

Public Education in Turkey Between the 1960 and 1980 Coups: Reflections in Cumhuriyet Newspaper

Lecture Doctor Burcu Çalığıuşu Aykanat

Anadolu University Faculty of Letters, Department of History Eskişehir Turkey

Email: bcalikusu@anadolu.edu.tr

Abstract

Until the Industrial Revolution, literacy was a privilege monopolized by a elite; however, alongside changing socio-economic conditions, it transformed into a necessity for the general public. In Turkey, public education initiatives were initiated during the late Ottoman period, spanning through the Second Constitutional Era and into the Republican era. Following the 1928 Alphabet Reform under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, literacy campaigns and vocational courses were launched to foster individual and societal development. Although interest in these programs waned during World War II, the political turning point of 1960 placed public education back on the national agenda. Following the overthrow of the Democrat Party government, the National Unity Committee initiated widespread educational activities, aiming to expand adult literacy campaigns and vocational training nationwide. This study examines the reflections of public education policies in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper between 1960 and 1980. By analyzing two decades of *Cumhuriyet* archives, this research traces the period's institutional expectations, operational challenges, and proposed policy solutions regarding public education. Archival documents from the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey and official government programs established between 1960 and 1980 constitute the primary sources of the investigation. Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach, employing historical analysis and document analysis techniques to evaluate how public education was conceptualized and debated in the post-1960 era.

Keywords: Public Education, *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, Adult Literacy, Educational Policy, Turkish Political History (1960–1980).

Introduction

A century ago, in a book published in the United States, the author asserted that "whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings." This endeavor is conceptualized as adult education or public education (Lindeman, 1926). Public education is a structured, systematic, and organized educational undertaking directed at adults and individuals outside the formal school system. It is variously designated as mass education, adult education, fundamental education, social education, and non-formal education. The populace targeted by public education comprises individuals with heterogeneous characteristics and attributes regarding age, schooling background, educational level, motivation to learn, and gender. The public educator engages with a broad demographic encompassing peasants, urban dwellers, laborers,

employers, farmers, students, artisans, tradesmen, homemakers, and self-employed professionals (Geray, 1978).

The essential components of public education involve establishing a participant-educator framework—or, alternatively, a student-instructor relationship—and conducting these activities in a systematic manner to cultivate the capabilities, behaviors, and conduct of adults who are not enrolled in school but hold or are eligible to assume societal responsibilities, as well as pre-school children and school-aged individuals who remain outside the formal education system (Geray, 1978).

Public education is charged with assisting individuals in developing their inherent capabilities. One of its paramount duties is to provide fundamental education to those who have been deprived of formal schooling. Public education can first assist individuals in recognizing and understanding their educational needs. It can impart functional knowledge conducive to solving personal problems. Here, the primary objective is to help the individual more effectively fulfill their responsibilities toward their family, dependents, and the society in which they reside (Geray, 1978).

In the new world order established following World War II, the United Nations and its affiliated agencies were reshaping the global landscape across numerous spheres. Education constituted one of these key domains. The subject of education had been extensively addressed in meetings convened by UNESCO since the early 1950s. Grounded in the proceedings of these conventions, the organization maintained that the global literacy rate ought to be elevated and consequently initiated various endeavors to achieve this end. Literacy was not viewed merely as an educational concern; it was equally evaluated as an economic and social issue. A resolution was adopted ensuring that nations would be supported not only through their domestic resources but also via funding provided by international organizations (Yüzbaşıoğulları, 1966).

Public education or adult education is construed as an investment in human capital. Lifelong learning encompasses mass education, including self-directed education, formal education, on-the-job training, classroom instruction, specialized training courses, and seminars. Lifelong learning carries vital importance in adapting to changing economic conditions and demands. Furthermore, the participation rate in adult/public education is high in developed countries. Today, participation in public education across OECD countries reaches nearly 60%, which concurrently serves to mitigate social inequality (Kul Gelal, 2025).

This study focuses on the implementation of the concept of public education—or adult education—in Turkey between 1960 and 1980. The scope of the study comprises the execution between 1960 and 1980 of the public education concept, which had been practiced since the late Ottoman period and found application in institutions such as the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocağı*), Nation Schools (*Millet Mektepleri*), and Community Centers (*Halkevi*) in the Republic of Turkey founded under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In previous studies on public education in Turkey, the topic was addressed primarily from a theoretical standpoint and through statistical data. Differing from existing literature, this study examines the reflections on public education in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, one of the high-circulation daily newspapers of the era in Turkey. Newspapers constitute contemporary primary sources that reflect the period (Deveci, 2005). Within this scope, answers will be sought to questions regarding the public education initiatives launched in the 1960s, the methods used to reach the target audience—the general public—and how these efforts resonated within society. This study possesses originality

in that the concept of public education has not previously been examined through the lens of a daily newspaper.

The articles and news reports published in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper constitute the primary source material of this study. Additionally, the Official Gazette (*Resmî Gazete*), in which laws and regulations are promulgated, serves as one of the consulted sources. Archival documents retrieved from the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey and the government programs established between 1960 and 1980 are also among the source materials utilized. Furthermore, scholarly books and articles concerning public education have been incorporated into the research.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, drawing upon historical analysis and document analysis techniques. The foundation of the research rests upon news items, articles, and archival documents published in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, as well as secondary literature comprising books and articles written on public education.

