



© UKAM PUBLICATIONS February 2013

UKAM REPORT

Uluslararası Kültürel Arařtırmalar Merkezi • International Cultural Research Center • Navende Lêkofîna Çandeyîya Navneteweyî



The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

AUTHORS: İlhan Kaya, Hasan Aydın

www.ukam.org

The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey:
**Challenges,
Experiences, and Model
Recommendations for
Bilingual Education**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the fundamental obstacles for the solution of Kurdish question in Turkey is the right to education the mother tongue. The Republic of Turkey founded as a nation-state has maintained substantially restrictive policies on the rights of different ethnic groups, and tried to suppress the problem by means of prohibitions. However, such suppression of the problem has not led to its disappearance, quite the contrary, it has complicated it. As a result, the Kurdish question has become one of the most major problems in the history of the country with its social, economic, political, and security aspects. Turkish nation state has usually seen the Kurdish issue as a question of public order, and has tried to solve it by security measures. However, as the present situation reveals, the Kurdish question would not be solved even if its security and public order aspects were brought to a solution. Any solution to the problem seems impossible unless Turkey recognizes Kurdish cultural rights and meets their demands for education in the mother tongue. In other words, the Kurdish question is basically a matter of democracy.¹ In this regard, only a democratic regime which recognizes and ensures the rights of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups will be able to produce permanent solutions to the Kurdish question.

We, as the International Cultural Research Center (UKAM), intend to provide an insight for the debates in Turkey by studying the right to education in the mother tongue and bilingual education with this report. The first section of the report discusses the right to education in mother tongue, bilingual education and the bilingual education models. In the second section, the history of bilingual education debates in different parts of the world, the processes experienced, the solutions developed and the models applied are analyzed. The third section examines the bilingual education experiences of the Republic

1 Bruinessen. M. (2011). *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States: Collected Articles*. İstanbul: Gorgias Press & The Isis Press.

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire as well as experienced problems and their historical backgrounds. The final section addresses to how bilingual education processes should be planned in Turkey and what types of bilingual education models can be applied.

I LANGUAGE RIGHTS

The right to education in mother tongue is a right ensured by many international conventions.² In this regard, an individual's right to speak his or her mother tongue in education, government, media and legal transactions is considered as a human right. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are among fundamental texts regarding language rights. These treaties and conventions secure a number of educational and cultural rights, chiefly right to education in mother tongue.³

I DEFINITIONS FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual education means the educational activities conducted in two (or more) different languages.⁴ For a program to be considered as bilingual, both the mother tongue (L1) and the dominant language (L2) must be used as languages of instruction to deliver the content of the curriculum. According to this, the teaching of Kurdish as an elective course is not bilingual education. For bilingual education, the courses within the curriculum must in part be taught in Kurdish (e.g. Geography or Mathematics). Therefore, what is meant by bilingual education is not the teaching of such minority language as a subject. It also refers to the use of that minority language in the teaching of different subjects or disciplines identified in the curriculum.

I BILINGUAL EDUCATION MODELS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

When bilingual education implementations in the world are examined, four models become prominent. These are Transitional Models, Maintenance Models, Enrichment Models and Heritage Models.⁵ Transitional models are prevalingly applied in the USA and some Western European countries. In these models, the student is usually being taught both in the mother tongue and the dominant language during the first two years of his or her education, then moves completely into the education in the dominant language. While some subjects are taught in the mother tongue in the later years of academic life, the dominant language is the language of instruction for the most part. Similarly, in the Maintenance Model, both the mother tongue and the dominant language are used to deliver the content of the curriculum. The fundamental difference here, however, is the increase in the density of and the prolongation in duration of the education in the mother tongue. In the Enrichment Model, all properties of the maintenance model are sustained, but additionally, those who do not speak in the minority language are also encouraged to learn that language. This model is claimed to decrease discrimination, develop empathy and facilitate integration among different ethnic groups. Finally, the Heritage Model aims at protection of languages spoken by few people and facing extinction by means of using those languages as education languages.

2 May, S. (2005). Language rights: Moving the debate forward. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(3), 319–347.

