

# Decentralization of Education and Strengthening the Participation of Parents in School Administration in Turkey: What Has Changed?\*

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## Abstract

This study which dealt with the localization in education and strengthening the participation of parents in school administrations was a descriptive research. In this research, where qualitative design was used, purposeful sampling method was preferred. A work group consisting of 15 schools administrators who were working in schools with varying socio-economic levels in Kastamonu city center was established. The data were gathered by using the semi-structured interview technique. There were some differences in the opinions of the school administrators who had participated in the research on the issue of parents' participation in school administration. The participation of parents in school administration varied with the socio-economic levels of schools. The effect of parents having participated in school administration on the decisions taken differed in the socio-economic levels of the areas where schools were located. The difficulties experienced by the school administrators and parents in the process of their participation in schools varied with the socio-economic levels of schools.

## Key Words

Neo-liberal policies, Decentralization in Education, Parents' Participation in School Administration.

Neo-liberal policies presented as a solution to the crisis experienced by the capital in 1970s put emphasis upon the re-strengthening of the state and its public aspect. This structuring mentioned involves the re-structuring of public services within the private sector as well as the transformation from Keynesian welfare state to a competitive state

structure (Mok & Tan, 2004). This new transformation regarding the role and function of the state is fulfilled with the help of structural adaptation programmes in the third world countries applied by the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank [WB] (Kamat, 2002). It is possible to view this powerful effect of neo-liberal ideology on education which is one of the public service areas of social state, as well (Humes, 2000).

Decentralization occupies one of the most significant paradoxes of neo-liberal education reforms (Rado, 2001). Within this direction, most of the financial, administrative, political authorities and responsibilities are transferred to administrative units, local institutions, local societies and schools at lower levels. Thus, democracy and participation constitute one of the starting points of efforts in localization in education. Therefore, localization in education tends to develop a school system which encourages the participation of various sections in the society consisting of an increasing number of teachers, parents, students, society leaders, non-

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governmental organizations and managements (Anderson, 1999; Lewis & Naidoo, 2004; Lindbland, Ozga, & Zambeta, 2002; Naidoo & Kong 2003; United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2007; Vincent, 1996). Providing greater participation in the administration of schools forces these institutions to face with the danger of colonization in the direction of the necessities of the close neighborhood of these institutions (Lasky & Moore, 1999; Humes, 2000).

It is possible to observe the structural adaptation programmes emphasizing on diminishing the state, liberalizing the economy and making it become outward-oriented by IMF and WB in Turkey in the late 1970s, as well (Sezen, 1999). Effects of neo-liberal policies on Turkish education system which has a considerably central structure right from the very beginning began in 1990s (Ünal, 2003). On the one hand, by way of legal arrangements in Turkey, the education system is tried to obtain a more local structure than the central, and on the other hand, parents' adopting more roles and responsibilities in school structures are given the way. It may also be uttered that the very first arrangement regarding this issue was the Project of Developing National Education in 1990 supported by DB.

The objective of the Project of Developing National Education is to raise educational quality, to increase students' successes, to enhance professional abilities of teachers, to ensure more efficiency and productivity in the use of sources and to enable more common use of technology in education. In order to actualize the mentioned purposes, Curriculum Laboratory School (CLS) was established at 208 primary school in 23 cities. School administration representative, representative teacher, representative of Chamber of Trade and Industry, student representatives, representatives of students' parents and non-governmental organization representatives are involved among the people participating in School Administration Development Teams in CLSs (Aydoğanoglu, 2003). The Ministry of Education decided to generalize this study beginning from 1999 due to its positive results.

Curriculum laboratory schools have been applied in primary schools connected to the Ministry of Education under the name of Planned School Development Model. These schools have been structured by depending on the total quality man-

agement and strategic planning approaches (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2005).

Another legal regulation important in view of both localization in education and providing parents' participation in administration is the Regulation of Educational Regions and Education Boards which was put into effect in 1999. Parents, mukhtars and representatives of non-governmental organizations are involved in "educational region counseling boards" in educational regions ("Kamuda esnek," 2010).

The most prominent legal regulation enabling the participation of parents in school administration in Turkey came into force in 2004 within the frame of article no 16 under the Basic Law of National Education numbered 1739 (Çamurcu, 2005). As it may be guessed, the so-called claim that democracy and participation shall be increased constitutes one of the basic reasons for this arrangement (Çamurcu, 2005; Yolcu, 2007).