1. Public Education from the 1960 Coup to the 1980 Coup

1.1. Public Education Up to 1960

The Ottoman Empire experienced profound transformations during the nineteenth century. In contrast to previous centuries, educational activities were expanded within the sphere of education. Alongside the opening of new educational levels for girls, schooling rates increased across the entire country (Kurnaz, 1992). Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908, public education emerged on the national agenda. Promoted through the press, public education initiatives were supported by political parties, associations, and schools through the organization of lectures and training courses (Tekerek, 2021, p. 310). These courses encompassed programs in literacy, foreign languages, bank clerkship, and commercial bookkeeping (Ergin, 1977).

Public education endeavors persisted during the Republic of Turkey era, founded under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Even amidst the active warfare of the National Struggle (*Millî Mücadele*) years, educational conventions were convened. Following the declaration of the Republic, "Guidance Committees" (*İrşad Heyetleri*) were established to enlighten the populace and disseminate republican values to the public. These committees continued their operations until the Alphabet Reform proclaimed in 1928 (Akyüz, 1985). The Alphabet Reform, which had been among Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's vision for the future during the National Struggle years, was enacted into law by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) on November 1, 1928. Although debates surrounding the Alphabet Reform had surfaced during the İzmir Economic Congress, no conclusive result had been reached at that time (Sarıkoyuncu Değerli, 2008). In the first national census conducted after the proclamation of the Republic, the literacy rate stood at 8.1 percent, broken down into 12.9 percent for men and 3.6 percent for women (Cumhuriyetin İlk Sayımı, 2023). To familiarize the public with the new alphabet and teach literacy, Nation Schools (*Millet Mektepleri*) were established. Male and female citizens aged between 16 and 45 attended these schools. Held in the evenings, the instruction spanned four months. Comprising both stationary and mobile units, these schools featured two tracks: Class A focused on basic literacy, whereas Class B covered reading comprehension, writing, arithmetic, measures, hygiene, and civics. Graduates of these schools were presented with a copy of the Constitution as a gift from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Akyüz, 1985).

Among the institutions serving public education were the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*). Established during the Ottoman period, the Turkish Hearths was an organization that made significant cultural contributions during the Republican era as well. This institution resolved to dissolve itself in 1931. In 1932, the Community Centers (*Halkevleri*) were established. It is known that the Community Centers were shaped as a result of research conducted in Europe. The fundamental mission of this institution, which had similar counterparts in countries such as Sweden, Czechoslovakia, and Italy, was the education and cultivation of the populace. The Community Centers aimed to rear a cultured and educated generation alongside intellectuals and cultural figures, while instilling state principles and republican reforms in the public. The Community Centers comprised nine branches, including literature, history, sports, museums, and village development (*köycülük*). The rural branches of this institution, which sought to elevate the cultural and educational level of the public, were designated as Community Rooms (*halkodaları*). Although Community Rooms were opened in rural areas, it was imperative to prioritize literacy activities, as the literacy rate in rural areas was considerably lower than in urban centers. To this end, Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) were established. By offering village children both academic (*kültür*) and vocational courses, they were expected to enlighten the populace in their respective villages (Bayındır Uluskan, 2010).

The revolution in the fields of education and culture initiated during the early years of the Republic drew to a close by the 1950s. In Turkey, which transitioned to a multi-party political system following World War II, the Democrat Party came to power in 1950. One of the initial actions of the Democrat Party was to shut down the institutions established by the Republican People's Party, which had governed the country for 27 years. The Community Centers were closed in 1951, and the Village Institutes were dissolved in 1954. This outcome constituted a political maneuver resulting from partisan rivalry.

The party program of the Democrat Party included principles such as the unification of education and instruction (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*), the dissemination of vocational and technical education, the autonomy of universities, and the establishment of museums, libraries, theaters, and conservatories. However, only a fraction of these commitments outlined in the party platform found expression in the program of the government formed under the premiership of Adnan Menderes. The program of the First Menderes Government emphasized national and moral education. Meanwhile, the program of the second government formed by Menderes stated that technical schools would be prioritized, village schools would be constructed in the Eastern regions, and a university would be established. The programs of the remaining three governments formed by Adnan Menderes contained no explicit objectives regarding education (Albayrak, 2004).

The educational policy of the DP, which incorporated sparse details concerning education, pursued a destructive stance toward the educational and cultural institutions established during the CHP era. Initially, a law expropriating a major portion of the property under the control of the CHP was enacted by the TGNA in 1951 (Ahmad & Turgay Ahmad, 2020). Through this legislation, the Community Centers and Community Rooms, which possessed numerous buildings nationwide, were closed down, and their real estate was transferred to the state treasury. Although Celal Bayar had asserted during his years in the opposition that the Community Centers were vital institutions that ought to be preserved, he ratified the decision taken by the Adnan Menderes government upon assuming the presidency (Albayrak, 2004). Another decision taken during DP rule—and one that remains contested to this day—was the closure of the Village Institutes. Founded during the tenure of Minister of National Education Hasan Âli Yücel amidst the World War II years, this educational institution served as a model

for numerous countries across the globe. Thanks to these institutes, which educated village youth and sent them back to serve in rural areas, the number of teachers and schooling rates increased rapidly in a short span of time. However, in the geopolitical conjuncture that emerged following World War II, as Turkey positioned itself within the Western Bloc, the Village Institutes were accused of being hotbeds of communism. Consequently, in 1954, the Village Institutes were converted into primary school teacher training institutions (*ilköğretmen okulları*) (Bora, 2021; Ahmad & Turgay Ahmad, 2021).