3 Smith, R. (2003). Mother tongue education and the law: A legal review of bilingualism with reference to Scottish Gaelic. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6(2), 129–145.

4 Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society* (2nd Eds). Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education Press.

5 Hornberger, N. (1991). Extending enrichment bilingual education: Revisiting typologies and redirecting policy. In O. Garcia (ed.) *Bilingual Education: Focusschriften Honor of Joshua A. Fishman on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (pp. 215–34). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishers.

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

Another important aspect of bilingual education is related to the philosophy of education and the objectives of the relevant education program. Does the bilingual program aim at the formation of multilingual repertoire for the student or does it just aid in his or her transition into the dominant language? In this manner, bilingual education has been a matter of socio-political debates in many countries. Many studies have shown that bilingual or multilingual education positively contributes to academic success of students who come from a different background other than the dominant language.⁶

Program level of bilingual education is another matter of discussion and has different application modes around the world. Properties such as the number of students, their qualities, and educational mobilities in schools as well as structural properties such as schools' curriculum, the place of languages in the curriculum and the language of instruction in the classroom have an impact on bilingual program applications and the qualities of the models developed.

The applications of bilingual education programs show great differences. As mentioned above, Maintenance and Enrichment Models aim at the protection, development and dissemination of the minority's mother tongue. However, there is no one single standard for in what ways and to what extent this is to be applied. Nonetheless, a large proportion of the teaching program during the first years of the education process in strong bilingual models might be in the minority's mother tongue by varying from 50 to 90%. At the fourth year of the primary school education, education language is planned to consist of 50 percent of the mother tongue and 50 percent of the dominant language. Another conspicuous aspect in implementation of bilingual programs is the realization of a bilateral/bilingual education. In this practice, students who speak the relevant minority's mother tongue (for example Spanish L1) and students who speak the dominant language (for example English L2) are placed in the same class environment in equal numbers. Here the students who speak Spanish L1 and the students who speak English L2 learn both Spanish and English by being taught within the same class. In this model, students whose native language is English consequently learn Spanish as well.⁷

I COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Governed by local education policies, the United States with its bilingual education programs provides an example for Turkey,. Dependent on the locality of education, each state in the US applies specific bilingual education programs. In the states with large migrant population such as Texas, Illinois, New Jersey and New York, bilingual education programs are compulsory. Although there have been some legislations against bilingualism throughout the history of the country, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Bilingual Education Act both of which protect bilingual education constitutionally secure ethnic minorities being taught in their mother tongues.

The United Kingdom's transition to bilingual education programs has not been free of adversity. Hence, it took approximately a century to implement bilingual education; and, constitutional amendments have only been made in the recent past. With the formation of the Education Reform Act (ERA) after 1988, a new national curriculum has been prepared; then, Education Reform has been considered as the most important educational regulation in England, Wales and North Ireland. For example, in Wales, Welsh became the second official language of the region following English and secured under the constitution. In the UK, bilingual education is practiced in four regions being Wales,

6 Cummins, J. (1991). Language Development and Academic Learning. In Malave, L. M. and Duquette, G. (Eds.) *Language, Culture, and Cognition*, (pp. 161–175). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Press.

7 Cummins, J. (2003). Bilingual Education. In J. Bourne and E. Reid (Eds.), *Language Education: World Yearbook of Education*, (pp. 3–19). London, UK: British Library Cataloguing in Publishing Data.

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

Scotland, North Ireland and England. Moreover, it has been observed that bilingual programs change in accordance with the needs and demands of societies and bilingual education varies region to region. Thus, the programs aiming at immigrant families' children are organized to accelerate the integration process in general and infuse them into civic principles. In Scotland, Wales and North Ireland, on the other hand, the goal is to protect and develop the mother tongue as well as transmitting it to next generations.