Another arrangement which strengthens parents' participation in school administration within the context of localization in education in Turkey is the "Student-Parent-School Agreement" put into force with the notice no 92 by the Office of Research and Development in Education under the Ministry of Education on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005.

It is viewed that with the alteration made to the Regulation of Primary Education Institutions which arranges methods and principles regarding establishment, task and operation of public and private primary institutions linked to the Ministry of National Education on 02/05/2006, it was given way for parents to be charged with tasks and responsibilities in boards and commissions (Kartal, 2008).

Another prominent regulation enacted in the context of localization in education in Turkey is a new registry system projecting the registration of students to be registered at the first grade at primary school electronically on the internet medium in 2006-2007 education year (e-kayıt kılavuzu, 2009). According to the project named as e-registry, parents are able to have their students registered. With this application, it was demanded to prevent compulsory registry contributions received from parents during registry by school administrators. Furthermore, in this application, it was also aimed to prevent that behavior of parents in which they regard the school in their own neighborhood as

insufficient and have their children registered at another school in another district which they think more qualified and thus they send their children to that school and pay for the school bus (Yolcu, 2006).

Apart from these, the last regulation regarding this issue was enacted in the Regulation of Social Activities in Ministry of National Education Primary and Secondary Education Institutions on 02/03/2008.

In the related literature in Turkey, there are some studies by Usluel (1997), Atasayar (2005) and Taşçı (2008) dealing with the issue of localization in education. Usluel intended to suggest “the ideas of administrators in the central organization in the Ministry of Education”, Atasayar aimed at revealing “the ideas of administrators in the local organization in the Ministry of Education” and Taşçı determined to put forth “the local administrators’ and school administrators’ perceiving of themselves as ready regarding the localization in education”. Accordingly, no study has been found in the related literature which is directly associated with the participation of parents in school administration.

As a conclusion, while in the process of decentralization of education in Turkey, the way how school administrators of primary public schools perceive parents’ participation to the school administration, parents’ affect on the decisions taken in the school and the level of their participation to the school administration, the strengths which school administrators faced with in this process comprise the problem of this study.

In this study, by benefiting from the opinions of school administrators working at public primary schools in areas with various socio-economic levels (SEL), it has been aimed to reveal how these school administrators conceive of parents’ participation in administration. The research questions are given below:

For the school administrators who work in different SEL environment

1. What are the opinions of school administrators on the necessity of parents’ participation in school administration?
2. What are the opinions of school administrators at the level of parents’ participation in school administration?

3. What are the opinions of school administrators on the effects of parents participating in school administration on the decisions made?
4. What difficulties are experienced by school administrators in the process of parents’ participation in school administration?

### Method

This study which deals with the localization in education and strengthening the participation of parents in school administrations is a descriptive research. As it is known, descriptive studies are the ones aiming at examining the case as it is and determining the available situation (Karakaya, 2009).

### Work Group (Sample)

Intentional sampling method was used in the research. As it is known, in the purposeful sampling technique, the researcher uses his/her own reasoning in selecting the ones to be included in the research and uses the ones most convenient to the purpose of the research (Balci, 2004). In this direction, a work group was formed of school administrators working at schools each having a different SEL in the center of Kastamonu city. There are 22 public primary schools in total in Kastamonu city center. To decide the SEL of these schools, near schools were visited and far schools’ administrators were called by the phone. Four of these schools are located in areas with medium SEL and four in areas with higher SEL. Hence, remaining 14 schools represent lower SEL. Accordingly, school administrators at schools at medium and higher socio-economic levels were directly included in the work group. The number of school administrators working at schools at lower SEL was determined depending upon the decrease in variety of opinions of the administrators interviewed. Therefore, the number of school administrators at lower SEL was determined to be seven. Henceforth, 15 school administrators were involved in the research work group. 14 of the school administrators were male and 1 of them was female. School administrators have 18 years of professional seniority on average.

Table 1 gives information about the SEL of the school where administrators work, and their gender, branch, occupational seniority, level of education.