Examining the public education policies of the DP, an Inter-Ministerial Commission for Fundamental Education and Public Education was established in 1951. This commission revised the public education curriculum and instituted new organizational bodies. Furthermore, it recommended fostering cooperation with UNESCO and inviting an expert from the United States to Turkey to conduct studies on public education. During the 6th National Education Council (*Milli Eğitim Şurası*), convened under the DP administration, resolutions were adopted to elevate the literacy rate, ensure national unity, advance the principle of public service, impart knowledge regarding domestic and international tourism, and enhance public education (Tekerek, 2021).

Although the Community Centers were closed down during the DP era, the public education courses initiated with the Nation Schools persisted. Following the mid-1950s, literacy courses began to attract greater interest compared to previous years. In the 1951–1952 academic year, the number of courses stood at approximately two hundred, with the number of trainees around two thousand. By the 1957–1958 academic year, the number of courses approached two thousand, while the number of trainees neared ten thousand. Within the framework of public education, vocational courses such as tailoring and sewing, blacksmithing, carpentry, Quranic studies, commerce, state monopoly (*tekeli*) trade, as well as construction and forestry courses were actively operating (*Milli Eğitim Hareketleri (1927-1966)*, 1967).

During the DP era, Turkish teachers were also dispatched to Cyprus. In the 1950s, Cypriots residing in Cyprus—which was then under British sovereignty—aspired for their children to learn Turkish and appealed to the Republic of Turkey, requesting that teachers be assigned to the island. Responding favorably to this petition, Turkey sent a contingent of volunteer teachers to Cyprus. Following the deployment of secondary and high school teachers, educators were also dispatched from Turkey to staff public education centers (BCA 37380-150271-256). In 1954, the education commission operating in Cyprus, rather than applying directly to the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey, sought teachers by placing advertisements in newspapers. This approach drew backlash in the *Halkın Sesi* newspaper published in Cyprus. Fazıl Küçük—who would subsequently lead the struggle for Cypriot independence and serve as Vice President—insisted that teachers ought to be requested directly from the Turkish Ministry of National Education instead of relying on newspaper advertisements. Expressing that classes were left unattended due to the shortage of teaching personnel, Küçük underscored that Cypriot children should not be deprived of their right to education. This situation was communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Cyprus (BCA-37380-150271-26). This appeal from the Cypriots did not go unanswered; teachers from Turkey were duly dispatched to secondary education institutions and public education centers providing instruction in Cyprus (BCA-30.18.01.151.70.13).

1.2. Public Education Initiatives of the National Unity Committee

The coup of May 27, 1960, marked a critical rupture in Turkish political life and democracy. The DP administration was forcibly removed from power by a military junta. Calling itself the National Unity Committee (*Milli Birlik Komitesi*—MBK) and headed by General Cemal Gürsel, this entity governed the country until the parliamentary general elections held on October 15, 1961. Although governance was relinquished to civilian politicians in 1961, the shadow of the military was felt across all spheres for the subsequent two decades.

The military junta that staged the 1960 coup harbored strong opposition to the political stance and practices of the DP administration as it ousted them from power. Consequently, the MBK drafted a comprehensive program. In this program, new policies were formulated across a multitude of domains, including the country's political, economic, cultural, educational, healthcare, and legal spheres. One of these key areas was education. Within the realm of education, the objective was to meet the country's needs in accordance with the requirements of the contemporary world and to prepare students for life. The primary goal of education, however, was to launch public education initiatives and a national literacy campaign. Additionally, the mobilization strategy entailed assigning university graduates and those fulfilling their military service as reserve officers to the national education campaign, alongside inviting intellectuals to serve this educational mobilization. Beyond these measures, efforts were to be undertaken to foster development and progress across all other levels of education (Official Gazette, September 16, 1960).

The National Unity Committee demonstrated sensitivity regarding public participation in state governance. Prior to submitting the 1961 Constitution to a popular referendum, the committee initiated efforts to educate the public on constitutional matters. In line with this objective, the Commission for the Dissemination and Promotion of the Revolution issued a declaration. According to this statement, the Directorate of Press and Information was slated to broadcast a 15-minute radio program entitled "Constitution Hour" (*Anayasa Saati*) to introduce the constitution to the public, and daily newspapers were to be urged to publish articles concerning the constitution. The Ministry of the Interior was tasked with preparing pamphlets, banners, and placards about the constitution. Furthermore, it was requested that speakers be dispatched to villages to introduce the constitution and that universities support this process (BCA-30.01.33.198.3). The practice of sending teachers to Cyprus, which had commenced during the DP era, persisted under the MBK administration as well. Teachers were dispatched to the Cyprus Public Education Center and the Turkish Experimental School (*Türk Deneme Okulu*) (BCA-30.18.01.02.157.32.20).