When Sweden's policies historically directed to the minorities are considered, one will see that the minorities have been largely suppressed and subject to assimilation. The Samis and Finns in Sweden have been exposed to assimilation policies for a long period of time and oppressed by the Swedish central government. It was only the 1950s when the oblivious and nationalist approaches against minorities came to change with the labor migration at that time. In 1999, Finnish, Sami, Romanian, Yiddish and Meankieli languages were officially recognized and began to be used as the languages of instruction in the education system. Also, minority languages have official statuses for the delivery of governmental public services such as courts, municipality services and kindergarten education. Broadcasting and publishing in minority languages are also free. The right to education in mother tongue is under the constitutional protection in Sweden. Therefore, education in the mother tongue is part of Swedish education system. Mother tongue course grades of high school students are included in their graduation certificates. Consequently, education in mother tongue also provides students with certain employment advantages such areas as translation services, teaching, and journalism when they have the language proficiency required for these jobs.

In Spain, until the Constitution of 1978, regions could not provide education in their own languages. With the Constitution of 1978, Spain has been divided into 17 regions and 2 autonomous cities. In those autonomous regions, Basque, Catalan, Galician and Occitan languages are recognized as the official languages of their regions. For example, with the Language Policy Act, Catalan has become the education language in all types of schools of all levels; and students have become entitled to be taught in their own mother tongue, i.e. Catalan. In addition, it is aimed to popularize Catalan language in the public sphere, media and other socio-economic areas.

Considering the bilingual education programs and relevant constitutional regulations in Switzerland, 22 out of 26 cantons in Switzerland are officially bilingual; courses are being taught bilingually. In addition to the official language, another language spoken in the region is included in the curriculum. Furthermore, there are schools in which education is trilingual. In the bilingual schools, students are bilingually provided with the contents of all courses. This enables students to break down the prejudices against different ethnic groups. Not to mention, Switzerland is a country which has received numbers of refugees and a great degree of labor migration. Therefore, as the migrant population in Switzerland has increased; it has developed a specific language policy for migrants and recognized the needs of all minorities in the country.

Another country in which bilingual education programs are widely applied is Germany where Turks constitute the greatest minority group of migrants. Most programs applied in Germany aim at the integration of the migrant population into society. The first step for this objective is considered as the transition into bilingual education because education in the mother tongue is a precondition for learning a secondary language. In Germany, it is widely thought that "the student's capacity to use German improves in the degree of which the student's capacity to use his or her own mother tongue improves." For this reason, education in the mother tongue for beginners is of great significance. In this way, it not only establishes a connection between teachers and students but also helps students express themselves and facilitates their integration into the society. Even

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

after migrant students come to a certain level in German, the weight of the teaching of two languages (German and the student's mother tongue) is maintained in the same manner.⁸

In Canada, the implementation of multicultural and multilingual education is very much in accordance with the official multicultural policy of the country recognizing all different cultural groups as the richness of the country and rejecting assimilation of them. Accordingly, Canadian citizenship has become a supra-identity for each individual. Canada, regardless various ethnic groups within its borders, implemented constitutional arrangements only for those who either speak French or English. It has never mentioned other minorities specifically. However, all ethnic groups other than those who speak these two languages have a right to education in their mother tongues, and there are no restrictions on the use of other cultural rights. Consequently, all minorities in the country have the right to education in both their mother tongues and the official language of their province.

I **BILINGUALISM DEBATES IN TURKEY**

Bilingual education has always been a matter of political discussion all around the world. Those who argue that monolingual education system and unicultural structure is the most important condition for the unity of a country often emphasize the idea that bilingual education risks the unity of the country and divides it. In Turkey, the idea of unification of education set forth by the Law on Unification of Education has been seen as one of the most important means in ensuring the unity of the country. Therefore, the failure in proceeding into multilingual education by raising the excuse of the political, cultural and social conditions "peculiar to us" hinders socio-cultural development, negatively affects the quality of education, and leaves many problems, chiefly the Kurdish question, unresolved.

Opponents of bilingual education impeach proponents of bilingual education for acting with political purposes, and try to distort the problem. They argue that bilingual education causes waste of resources and hinders the integration of minorities.⁹ However, those deliberation processes have been overcome in many countries and legal amendments enabling education services in different languages have been implemented. Those countries have developed different application models and ensured the use of different languages in their educational systems. Bilingual education became widespread and qualitatively transformed during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰ For example, bilingual education programs were developed and put in effect in 17 Latin American countries during this period. The US and Canada have been applying bilingual education programs all along. Many European Union countries have developed and applied bilingual education programs by issuing necessary legal arrangements. While there is a consensus on the necessity of bilingual education programs in international public opinion today, there are different views on the quality, intensity and the implementation of these programs.