**Table 1.**  
*The SEL of the School Administrators' Schools, and Their Gender, Subject Teaching, Professional Seniority, Level of Education*

Sequence Number	The SEL of the School	Gender	Subject Teaching	Professional Seniority (Year)	Level of Education
A1	Lower	M	Religion and Ethics Teacher	5	Undergraduate
A2	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	15	Undergraduate
A3	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	15	Undergraduate
A4	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	25	Associate Degree
A8	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	35	Associate degree
A10	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	30	Associate degree
A12	Lower	M	Classroom Teacher	29	Undergraduate
A7	Medium	M	Turkish Language Teacher	22	Undergraduate
A11	Medium	M	Turkish Language Teacher	5	Postgraduate
A13	Medium	M	Turkish Philology Teacher	15	Undergraduate
A14	Medium	M	Classroom Teacher	11	Undergraduate
A5	Higher	M	Classroom Teacher	17	Undergraduate
A6	Higher	M	Classroom Teacher	16	Undergraduate
A9	Higher	F	Classroom Teacher	5	Undergraduate
A15	Higher	M	English Language Teacher	10	Undergraduate

### Data Gathering Tool

The data were gathered by using semi-structured interview technique in the research and a semi-structured interview form was developed for school administrators. The related literature was investigated during the preparation of questions in the interview form, and ideas and suggestions of the school administrators were referred to its application. The interview form prepared in the form of a draft as a result of these studies was presented to 10 experts in the same field for their ideas and suggestions as well. Within the direction of field experts' opinions and suggestions, "the content validity" of the semi-structured interview form was tried to be ensured. Moreover, a pre-interview was held with one school administrator with the aim of both determining whether the questions in the interview form could be understood, whether they had any problems in interpretation and answers and gaining experience.

### Data Gathering

The semi-structured interviews held with school administrators were fulfilled from 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010 to 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010 on the research permission dated 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010 from Kastamonu Provincial Directorate of National Education.

Interviews were held by appointment. The interviews held with school administrators in the research work group were tape-recorded. Coding was applied in order to keep identities of people interviewed. Thus, school administrators interviewed were coded as A1, A2... Except for Y6, all school administrators let the interview being recorded. Interviewer noted the interview which held with Y6. Table 1 show the information "Interview Code" about the school administrators who interviewed.

### Data Analysis

The interviews of the research lasted 288 minutes and 38 seconds. The logs of the interviews decoded by the researcher and transformed into 30 pages interview text. The data obtained from interviews were evaluated by using the descriptive data analysis which is a technique of qualitative data analysis methods. Descriptive analysis is the one where the data are presented by directly quoting the statements of people involved in the research by maintaining their originality (Kümbetoğlu, 2005). In this research, the data obtained from the interviews were first described systematically and clearly by paying attention to research questions, and interpreted afterwards, and some conclusions were tried to be deduced.

## Results

In this part of the study, opinions of school administrators working at primary schools in areas with various SEL have given.

### Opinions on the Necessity of Parents' Participation in School Administration

4 of the school administrators participating in the research thought that parents' participating in school administration is important. Moreover, there are some differences in the mentioned administrators' answers to the question; "Why should parents participate in school administration?" A1, A2, A3 and A10 thought that the participation of parents in school administration can cause positive effects on the operation of schools, and enable educational services to be more successful and facilitate solving the problems to occur about this issue. A1 stated that, "parents should certainly be included in the administration of schools and they would not be effective in solving problems without parents' existences"; A2 said that, "parents should know the structure and necessities of schools and view teachers' work"; A3 stated that "parents have their students educated here and parents' involvement in school operation would be difficult when they sent their children to school and administrators claimed to be the only responsible and authority avoiding any intervention by parents"; A10 mentioned that "parents' supporting the decisions made, would facilitate the application of these decisions".

The administrators who work at the lower SEL think different from the others about the necessity of participation of parents to school administration. While A4 stated that "actually, parents' participation in school administration is necessary", he added that "school administrators and teachers have some tasks and responsibilities to fulfill due to regulations and oppose to things demanded from themselves other than these". A8 expressed that they do not find parents' participation in school administration as a right action, parents do not have any education regarding this issue and therefore, they can make suggestions in the form of advice only. A12 stated that the thing required to be shown by parents should be limited to moral and material support.

All of the school administrators of medium SEL schools in the research work group thought the necessity of participation of parents to school administration. A7 thinks parents should participate

to the school administration in terms of "to ease the administration's workload" and A11 thinks in terms of "They are a new founded school and they have so many needs, so it is necessary to fulfill these needs". A13 thinks "the participation of parents to school administration is positive in terms of responding the needs and expectations of students" while A14 emphasized that the existence of parents in boards and commissions would ease the solving problems.

What do the administrators who work at schools in the higher SEL think about parents' participation to the school administration? One of these administrators, A5 said "It is a need of democracy and also the new curriculum requires this." A6 "expressed that they do not find parents' participation in school administration as a right action, parents do not have any education regarding this issue and therefore, they can make suggestions in the form of advice only," A9 pointed out that "parents should participate to school administration because it is useless to give an academic education without knowing parents' expectations" and A15 mentioned that "parents should participate to the school administration for the success of the students".