The 1961 elections, in which the military relinquished power to civilians, also initiated the period of coalition governments for the first time in Turkey. As a result of the 1961 elections, while the CHP emerged as the leading party, the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*—AP) and the New Turkey Party (*Yeni Türkiye Partisi*—YTP), both successors to the DP, along with the Republican Villagers Nation Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*—CKMP), which appealed to the DP's electoral base, secured seats in parliament. However, no single party commanded a majority to form a government independently. Consequently, the era of coalition governments commenced in Turkey for the first time. The first coalition government was established between the CHP and the AP. This coalition government proved short-lived and dissolved after approximately seven months. Subsequently, the CHP formed another coalition government with the YTP and the CKMP. However, the loss of votes suffered by the coalition partners, YTP and CKMP, in the local elections fostered the perception that the party grassroots

disapproved of this coalition, leading to its dissolution. The final government led by CHP Chairman İsmet İnönü was a minority government. Established in 1963 with external parliamentary support, this government drew to a close in the early months of 1965. Suat Hayri Ürgüplü'nün prime-ministerial coalition government steered Turkey toward the 1965 elections. As a result of the parliamentary general elections held on October 10, 1965, the AP emerged as the leading party. Claiming the legacy of the DP, the AP gained public endorsement and achieved single-party rule. The AP's governance continued until the 1969 elections. The winner of the 1969 elections was once again the AP, which remained in power until the 1971 Military Memorandum.

Following the 1960 coup, as politics was being restructured, the indirect approval of the military was invariably sought. The memorandum delivered on March 12, 1971, to the government led by Süleyman Demirel signaled the military's discontent with the nation's governance, warning that should the requisite measures fail to be taken, the armed forces would seize control of the administration. In evaluating this period, the broader prevailing atmosphere in Turkey must be taken into account. The relative climate of freedom afforded by the 1961 Constitution, coupled with the emerging era of détente in a multipolar world, had carved out a viable space for left-wing ideology in Turkey. In the 1965 elections, the socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*—TİP) entered parliament; workers who had secured the right to strike organized demonstrations, while students, divided into ideological camps, engaged in protests. The emergence of right-leaning groups opposing the left-wing ideology and the ensuing confrontation between these two factions ushered in an era of social chaos. Indeed, the wave of protests that erupted in France in 1968 and swept across the globe persisted in Turkey until 1980. Amidst this chaotic environment, following the 1971 memorandum, the country was governed for two years by technocratic governments. Governance was subsequently restored to politicians through the 1973 elections. Although the CHP and the AP captured the vast majority of votes in the elections held in 1973 and 1977, neither succeeded in attaining single-party power. The coalition governments established during this period proved short-lived; seven different governments were formed in the seven-year span between 1973 and 1980. Social polarization and turmoil constituted the underlying causes of this political instability (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014).

In a period marked by social polarization—most notably manifest in the right-left conflict—governments are observed to have incorporated public education into their official programs. Particularly in the governments formed after 1961, public education policy emerged as a central topic of focus, whereas by the 1970s, the national literacy campaign—a persistent issue articulated since the proclamation of the Republic yet remaining unresolved—came to the fore.

The program of the First Coalition Government, established in 1961 through the CHP-AP alliance, stipulated that national education pursued a developmental objective. Investments channeled into education were anticipated to yield economic and social returns aligned with national development. While primary education constituted the principal target of the educational agenda, emphasis was scheduled to be placed on public education to rapidly train adults and children remaining outside the formal schooling system. Agricultural, handicraft, vocational, and technical training courses, alongside literacy programs, were to be accelerated. Within the framework of cultural and artistic policies, efforts were aimed at ensuring that proposed activities encompassed all strata of society (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

The Second Coalition Government was established among the CHP, the YTP, and the CKMP. An examination of the Government Program reveals that public education was brought to the

forefront. The program explicitly affirmed: "Our objective is to train our citizens of all ages at a superior level in accordance with their aptitudes and capabilities within equal educational opportunities; to transform them into good, productive citizens beneficial to our nation and humanity; and to prepare the human power of various qualifications required for the execution of social and economic development programs." Here, emphasis was placed on the continuation of public education and the support of economic development—which had evolved into a state policy during the 1960s—through education. Among the government's targets were providing access to schooling for all school-aged children within eight years, while offering programs tailored to the economic and social characteristics of the local environment, such as agriculture and handicrafts—primarily literacy courses—for out-of-school children and adults (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

The Third Coalition Government was established in 1963 as a minority government. Holding the distinction of being the first minority government in Republican history, this administration was supported externally by minor political parties. Although it was stated in this government's program that the necessary personnel for education would be trained within the framework of the development plan and that emphasis would be placed on vocational and technical education, there was no statement directly referencing public education. Similarly, the program of the Suat Hayri Ürgüplü government, which was established in 1965 and steered Turkey toward the 1965 parliamentary general elections, made no reference to public education (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

As a result of the 1965 parliamentary general elections, the AP, led by Süleyman Demirel, emerged as the leading party. Possessing the capacity to form a government independently, the AP governed the country as a single-party administration until 1969. In the AP government program, emphasis was placed on education, as was the case with numerous other domains. The program affirmed that they would not "neglect" elevating the literacy rate and adult education. It is observed that the program predominantly focused on university education. Furthermore, the objectives concerning the public education institution—which had been affiliated with the Ministry of Village Affairs in 1964—were included in the section regarding policies for villages and peasantry. With the aim of community development, imparting production-enhancing skills and knowledge to the public, and utilizing spare time and labor, it was planned to establish continuous and mobile village handicraft courses and to attribute the necessary importance to public education (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

The AP emerged once again as the leading party from the 1969 parliamentary general elections. Securing a significant majority of the votes, the AP remained in office until the March 12, 1971 Military Memorandum¹. An examination of the program of the government formed in 1969 demonstrates that education was incorporated into its agenda. The objectives included extending mobile courses for women across a wide geography of the country, ensuring equality of opportunity in education, implementing an "education for all" policy, and bridging the standard disparities between schools through distance education methods (*mektupla eğitim-öğretim*) (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

