Turkey. The basic objective of this study is to discuss the point of view of these schools' to religious education. The study has been realized in accordance with the body of literature. The content of the study is constructed with the properties of different school types defined as alternative schools, their position in Turkey and the religious education in these schools. It is an descriptive study. Alternative school models suggest integrative education, awareness of individual differences, supporting values in school as well as teaching them and emphasize the importance of self-motivation in the process of bringing values, which religions provide, into life. Various types of school models exist in many civilizations. People have the opportunity to attend any school model. As the student who manages to take the appropriate education for himself is healthier he will be open to religious and ethics education. When uncompetitive school models which consider the factors such as individual choices and learning speed of students form education models that are not disjointed from social life, religious education will be studied again from preschool to higher education to meet the expectations of the society.

Keywords: alternative education, alternative schools, religious education

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As in all throughout the world, the interest towards to alternative schools is also on the rise in Turkey. The concept of "alternative school" is being chosen within private schools but also this school concept can be seen in small number of public schools. There are numerous reasons to choose alternative schools.

Throughout history, mankind educated their children with the passion teaching their knowledge, their life, their norms and culture to channel them. With the rapid changing of social events and differentiation of personal needs made education to be done indiscreetly. By this, the culture channelling fuction of education brought the concept of "school" with it. By collective education, schools became institutions where systematical and regular training activities are held. (Memduhoğlu - Mazlum, - Alav, 2015). Instead of individual differences, competitive understanding viev is taking place at schools in our day. In Turkish educational system practices, cognitive objectives are in the foreground. (Titrek – Zafer – Sezen – Ölçüm, 2013, p. 31). There are some views such as schools are not quite attractive for students, not answering needs of society and individuals, giving biased decisions on students' mental progress, etc. In 2005, educational reformations specified the change towards education programs only in Turkey. But for constructing a durable and effective changing makes all education-related elements to take their shares from a possible change mandatory. Schools are centered on learning and teaching progress are should have a view of being open, acceptive and adapting to oneself to mentioned changes above. In this view, it should be considered in details on physcial, social, cultural, economic and executive structural elements. (Elkatmış, 2013). According to some scholars and educators, the following critics should be applied to ongoing mass education system.

- To make blindly obedience and simplicity interiorize by limiting freedom,
- Targeting good, submissive and passive individuals instead of free and independent ones,
- Restrain students to live their childhood by giving targets and aims them early in their ages,
- Prioritise of state's and other social institutions' expectations to child,
- Not making out of new talents and even dulling talents that already exist,
- Being disconnected from life,
- Making school the aim but not the tool,
- Prioritise the school success to life success,
- Being teacher, institituion or system based instead of being student based,
- Giving priority more to numbers than to quality,
- Having an overloaded syllabus,
- Exterminating imagination, critical thinking and reproductivity,
- Being predicated on discipline, submission and punishment,
- Disregarding the individual for the sake of social benefit.
(Gezer, 2007).

This situation dragged so many parents into pursuit and the faith to classical schools started to decline. On this lose of a faith, "taking child as an individual and making him free" view - as one of the main pillars of new educational understanding- became also effective. (Dündar, 2007). There are some new schools emerged in regardless of the schools that named as mass education or main trend schools. The format of contradictory process of school against to human's nature, is dragging unwanted action forms and failure together with it. Succes focused education conception, caused students to be ignored or put them out of the system. In

fact, the main aim of the help of schools' towards children and teenagers is making them to be grown as a character-wise, happy and peaceful individuals. (Öcal, 2004). Alternative schools such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, International Bakalorya, Home School etc. evaluate education as a whole, making this school models attractive. In literature, "alternative education" is being addressed as "alternative schools". Alternative school view is being used in two ways: Firstly, having unique education methodology and philosophy and being student-based school models. Secondly, school services to under risk group and crime-committed children. Second way is more common in the USA. The common characteristics of alternative schools are being small sized, having a supportive society, having individualistic programming, being multi-optioned, having autonomy and democratic structure, giving support to family's and society's experiences, well qualified standarts and rules, having certain aims, being always inspected institutionally and being student centered. (Aydın, 2010).