### Opinions on the Level of Parents' Participation in School Administration

As it is known, schools reflect the characteristics of the close neighborhood. Considering this fact, the fact that parents' education, culture and economic levels are low is the principal factor restricting their participation in school education as derived from the opinions of school administrators who work at schools at lower socio-economic levels (A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, and A12).

Another factor restricting parents' participation at schools at lower socio-economic level is the fact that some students come from Provincial Social Services and Child Protection Institution. For instance, the schools where A2 and A8 work have students from the mentioned institutions. It is concluded from the opinions of A7, A11, A13 and A14 working at schools at medium socio-economic level that parents' participation in school administration is higher than that of schools at lower socio-economic level. Furthermore, there are still some differences among the administrators mentioned in view of the issues focused on. For instance, A7 considered the participation of parents in school administration as sufficient; A11 thought their

existence in school-parent associations and class-parent gatherings is sufficient even if it is not in other boards and commissions. A13 stated that hosts owning houses around schools underlet their houses to people coming from nearby villages or to workers to avoid empty houses without any rent and it affects them negatively. According to A14, parents' participation in school-parent associations is improving day by day in their schools.

A6 working at a school at higher socio-economic level stated that his/her school is one of those receiving high level of participation by parents. A9 said that it is sufficient and parents support them. While A9 expressed that they do not have any problems about the participation of parents and that parents always give them more assistance than the demanded, A15 stated that parents spend most of their time at schools.

#### **Opinions on the Effect of Parents included in School Administration on Decisions**

It is concluded from the interviews held with A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, A10 and A12 working at schools with lower socio-economic levels that parents are not influential on the decisions and generally act under the influence of school administrators.

A11 working at a school at medium socio-economic level expressed that parents are involved in decisions from time to time, but they mostly focus on general things. A11 added, "For example, previously we provided parents' participation in the board of group teachers but nowadays we have stopped doing this"; the opinions of A13 on this issue, in a sense, complies with the opinions of A11. A13 stated that they allowed for the participation of families in some boards and commissions beforehand, but they gave up doing this as parents' statements were only restricted to what kind of difficulties they faced with or the nourishment of students, and thus, parents did not contribute much pedagogically. A14 said that parents express their ideas on the issues discussed but leave the decision on making process to administrators only.

It is observed that the statements of school administrators working at medium socio-economic level schools differ from those of school administrators at lower socio-economic level schools. Moreover, it is understood from the opinions of A5, A6, A9 and A15 working at higher socio-economic level schools that parents participation in these schools are relatively more influential on the decisions.

#### **Opinions on Difficulties Experienced**

While the school administrators A1 and A12 from the schools at lower socio-economic level stated that the main difficulty they face during the participation of parents in school administration is the financial difficulties and impossibilities, A2 explained that they do not face with any difficulty in this issue, in contrary, they are satisfied. A3 said that they discuss with the school-parent associations on where to spend money and convince them, benefit from their ideas and work in cooperation and thus they do not experience any significant difficulty. A4 stated that they do not have any difficulties, they are respectful to parents' opinions and they take decisions altogether. A8 and A10 are one of those administrators like others working at schools at lower socio-economic level who have not experienced any significant difficulties so far. While A8 thinks its reason to be his/her being transparent and clear, A10 thinks it is because he/she has worked at the same school for a long time and this fact avoids experiencing problems. Some opinions of administrators on this issue are given below:

One of the school administrators in the workgroup working at lower socio-economic level schools expressed that there is some difficulty in the participation of parents in school administrations at a sufficient level, it would have reduced the burden of all hard work of the administration and made their education area more technological if they could have participated; A11 said that some parents do not want to make financial contributions; A13 stated that parents want to create a sense of pressure on teachers; and A14 said that they have not experienced any difficulties. The opinions of school administrators at schools at medium socio-economic level are given below:

The fact that school administrators at higher socio-economic level schools also experience highly prominent problems like the administrators at schools at lower and medium socio-economic levels is observed. It may be said that the difficulty emerging at higher socio-economic level is the parents' personal demands becoming prominent increasingly. Some opinions of the school administrators working at schools at higher socio-economic level regarding this issue are given below.