Following a ten-year interval, Turkey faced military intervention in politics once again in 1971. Subsequent to the memorandum delivered to the government on March 12, 1971, by the Chief

¹ Two governments were formed by the AP between 1969 and 1971. The First Government served until November 3, 1969, and prepared the program cited above. The second government held office from March 6, 1970, to March 12, 1971. This government program made no reference to public education.

of the General Staff and force commanders, the AP government under the leadership of Demirel resigned. Between 1971 and 1973, the country was governed by administrations formed by Nihat Erim, Ferit Melen, and Naim Talu. Established during an extraordinary period, these governments incorporated public education into their programs alongside affirming allegiance to Atatürk's principles and reforms. The government programs included provisions for expanding access to education and conducting the necessary endeavors to utilize television and radio in public education and cultural development (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

Following the 1973 parliamentary general elections, politicians resumed their positions in the national administration. However, as a consequence of societal polarization, stable governments could not be established. During this period, three governments were formed under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit (CHP) and three under Süleyman Demirel (AP).² The CHP established a coalition government with the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*—MSP) and a minority government with the support of a group of deputies in parliament. The AP, on the other hand, participated three times in National Front (*Milliyetçi Cephe*) Governments alongside right-wing ideological parties represented in Parliament (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

The first CHP government under the premiership of Bülent Ecevit was formed in coalition with the MSP, led by Necmettin Erbakan. Positioned at opposite ends of the political spectrum ideologically, this government's program reflected an ideological synthesis of the two parties. Furthermore, this administration allocated considerable scope to public education. Non-formal/public education was to be implemented within the framework of needs and available resources. Individuals outside the formal education system were to participate in training programs centered on literacy and vocational skill acquisition. The objective of this education was the provision of a qualified workforce and the realization of continuity in education. On the other hand, television was to be utilized as an educational medium, and necessary endeavors were to be undertaken to facilitate higher education via distance learning (*mektupla yüksek öğrenim*). The Second Ecevit Government, formed under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, remained in office for a brief span of approximately one month. Although the projected government program could not be executed, it nevertheless targeted equality, ubiquity, and continuity in education, the resolution of the literacy problem through educated citizens, and the deployment of contemporary technology such as higher education by correspondence. The final government established by Bülent Ecevit in the 1970s served between January 1978 and November 1979. In the educational section of its government program, the Third Ecevit Government included explicit provisions affirming that political polarization—which constituted the root cause of social unrest—would be prevented, while personal safety and freedom of education and instruction would be guaranteed (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

The First National Front (*Milliyetçi Cephe*) Government, established under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel, served between March 1975 and June 1977. The Second National Front Government held office between 1977 and 1978. In the programs of both governments, commitments were included regarding the grounding of education in national and religious sentiments, alongside promises concerning Prayer and Preacher schools (*İmam-Hatip*) and higher education. It was affirmed that radio, television, and educational laboratories would be utilized in instruction. The final government prior to the 1980 Coup served between November 12, 1979, and September 12, 1980. As was the case in the final Ecevit government, the reflection

² A technocratic government was formed by Naim Talu between April 15, 1973, and January 26, 1974. No reference was made to public education in this government's program.

of social unrest on education was addressed in this government's program. It was asserted that education would be safeguarded from ideological influences. Although no direct reference was made to public education, the utilization of radio and television in education was explicitly highlighted (Hükümetler ve Programları, 1988).

2. The Concept of Public Education in *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper

The perpetrators of the May 27 coup, while politically eliminating the DP administration, acted with the intention of establishing a new order in the country. This new order was not confined merely to politics. Archaic institutions and structures where functionality had stalled were restructured by the military alongside the civilians acting in alignment with them. In the immediate aftermath of the 1960 coup, action was taken to initiate national empowerment, economic development, land reform, and modifications in national education. Among the subjects addressed, public education constituted a prominent concern.

An examination of the coverage in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper following 1960 reveals that a major portion of the articles concerning Public Education and Public Education Centers made reference to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his educational reforms. The Alphabet Reform, the establishment of Community Centers (*Halkevleri*) and Community Rooms (*Halkodaları*), and his pronouncements on education comprised a significant part of these writings. According to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, advancing in the field of education constituted the nation's sole salvation. In 1960s Turkey, where 60 percent of the population was illiterate, a public education mobilization stood among the foremost essential requirements (*Cumhuriyet*, February 1, 1961).

Defining public education in the newspaper, İlhan Selçuk conceptualizes it as any initiative undertaken to educate citizens of all ages who fall outside formal school education. In 1963, one million children were deprived of schooling. Public education was primarily necessary to elevate the living standards of the populace and to enable the effective utilization of the public's potential power. Public education was not merely confined to teaching the alphabet. Believing that avoiding abstract knowledge in public education enhanced the rate of success, Selçuk maintained that practical education would yield lasting results. Successful outcomes could be attained through collaborative endeavors between the public and public servants, particularly educators. Public education ought to have commenced with the villages and villagers who constituted more than half of the population (*Cumhuriyet*, March 14, 1963).