As a matter of fact, the way in which bilingual education is being discussed in Turkey has a political character and ignores educational dimensions. This results in misperceptions. There is no discussion on the pedagogic, cultural and social aspects of education whether monolingual or bilingual; there is no discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual education. There are a number of studies indicating that bilingual education positively contributes to the academic performance of the students

8 ⁸ FON Institut. (2012). *İki Dilli Eğitim [Bilingual Education]*. Available: <http://www.foninstitut.de/kinder-zweisprachigkeit.html>

9 Banks, J. A. (1988). *Multiethnic Education (2nd eds)*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon Press.

10 Banks, J. A. (2007). *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Press.

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

who speak minority languages¹¹ and reduces social and cultural inequalities.¹² In this regard, when one should assess the debates over education in the mother tongue or bilingual education in Turkey, it is crucial to consider its pedagogic, social and cultural dimensions.

The fear of being divided in the Turkish collective memory furnishes the idea that education in different languages other than Turkish will inevitably result in disintegration.¹³ First of all, one should note that in none of the bilingual education models is it the case that the dominant language (Turkish L2) is not taught or education is provided solely in minority language (Kurdish L1). In all models, the minority language and the dominant language are both used as education language. Therefore, it is of great benefit that the debates over bilingual education are conducted in a correct and multidimensional manner. All countries which have proceeded to bilingual education have not been disintegrated. Nor do disintegration problems cease to exist in countries which use solely the dominant language as the education language. Quite the contrary, prohibitions and restrictions have resulted in the alienation and lack of belonging among minorities, and facilitated separatism in the society.

Then, is it possible for Turkey to proceed to bilingual education? If so, how will this happen and how should the process be managed? First of all, it must be noted that discussing every problem within the context of “peculiar to us” and “our specific conditions” complicates benefiting from other experiences. We are not the first nor will we be the last to experience such debates. Many countries have experienced and concluded similar discussions or made progress. The process has not been completed in those who have come to a conclusion. They also confront with new difficulties and continue their debates to solve the problems they face. Turkey should cure this disease “peculiar to it” and adopt universal approaches for solving its problems. It is impossible to move forward for a Turkey which is unable to confront its problems.

Turkey’s current laws, human resources, government structure and education planning create difficulties in suggesting a perfectly ideal bilingual education model. For this reason, a long term of the planning should be considered. This planning should be divided in phases; the transition into the idea bilingual education should be undertaken gradually. Neither impetuosity nor uncertainty will produce resolutions. Quite the opposite, they lead to the deepening of dissolution and conflicts. In this regard, we propose three different types of bilingual education models to be implemented gradually in Turkey. The bilingual education process will start with elective Kurdish and find a ground with the “Transitional Bilingual Education Model”. It will become more satisfactory with the “Enrichment Bilingual Education Model” in the long run. The suggested models have been prepared in consideration of political, cultural, economic and educational structures in Turkey. The important point here is to adopt pluralism and multilingualism as a principle, and to follow the plans and strategies accordingly. For realization, a determinant political and administrative stand is crucial.

Apparently there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Turkey is not the first to undergo such a process. There is no country left which has not proceeded to bilingual education, except for authoritarian regimes. We must prepare the legal grounds and educational infrastructure for education in different languages. For this reason, although little and unplanned steps of the state, as in the implementation of elective Kurdish courses,

11 Slavin, R. E. & Cheung, A. (2005). A Synthesis of Research on Language Reading Instruction for English Language Learners. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(2), 247-284.
12 Cummins, J. (1991). Language Development and Academic Learning. In Malave, L. M. and Duquette, G. (eds.) *Language, Culture, and Cognition* (pp. 161-175). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
13 Mağçupyan, E. (1999). *Yönetemeyen Cumhuriyet [The Republic Unable to Govern] (1st edition)*. Istanbul: Patika Yayınları.

