

Gender in secondary education: Experiences in Turkey Overview¹

Ceren Isat, Policy Coordinator, Social Development and Gender Equality Center (SOGEP), Turkey

According to the Ministry of National Education's 'Regulation on Schoolbooks and Education Tools', discrimination on all grounds including gender is forbidden in education materials. Article 5/a-3 of that Regulation indicates that education materials "do not have contradictions to human rights. They do not include discrimination on the bases of gender, race, religion, language, colour, political thought, philosophical belief, persuasion and etc.". However, when it comes to implementation, it cannot be said that there is no discrimination on the bases of gender in the textbooks.

An important research on gender discrimination in Turkish schoolbooks conducted by Dr. Firdevs Gümüšoğlu (*Ders Kitaplarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Çev Yayınları, 2006*) shows that there are lots of discriminative components within those materials. This research also shows the historical changes about presented gender roles in education materials. According to the data of that research it is clear that during the first decades of establishment of the Turkish Republic, equality between women and men was highlighted in schoolbooks via images and stories since equality between sexes was a fundamental principle of the new Turkish Republic (*See pictures 1, 2 and 3 in the Annex*). However, after 1950s, when Turkey adopted a multiparty system, the textbooks started to represent women by their traditional gender roles mostly as mothers rather than free and equal women. For example, in the textbooks published before 1950s, we can see images of women who read or take care of their children together with their husbands. After 1950s, textbooks started to present women mostly in the kitchen doing their traditional gender roles. This situation is not only valid for pictures and images but also for the mathematic problems those link men with the usage of Money and women with the household tasks (*See pictures 4, 5 and 6 in the Annex*).

With the candidacy of Turkey to the European Union, the Ministry of National Education started to revise the curriculum. Improvements in the field of human rights and changes in the structure of Turkish family counted within the reasons that made the revision of curriculum a necessity. Thus, 'respect for human rights' and 'gender equality' are targets of revision of curriculum. To reach those aims, the Ministry of National Education started to examine textbooks and to expurgate images and expressions, which causes discrimination on the grounds of gender, call for violence and present women as second class people. In this process, the Ministry cooperates with Directorate General on Status of Women.

In 2004, at the second meeting of the revision process of the curricula, the Ministry of National education indicated that it was necessary to include the terms 'gender' and 'inequality' in the curriculum and include relevant activities within the content of textbooks.

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*“Equal at School – Equal in Life” is an initiative under the European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation
"All Different, All Equal": <http://alldifferent-allegal.info/>*

The Ministry also asked for views of non-governmental organisations and unions of teachers. However, the work done by Ministry and Directorate General is not enough. A new research conducted by Dr. Hasan Arslan from University of Kocaeli (Gender Discrimination in Textbooks, University of Kocaeli) shows that there are still a lot of images and expressions in schoolbooks used for the academic year 2005-2006 that presents women as the ones who do household tasks within the private sphere and men as the ones who do economic, political and social activities within public sphere.

ANNEX

During the first decades of establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, equality between women and men was highlighted in schoolbooks via images and stories since equality between sexes was a fundamental principle of the new Turkish Republic.

The images in pictures 1, 2 and 3 are from the 1930s and 1940s and give a clear idea of how gender equality was underlined in the textbooks during that period.



Picture 1: An image from a textbook from 1943 showing equal roles in a game.



Picture 2: An image from a textbook from 1937 showing a girl and a boy playing together.



Picture 3: An image from the Reading Book for the second grade from 1939 showing a father playing with his boy while the mother is reading a book.

After 1955, when Turkey adopted a multiparty system, the textbooks started to represent women by their traditional gender roles rather than free and equal women. Pictures 4, 5 and 6 are from that period and are a good example how education was influenced by the change in the political values.



Picture 4: An image representing a woman cooking, 1964.



Picture 5: An image representing future professions for boys and girls from 1963.



Picture 6: An image from the textbook in Turkish from 1999-2000 showing a woman while performing her traditional gender tasks as a mother.

Sources:

The images are taken from the survey *Gümüšoğlu, Firdevs, Ders Kitaplarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet, [Gender in Textbooks], 2006, published by ÇEV).*

Some expressions are taken from the article written by Tezer Asan and published in *Amargi Feminist Journal*, June 2007.