It is observed that personal demands become more prominent than parents' participation for school administrators at higher socio-economic level schools in addition to those at lower and medium socio-economic levels

### Discussion

School administration is a tool used to reach educational purposes beforehand. Within this view, the school is expected to have a structure and operation to fulfill the expected purposes (Uysal et al., 2003). As Bursaloğlu (1999) states, it means that the close neighborhood affects schools in the direction of its own expectations. This kind of localization stipulates the participation of all sides in the decision-making process and interaction with each other (Şişman & Turan, 2003).

As it may be remembered, it was expressed that A4, A6, A8 and A12 do not consider parents' participation in school administration as right, since parents do not have any education on this area. It is understood that A4, A6, A8, A12 and all other administrators did not graduate from the departments related to education management. A4 has been a manager for 25 years; A6 has been a manager for 16 years, A8 for 35 years and A12 for 29 years. Excluding A6, it appears that the administrators with higher seniority do not support parents' participation in administration. This occasion may be explained with their adopting an authoritative management approach relying on the fear of losing their power rather than a democratic approach. This finding obtained in the research is similar to the findings of researches by Can (2004), Derqui, (2001), Lai-ngok (2004), Mkrtchyan and Tsaturyan (2008), and Pini and Cigliutti (1999).

Considering the findings above, is it possible to think that the school administrators who think parents' participation in school administration is necessary and has a more democratic management approach? The answer to be given to this question may be dealt within the context of neo-liberal policies beginning to be influential on the education politics in Turkey since 1990s. The studies conducted by Kavak, Ekinçi ve Gökçe (1997), Öztürk (2002), Akça (2002), Süzük (2002), Zoraloğlu, Şahin ve Fırat (2004) and Yolcu (2007) not only show the dimensions of the search for out-of-budget resources by primary schools in Turkey, they reveal the difficulties encountered by school administrators and teachers during this process, as well.

Considering the fact that the school administrators at schools at lower socio-economic level in the study work group experience more difficulties than those working at schools at medium and higher socio-economic levels in reaching the resources necessary for both compulsory management expenditure of schools and also to increase the educational quality, regarding the participation

of parents in school administration as the solution coincides with the findings of Özdem (2007) and Polat (2007).

Bursaloğlu (1999) stated that some regard the issue of participation as a magic formula to solve all problems and some as taking over the power. Some people, different from these views, tend to use the participation as a game of administration. These people state that they want to see the participation as the instruments which can tell and do what is demanded. According to Van Zanten (2002), public schools are the unique places where parents from varying socio-economic levels are forced to interact with each other in addition to being the places playing the principal role in social re-creation and social mobility. In such an occasion, whereas the parents at lower socio-economic level tend to absent themselves from this area, parents at medium and higher socio-economic levels develop strategies to colonize public schools. As Bursaloğlu (1999) states, it means that the close neighborhood affects schools in the direction of its own expectations. By participating more in school administration than parents at medium and lower socio-economic levels, parents at higher socio-economic levels change the educational quality of these schools in the direction they demand. Accordingly, it has been revealed with the help of this finding in the research that in Turkey there are some arrangements aimed at increasing the participation of parents in school administration and that the participation level of parents at higher socio-economic level in school administration is higher than the levels of families at medium and lower socio-economic levels. This finding complies with the findings of the researches by Yolcu (2007), Duru-Bellat (2000) and Nukkuwana (2008).

The fact that parents' participation in school administration does not cause school administrators to face with any significant difficulty during this process is concluded from the interviews stated above which were held with the school administrators working at lower socio-economic level schools. Moreover, it may be said that the main difficulty in this issue is the insufficiency of families in financial means. This finding coincides with the research findings of Yolcu (2007).

It was previously emphasized that the parents at medium and higher socio-economic levels participate in school administration more when the schools at lower socio-economic level are excluded. It is understood that this situation creates a kind of pressure on the school administrators work-

ing at medium and higher socio-economic level schools and compels them to be clearer and more transparent. Furthermore, it is comprehended that the process experienced requires more developed abilities of communication and persuasion in administrators.

Considering the findings of the study, it is possible to give some suggestions. First of all, it would be a more appropriate approach for the state to make new arrangements to eliminate the problems of public schools in this field rather than retreating itself from presenting educational services. Accordingly, the cost of a primary school student to the state should be determined and considering this cost, each school should be allocated according to their student number. This allocation can be increased or decreased when properties like the development level of the city where the school located and immediate surroundings of the school are taken into account. Moreover, a different study may be conducted which will deal with the opinions of the heads of school-parent associations, teachers and parents on strengthening the participation of parents in school administration, and the difficulties experienced.

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