

Extended Abstract

The Progressive Education System and Imam Hatip Middle Schools in the Context of Religious Education*

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Abstract

Religious education has been seen as a danger to the requirements of the principle of secularism throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey and has been subjected to different practices in almost every period of government. When mentioning religious education, Imam Hatip Schools are the first to come to mind. These schools, which have seen intense interest from society since the day they were established, have formed the dart board of implementations. The Imam Hatip Schools, which have been subjected to different practices in the historical process, today operate as middle schools and high schools, and in terms of the number of students, now possess the greatest number of all times. This article analyzes the findings obtained from the domain of trying to determine the level of expectations and reasons why the parents of students studying in Imam Hatip Middle Schools, which have come again into action after a span of 14 years, chose these schools. The study has been applied as a field survey in six Imam Hatip Schools to a total of 285 seventh-grade students who were identified as having high and low socioeconomic levels from three different municipalities found in the center of Konya Province in Turkey. In this sense, the article attempts to explain the extent to which parents' expectations from the school have been met in the period that provided the first Imam Hatip Middle School graduates in the mandated 4+4+4 progressive education system that has been implemented since 2012.

Keywords

Religious education • Imam Hatip • Middle School • Parent • Student

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Fundamental issues have apparently always existed since the first years of the Republic when looking at the history of Turkish education. In the first years of the Republic's founding, the educational institutions that had had a traditional structure from the time of the Ottoman Empire were seen unsuitable for the new education model, which projected nationalist understanding; thus it went to new searches in forming an education system appropriate to the understanding of the new state. The existing education system, having been subdued through the revolutions made in the first years of the Republic, was completely changed. Fundamental innovations were carried out in education in this direction through implementations placed by the Law of Unified Instruction (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) and revisions to the alphabet. Through the education policy applied in the construction of the nation state at this time, religious education was completely banned, and a gap in religion education was formed in the social substructure. However, politicians perceived the different ideologies that emerged during World War II as threats, and this situation necessitated the return to religious education. This period unearthed the Imam Hatip phenomenon.

The Imam Hatip School, while being intensely popular in its first years among families and children coming mostly from villages, changed and transformed its inner process through political implementations; these schools have come to be institutions demanded by many sections of society. Imam Hatip Schools in their present form were established at the time of the Democrat Party. Sixty-six years have passed from when it was founded until today. During this time, even though encountering various obstacles, it has preserved the quality of being a school always desired by the community. Due to the mission that Imam Hatip Schools carry, that the graduates of these schools are esteemed by society is an undeniable fact. Therefore, being an Imam Hatip student is to say one bears an identity and mission at the same time. But on this point, the negative effects of the conditions of this age, such as urbanism being more intense than ever, city efforts to keep pace with the conditions, and the negative widespread use of Internet and social media through the progress of technology, are also discussed over Imam Hatip students. Even though the reason Imam Hatip Schools are preferred by families is due to the sensitivity shown to religion and religious education, one of the reasons underlying the demand for these schools today is that Imam Hatip Schools are seen as "trustworthy institutions where in a child can be entrusted" in the face of peripheral threats such as crime and violence.

Today's family profiles from Imam Hatip Schools, which had been schools that made it possible for children of village families to be educated as boarding students in its first years, is undoubtedly much different than in the past. The schools, which started being commemorated in the 1970s with female students being received at Imam Hatip Schools and in the 1990s with the opening of the Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools, saw heavy demand and became preferred by upper-level professional

staff and bureaucratic families. Today, with the establishment of the International Imam Hatip Schools, not only are they preferred by citizens of the Republic of Turkey, they are at the same time also preferred by students and families of different ethnic backgrounds.

In the history of Turkish education, many applications have been realized related to Imam Hatip Schools, which provide religious education as well as education in the positive sciences. Attempts had been made to constrain the schools, which were subjected to positive and negative practices at the hand of politics especially after the 1960s, through multiple applications and a continuous compulsory eight-year education. Despite these obstacles, however, demand for the schools was uninterrupted. During the period when the headscarf ban was in effect, these schools were the only option for families who wanted their daughters to see education with a headscarf. Yet an Imam Hatip High School graduate could not be found who preferred anything but the Faculty of Theology, even if they got a perfect score on the university exam (the university placement exam that is specific to Turkey). Therefore, the family and student profiles of Imam Hatip Schools, which place religion education first and academic achievement second, exhibit a largely homogenous structure.

Prohibited practices have led society to search for different solutions. Among the families that emphasize religious education, which is considered alternative, those with higher economic income levels prefer private preparatory schools that form an alternative even if the curriculum is officially boorish, instead of sending their children to Imam Hatip High Schools as a result of a concern for the future. These prep schools, which unofficially represent different religious communities, ensure for families that their children receive a religious education and protect them against peripheral threats. However, having alternative educational models as a model of service is necessary in the understanding of a democratic state. This alternative was in a sense provided with the progressive education system that has been in effect as of 2012. Some of the Imam Hatip Middle Schools, which had been closed in 1997, were reopened as of 2011 with the official removal of multiple implementations and in 2012 with the transition to the *4+4+4 progressive education system*. This situation has brought about a sudden increase in the number of students and schools.

The Imam Hatip Schools, which offer alternative education, have left concern of the future in the background by doing away with the multiple implementations and headscarf ban; these schools have ranked among the preferences of families with different demographic characteristics. Today, families do not just prefer these schools for their religious sensitivities. In the face of peripheral threats that go as far down as the primary school level these days, the reason Imam Hatip Schools rank among families preferences is because they possess a great influence as schools that are

trusted in this sense. The Imam Hatip Middle Schools, which also see intense demand from families who prioritize academic achievement alongside religious education, have been viewed in the past as a stepping stone to a good high school; the schools reveal the expectation of providing great success in the transition from primary education to secondary education.

Imam Hatip Schools, drawing attention with the increase in the number of schools and students in its first years, bring together to the agenda debates on “raising the religious generation.” The extent to which these criticisms are found is another issue addressed in the scope of this article. This article, performed over Imam Hatip Middle School parents, alongside describing parent profiles, will attempt to detect the reasons why they send their children to these schools and, in particular, what their expectations are from these schools. In short, this article presents a short history of the Imam Hatip Schools with a particular emphasis on its turning points. Based on the data obtained from the area of study being a field implementation, the reasons why Imam Hatip Middle School parents prefer these schools are found in the evaluation and analyses over what their expectations are, the extent to which their expectations have been met, and their concerns.