Although initiatives aimed at public education emerged with great enthusiasm during the initial years of the 1960s, commentators cautioned that past endeavors had gradually faded over time. Osman Akol notes that one of the preliminary steps toward public education materialized during the Second Constitutional Era with the enactment of the Provisional Law on Primary Education (*Tedrisat-ı İptidaiye Kanun-ı Muvakkatı*). Under this provisional law, provision was made for opening schools to teach minor handicrafts and manual skills to children completing the third grade of primary school, alongside supplementary completion courses for men and women who remained outside formal educational tiers. A portion of these courses was designed to review primary school curricula, whereas others were to focus on commerce, agriculture, or crafts according to the regional characteristics of the school's location. However, this legislation could not be implemented. Had it been executed, this law enacted in 1913 possessed the potential to resolve the nation's educational problem within approximately fifty years. During the National Struggle years and following the proclamation of the Republic, endeavors—spearheaded by the Alphabet Reform under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—were undertaken to elevate the public's educational level. Akol asserts that despite the efforts undertaken since the early

nineteenth century and the reform measures initiated over the preceding half-century, the nation was confronted in the 1960s with a populace living under "medieval" conditions, demonstrating that Turkey remained at a considerable distance from the level of contemporary civilization. Furthermore, he emphasized that unless stability was secured in the newly launched initiatives, no tangible yields could be attained, as had been the case in historical precedents (Cumhuriyet, January 19, 1961).

During the initial phase of its establishment, the Public Education Center required 116 personnel at the central organization and 2,890 in the districts. Of these positions, 1,352 were to be recruited from Technical Education, whereas 1,654 were to be covered through newly recruited personnel. Personnel affiliated with the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Health, Agriculture, Labor, Industry, Reconstruction and Resettlement, alongside Press, Publication, and Tourism, were to be assigned. The organization stood in need of an appropriation of approximately twenty million Turkish liras. Excluding the civil servants assigned to the organization, the Central Public Education Advisory and Cooperation Board was constituted with members to be delegated by universities, official and private institutions, associations, and organizations. In sub-districts (*bucak*) and villages, this body was designated as the Community Development Board (Cumhuriyet, January 26, 1961).

One of the centers operating within this framework was the Bağlarbaşı Public Education Lecture Hall (*Bağlarbaşı Halk Eğitim Dershanesi*). Operating within the premises of Bağlarbaşı Primary School, the center had been established in 1955 during the DP era. Following its restructuring in 1961, alongside literacy programs, courses in English, accounting, traffic safety, and primary school completion were inaugurated. In 1961, application numbers for these programs stood at 120 for English/language, 28 for accounting, 70 for traffic safety, and 27 for literacy. The director of the Bağlarbaşı Primary School/Public Education Center, Nurettin Sezerkant, had traveled to the United States in 1947 to conduct investigations in the field of public education, remaining there for 18 months. According to Sezerkant, public education was not merely literacy instruction; rather, it was "an educational system encompassing all modes of instruction, ranging from the peasant's grip on the hoe to the scholar's acquisition of unknown knowledge." As part of the activities conducted at the Bağlarbaşı Public Education Center, an exhibition was mounted. A photograph taken in the United States was displayed at this exhibition, depicting retirees working in a carpentry workshop in Florida to utilize their spare time and supplement their economic situation. Another photograph belonged to the Dr. Laubach system, which had also been implemented in Turkey during the 1940s (Cumhuriyet, February 1, 1961). Implemented in public education centers in Turkey during the 1940s, this system entailed preparing educational materials tailored to the level of adults (Batır, 2017). Under this system, a visual shape and an object beginning with that letter accompanied the letter to be taught. The center strove to extend public education to broad masses. Students distributed brochures announcing the commencement of public education initiatives. The 28 teachers residing at the school volunteered to work without requesting remuneration, vocational courses were to be instructed by the parents of primary school students, and physicians practicing in surrounding hospitals announced their intention to contribute (Cumhuriyet, February 1, 1961). A total public education mobilization had been launched in Bağlarbaşı with the participation of volunteers.

During this period, expectations surrounding public education were high. It was believed that the root causes of academic failure and behavioral disorders in schools stemmed from deficiencies in public education. The success of child education and the healthy functioning of democratic governance were likewise linked to public education. In countries such as Denmark,

Sweden, Canada, and the United Kingdom, public education centers, educational associations, universities, and evening classes had successfully elevated the educational level of the populace (Cumhuriyet, November 24, 1964). It was hoped that similar outcomes could be attained through comparable practices in Turkey.

In Turkey as well, the goal was to attain the level of contemporary civilized nations through public education. Alongside public education and primary education mobilizations, it was deemed necessary to assign university and higher education graduates to the national education campaign, counting this service toward the military obligations of reserve officers. To ensure equality of opportunity in education established by law, it was required to satisfy students' essential needs (such as higher education student loans and dormitories), transform vocational schools, institutes, and technical schools into active workshops, and fulfill the primary school deficit by deploying all available resources (Cumhuriyet, May 30, 1965).

Education via radio and television, which was also referenced in government programs, found expression in newspaper columns as well. During the initial years of the 1960s, public education constituted one of the primary issues upon which both the government and the press predominantly focused. Alongside schools and courses, radio was also put into service as an educational medium. In 1963, Ankara Radio initiated its educational and instructional broadcasts. However, the absence of educational and instructional broadcasts on regional radio stations beyond Ankara Radio constrained these efforts. Unless comparable endeavors were undertaken across regional radio stations as well, the targets set for public education could not be attained (Cumhuriyet, April 11, 1963).