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

are important, they are not sufficient for the solution. Everybody should know what kind of strategy the government or the state will pursue. We should decide whether Turkey is a multicultural country or not. If it is multicultural, then it has to meet its requirements.

The teaching of Kurdish as an elective course is an unambitious but important decision. However, it is impossible to say that this step is satisfactory for those who argue that Kurdish should be adopted as an education language. The Ministry of National Education has started the Kurdish elective courses process, but unfortunately Turkey has not basic foundations for the teaching of these elective courses. For this reason, it is possible to conclude that Turkey is on the eve of confusion. While the state has not opened departments of Kurdish teaching in universities and did not train a single professional, it started giving elective Kurdish courses. Thus, Emin Zararsız, the undersecretary of the Ministry of National Education declared that 21 thousand students elected the Kurdish courses.¹⁴ It should be noted that the leading of school administrations and uncertainties in this matter played a significant role on the fact that only 21 thousand students preferred elective Kurdish courses due to the lack of Kurdish language teachers, materials, and classrooms.

One of the fundamental findings of this research is that Turkey entered in the process of elective Kurdish courses in an unfavorable and unplanned manner. Turkey should immediately resolve such confusion and produce and apply permanent plans and strategies on this topic. The first thing to do is to implement necessary legal arrangements and prepare a strategic action plan. Secondly, it is urgently necessary to raise competent academicians and professionals. Then, multicultural education programs should be developed and they should be opened within the faculties of education, and the qualification of the teaching trainee programs should be in accordance with bilingual education. Furthermore, the lack of relevant professionals should be immediately resolved by founding Kurdish teaching departments.

Finally, it is crucial to note that pluralism and diversity in education require autonomy in local governments. Only then, each local government will be able to develop an education program corresponding local needs and shape language education. However, one should also remember that the assignment of education to local governments will bring human resources problems. Therefore, the required human resources planning should be carefully carried out.

I THE PURPOSE OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the transition to bilingual education in Turkey by providing policy-makers, opinion leaders and public opinion with the bilingual education models, the transition processes to bilingual education, different approaches to the subject matter and experiences from different parts of the world. In this study, the transition processes to multilingual education, debates taken place, legal arrangements, teacher training programs, and teaching and educational practices in 55 countries have been analyzed, and "10 countries' examples" have been presented in this report. For this purpose, a large literature has been reviewed, and the models that can be exemplary for Turkey and the experiences that could contribute to the deliberation process in Turkey have been identified. For this purpose, both academic works on this topic have been reviewed and the web sites of the education ministries of different countries have been examined in order to understand procedures and management mechanisms in the

14 Hürriyet Newspaper. (2012). *En Çok Matematik Dersi Seçildi [Maths has been elected most]*. Available: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/21544666.asp>

I The Question of Mother Tongue Education in Turkey: **Challenges, Experiences, and Model Recommendations for Bilingual Education**

implementation of bilingual education programs. In order to determine the frame of the right to education in the mother tongue, the international legal frameworks such as conventions and arrangements have been analyzed and key issues have been identified. Also, the bilingual education experiences of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey have been investigated in order to present the multicultural and multilingual memory of Turkey.

A fieldwork has been conducted in densely Kurdish-populated areas in order to understand Turkey's Kurdish language elective course process. To examine how the elective Kurdish education works in Turkey, 40 interviews were conducted with school administrators in the cities where Kurds are densely populated. The interviews were conducted with administrators at provincial, district, and school levels. Also, the current situation in Kurdish education and its likely contributions to teaching trainee programs were examined by interviewing authorities from the Institutes for Living Languages in Dicle University, Mardin Artuklu University, Bingol University and Mus Alparslan University.

Finally, the models which can be applied by Turkey in the short, medium and long run have been developed in the light of the literature review and debates in the media and the interviews conducted with the administrators at different levels of the Ministry of National Education. The objective has been to contribute to the development of bilingual education programs, the process of the implementation of the programs, and the development of teaching trainee programs.