Religious education which is born from religion as being faith to believe in and education which has an influence over people is and important necessity for individualistic and social life. To fulfill this need, people believed a certain religion in every age. They wanted to learn fundementals and teach to others about religion they believed. And with education they succeded this in. With this, the need of learning the believed religion and teaching to others gave birth to religious education. (Yılmaz - Kılavuz, 2009, p. 2). Morals and ethical values are simultaneous phenomenon to mankind's creation. Either being seen as religious believes or being traditions, way of life or a must to live together, morals and ethical values have a certain and important place in individualistic or social life. For this, morals was a topic of research from the very begining of the history of thinking and there had been numerous studies and publications about it. About morals' origin, beside religious and philosophical explanations, there had been a seperate field of research about it's origins and the progress of morals on social sciences. (Gündüz, 2010). The religious education is covering content as methodology and covering methodology as much as content. While one of these covers the topic of "What to teach?", the other one covers also the topic of "How to teach?" In religious education, both of them have their importance. (Yılmaz - Kılavuz, 2009, p. 2).

In some schools there are lessons that target to explain about religion and morals in general, in some of others there are lessons which aim to introduce the specific religion and belief system practices. In some of other schools, religion and moral topics are being given within firstly in social sciences and in other lessons. In some schools they are making some activities within extracurricular activities by clergymen and religious teaching teachers. The main aim of education institutions is to prepare the individual into life and to give qualified education to youngsters and adults. To accomplish this duty, education institutions must plan their plans with utmost particularity. This planning must be shaped according to the nation's social character, progress level of growing generation and according to this generation's needs and attentions. (Çakmak, 2013, p. 81-104). The main trend schools' paying attention to transfer of knowledge, not paying attention to local conditions and needs, not covering of individual's preparedness level and needs are giving challenges for students to be ready to life. Religious, morals and ethic values teachings become on second plan. Alternative schools are giving importance for earning positive behaviour at school rather there is a religious education and ethics lesson or not.

School age is the time for children and teenagers to create their personality and physical development. Development is a whole factor and there is a strong bound between physical, mental, emotional and social improvement. Emotional and social progress is so connected that they cannot be recognized without one and other. (Başal, 2012, p. 179). Alternative school approaches defend that at the education, child should be approached integratively. Some researches show that while child gains positive behavior at school, he or she also gets negative behavioral acts from his fellow friends and his teachers. (Musayev, 2014, p. 1-12). The individual adopt the society's behavior into himself and become a part of it. In this progress, child learns about how to obey the rules and values of the group and adopt this system of values. (Başal, 2012, p. 179).

Method

This research is being prepared to investigate the education of religion at alternative schools in Turkey. It's a qualitative research. Accroding to Karasar, scanning models are research approaches describe a situation as it's own which was in the past or still exists now. (Karasar, 2010). In researches where scanning model is accepted, if the situation, individual or object which been subjected for the research would be identified as it is in it's own situation, they should be observed without any attempt to change or effect. (İslamoğlu, 2011).
There has been an interview with some schools that using alternative school approaches in Turkey.

Chart 1: Interviewed Schools

Numbers	*Name of the School*	*Age Gap*	*Approach*
1	Bursa Pembe Kule Anaokulu (Kindergarten)	3 - 6	Montessori
2	Ankara Sihirli Bahçe Anaokulu (Kindergarten)	2 - 6	Montessori
3	Arel Okulları	3 - 18	IB Organizations
4	İstanbul Özel Taş İlk ve Ortaokulu (Primary and Secondary Schools)	6 - 14	IB Organizations
5	Coşkun İstanbul Ortaokulu (Secondary School)	10 - 14	IB Organizations
6	İstanbul Saklı Dünyam Anaokulu (Kindergarten)	3 - 6	Reggio Emilia
7	Bursa Çağdaş Eğitim Kooperatifi 3 Mart Özel Anaokulu (Kindergarten)	3 - 6	Montessori and IB Organizations
8	A nameless school	3 - 18	IB Organizations

Findings

There has been a conclusion after interviewing with schools:

Montessori approach and International Baccalaureate, is been practiced from pre-school till to end of high school. Reggio Emilia approach on the other hand, is only been practiced for pre-school. Except previously named approaches there are also alternative school approaches, but

these named ones are commonly have been used in Turkey. But at Montessori approach due to subject pass system instead of class pass system, it can only be practiced for pre-school in Turkey. Montessori approach aims to highlight the child's potential by education. Student's spiritual progress is also important in this process. In Reggio Emilia approach, the the interaction of the child at social and physical environment where he/she gets interacted with other people is featured. Cooperation, problem solving, searching and learning are encouraged. At International Baccalaureate grounds on learning by interrogating. A problem about alternative schools in Turkey is that cannot finding educated pre-service personnel. Institutions are educating their own staff/personnel by in-service education. The other working personnel in small numbers are that who got educated abroad or those who had observations there.

Every society aims to channel their accumulations to their new generations and to prepare their kids and teenagers to the life. In this context, they utilizable from formal and non-formal education. Also, society engaged in to learn and teach the religion, morals, ethic values and the other culture elements to their individuals. The schools where they use alternative education, religion, morals, ethic values and the other culture elements are already integrated into programs. Pre-school institutions where Montessori approach is being used, religion and moral values are being educated within social decorum and cultural practices. It's been wanted to reach the creator of the universe to God/Allah, to know universe better, to know duties about relationship with other humans and entities in lessons at primary schools with an understanding named as "cosmic education". In International Baccalaureate schools, except religious culture and moral knowledge lesson and social science lesson, also epistemology lesson locates in Diploma program. Religion, morals and ethic values are also in this lesson's content. Regulations about these lessons are made in Ministry of Education's secondary education institutions weekly lesson table of distribution. Religion and moral values subjects are taking place under the name of "culture" in curriculum at Reggio Emilia's approach originated pre-school institutions.

Religion and values education is being the main topic of conversation between parents and educators more and more with every passing day. Topics of religion and moral values is integrated in Ministry of Education's lesson programs and syllabuses. Having an idea about alternative schools will be useful for related branch teachers and teacher nominees. Another subject about religion moral values education content is about religion and moral values education activities as extra curriculum at schools. In this subject there are systematically working institutions which have positive feedbacks. In institutions where children' and youngsters' education in general and religion and moral values education for age groups in private, there can be no educated personnel to be found for answering the demand from society. This situation can cause problems that hard to recover. While attention to alternative education and alternative schools is on rise, schools that use this approaches also gives extracurricular religion and moral values education.

The progress of kids and teenagers at school age should be seen as whole. Alternative school approach sees the individual as a whole. Psychomotor acquisitions are important as much as mental acquisitions. The importancy of to know how and by which method the subject will be taught and to know which subject about religion and moral values education will be picked, is same. The politics about alternative schools' religion and moral values education can be

summarized as: Implicit learning, integrated education, freedom relies on self-discipline, cosmic education that sees the universe as whole, how to use materials and books about moral values education, drama method, making organizations about moral values, respect and dialogue of all sharers, preparing physical and social environment, social service applications. A learner's profile in International Baccalaureate, is the main point of schools' moral values education politics. A unit named as "Planner" gives about to which value should be given to student in that unit plans. In Montessori approach, every single individual has accepted as "special person" by thinking that human came to earth with learning talent, says that adults can help to kids and teenagers at learning process, but the main responsibility relies on student's himself. There is no comparison between students. It's up to student that to do what and to do it with which education method in Montessori approach. There is "subject passing" instead of class passing. It's cared to earn life skills and positive behaviours in all education process. There is a high coincide between religions' and belief systems' rules and approach and practice in alternative schools. They are overlapping in most subjects. For this, there are alternative school approach accepted all-level schools are available that opened by institutions which religion and belief systems taken as reference.

Result

In Turkey, religion and moral values education at some schools who accepted alternative school or alternative education which are named as different education and school approaches in some sources, is being given according to Ministry of Education's planned curriculum. Lesson's content and the way of how to teach is being defined by ministry's approach. It's being detected that religions' and belief systems' moral teachings are being interiorised at school's atmosphere.

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