In the 1960s, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu*—TRT) commenced its operations on May 1, 1964, pursuant to Law No. 359. Under the statutory mandate governing TRT, its duties comprised broadcasting informative, educational, and entertaining programming on radio and television, alongside providing news services. While a segment of the contemporary public argued that television could not achieve widespread adoption due to its high cost, another faction maintained that radio was sufficient. Asserting that the 1960s constituted the "Age of Television," İsmet Giritli believed that failing to expand television would preclude catching up with the modern era. In numerous parts of the world—most notably the United States and the Soviet Union—television served news-gathering, educational, and instructional functions. It was argued that this characteristic of television would yield benefits in the realms of public education, vocational and technical training, and particularly rural development, thereby necessitating the establishment of broadcasting facilities. Rather than being viewed as a wasteful measure or a luxury consumer good, television was regarded as an effective technical tool and auxiliary medium in education. Regarding the utilization of television in public education, the Council of Europe's "Committee for Out-of-School Education" conducted research on the subject. Officials at Istanbul Technical University asserted that if they were to establish a television station beyond experimental broadcasts, endeavors in public and vocational education as well as rural development could be provided free of cost (Cumhuriyet, May 10, 1964, p. 2). This demonstrates that substantial expectations were invested in television within the realm of education.

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In another entry submitted within the scope of the 1961–1962 Yunus Nadi Prize (*Yunus Nadi Armağanı*) in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, a comparison was drawn between Turkey and Japan. Japan possessed a literacy rate approaching nearly one hundred percent, a factor to which it owed its economic and social development. For Turkey to attain Japan's level of development, it was proposed that literacy be taught to all citizens—from industrial workers to peasants—and that every literate individual instruct ten others in what they knew. It was posited that the targeted level of development could be achieved through a phased educational progression: first basic education and public education, followed by constructive technical training, secondary education grounded in empirical reality and experimentation rather than rote learning, and research-oriented higher education (Cumhuriyet, August 30, 1961).

Retired General Oğuz Kazım Atok, writing for *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, conceptualizes education not merely as a schooling process, but as the totality of endeavors encompassing the entirety of life—including research, discovery, memorization, inquiry, evaluation, experimentation, development, and maturation. Furthermore, he categorizes education into distinct tiers: childhood education, school-age education, education for the uneducated, occupational training, and societal education. Regarding the education for the uneducated, those who remained outside the scope of compulsory education due to various reasons ought to redress this gap or deficiency through public education. For individuals excluded from all of the aforementioned educational systems, the implementation of societal education is proposed. Individuals participate in this form of education in alignment with their personal aptitudes. This education possesses neither a instructor nor a textbook; instruction is delivered through entertainment. Theatres, cinemas, concerts, lectures, libraries, classical and modern literature, the press, radio, television, educational excursions, and exhibitions constitute the instruments of this education (Cumhuriyet, November 30, 1966).

Although literacy instruction is the first notion that comes to mind when public education is mentioned, this constitutes a highly limited definition. Universal literacy does not imply that everyone is educated or that the cause of national education has been resolved. Under the conditions of the period, it was believed that rendering the entire populace literate and teaching the alphabet to everyone was impossible. Even if the alphabet were taught, it was emphasized that education was a concept transcending mere reading and writing. Considering time, available resources, and economic constraints, the proposal to educate society through theatre found expression in the newspaper. Historical precedents for theatre serving as an educational

instrument were sought in Antiquity. It was recalled that the Athenian city-state and the Roman Empire constituted the foundations of Western civilization, both of which shaped society through their theatres. Education begins with literacy; however, being literate does not equate to being educated. Education is expected to foster emotional and intellectual maturation in an individual, alongside developing moral values and a sense of responsibility. The discernment between right and wrong is achieved through education. Knowledge carries no meaning unless it is directed toward the ultimate objective of education (Cumhuriyet, September 24, 1960).

In this context, initiatives were undertaken in Kapıköy, a village of Trabzon, which stood as the sole village possessing a community room (*halkodası*). Constructed in 1945, the community room had remained derelict for many years due to neglect before being reactivated following the 1960 period through the efforts of the local population. The Kapıköy community room featured a 200-seat conference hall. Through the endeavors of the village teacher, Süleyman Dönmez, a concert was held in the village, marking the first time a concert had been staged in a village of Trabzon. In addition, public education activities were being conducted in Kapıköy. The Ministry of Village Affairs provided home economics instruction to the village women once a week, encompassing training in embroidery, sewing, cooking, household management, and childcare. Fourteen young women who graduated from the carpet-weaving course intended to establish a cooperative using the village's reading room. Among the visitors to the village were Nejat Yüzbaşıoğlu, Deputy Director-General of Public Education, UNESCO education expert P. Fourre, and Indian development expert Mr. Wally (Cumhuriyet, May 16, 1966).

Directors of public education centers likewise voiced the grievances they experienced through a letter addressed to the newspaper. The educational staff of the Public Education Centers, which had been affiliated with the Ministry of Village Affairs in the early 1960s, was supplied from teachers belonging to the Ministry of National Education. By 1967, an anonymous group of Public Education Center Directors communicated their hardships to the press. They published a statement asserting that they suffered material and moral grievances; that they lacked educational allowances, executive position allowances, and travel allowances; that the organizational law had still not been enacted despite the considerable passage of time; that teachers serving in public education operated under severe living conditions; and that they requested to be reassigned to the Ministry of National Education, warning that otherwise they would resign and return to classroom teaching (Cumhuriyet, August 20, 1967).

The accusation of socialism leveled against a public education teacher who pursued their profession with dedication, along with their inability to access the relevant minister, was covered in the newspaper. Having been removed from their post at the Public Education Center affiliated with the Ministry of Village Affairs and reassigned to a school under the Ministry of National Education, the teacher sought to convey their grievances to the Minister of Village Affairs through *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. The teacher expressed distress over being alienated from their core objective—having received specialized training in public education and performing their duties with devotion—which was to propagate and sustain Atatürk's legacy and reforms, internalize the republic and democracy, defend the Constitution, foster unity and solidarity among citizens, and achieve societal development through socio-cultural endeavors (Cumhuriyet, April 19, 1966).

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Regarding public education, Attorney Şukufe Ataöv raised a critique concerning the institution's budget. Provisional Article 3 of the Primary Education and Training Law mandated the Ministry of National Education and tasked the Council of Ministers to resolve the primary education problem within ten years starting from 1961. The financing of the education campaign relied on deductions from the state budget, specified at no less than 3 percent of the state's mandatory allocated revenue sources. Şukufe Ataöv contended that these deductions, which ought to have been allocated by Parliaments and Governments as educational appropriations in the budget, were systematically withheld. The consequence of this withholding was a populace of adult citizens who, having been unable to benefit from basic education and primary instruction, were compelled to turn to public education.

Ataöv asserted that public education could be accomplished through a comprehensive initiative encompassing various educational and instructional activities across economic, social, and cultural domains—aimed at enhancing the productivity of individuals entering working life, elevating their living standards, increasing their individual contribution to national development, instilling an understanding of Atatürk's Reforms, and embedding as well as internalizing democratic life. Although the Armed Forces represented the institution that assisted adult education most within the state, its educational activities remained detached from community development. Seventy-five percent of women were illiterate, and a segment of the citizenry lacked adequate proficiency in Turkish. Asserting that civic duties could not be expected from citizens who were not taught our language, she articulated her critiques by stating that public education had not been sufficiently addressed in Parliaments and Governments (Cumhuriyet, January 28, 1967).

During debates surrounding public education, the Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) frequently came to the fore. Bahri Savcı, who was among those who drafted the 1961 Constitution, penned an article in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper titled "Village Institutes and Public Education," analyzing the contributions of the Village Institutes and the nature of public education discussed at the time. In this article, he underscored the idea that embedding modern and secular values into society could be accomplished through education. Viewing the closure of the Village Institutes as an impediment to the enlightenment of the populace, Savcı contended that political circles exploited this situation for their own interests. He noted that the objective of directing education toward young girls, women remaining outside the formal education system, and rural areas traced back to the years of the National Struggle. Initiatives had been undertaken by the founding cadre, most notably Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to disseminate education. The instructor courses (*eğitmen kursları*) initiated under Mustafa Necati and Saffet Arıkan were realized as the Village Institutes under Hasan Ali Yücel and İsmail Hakkı Tonguç. Within this system, directing education to the countryside and formulating policies aligned with the needs of villages constituted, in a sense, a form of public education. This was not merely an educational issue, but one focused on socio-economic and cultural transformation. The goal was not simply to educate villagers—boys and girls alike, within and outside the school—but to achieve the establishment of a modern and secular society by subjecting society to transformation across

all aspects of life. Within this framework, increasing the number of schools was insufficient; it was necessary to undergo a secular and populist transformation of life in social, economic, and cultural terms. The institutions where this education could be delivered with minimal expenditure were the Village Institutes. Indeed, within six years, the Village Institutes had graduated more than 20,000 teachers, health officers, and instructors to serve society (Cumhuriyet, April 18, 1968).

Village Institutes represent the sole avenue for increasing the educational attainment rate in villages. With the inauguration of the Village Institutes, the literacy rate rose from 13 percent to 31 percent. Originating from within the village and returning to serve their own communities, Village Institute graduates constitute the most vital element capable of understanding and fulfilling the socio-economic needs of the countryside. A Village Institute graduate is not merely a teacher delivering literacy instruction, but simultaneously a midwife, an agriculturalist, a master craftsman, an artisan, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a mechanic, a healthcare worker, and a cooperative organizer. Through these missions, they serve as leaders spearheading transformation in the village. They organize production by evaluating the demand and value of agricultural yield within the national economy. Furthermore, they stand as the initiators of a populist movement. The Village Institutes emerge as the central axis of a democracy that attains efficiency through the active, conscious, and secular consent of an awakened and educated populace (Cumhuriyet, April 18, 1968).

Another topic frequently articulated during the period and included in government programs was community development (*toplum kalkınması*). This constituted a methodology for transforming the living conditions of the peasantry through the synergy generated by combining public participation with state resources across social, economic, and cultural stages. Providing state educational, organizational, and functional support to the traditional concept of collective labor (*imece*) is conceptualized as community development in the modern sense. The most vital element in community development is securing a dialogue between the intelligentsia and the populace. Community development materializes when these elements, which have remained distant from one another for centuries, unite and act in unison. There are core principles underpinning community development: Constitutionalist and Revolutionary Community Development: The foundation of community development must not contravene the constitution and must rely on the principle of volunteerism. Village Institute-Oriented Community Development: Community development ought to be supported in every aspect through an educational campaign. The natural implementers of this objective are the Village Institutes. Secondary education institutions that teach modes of livelihood beyond basic literacy instruction and impart a vocation can be integrated into this framework. Through the Village Institutes, public education will elevate adult education to its deserved level. Cultural centers such as Community Houses (*Halkevleri*) and television rooms will reinforce the educational function of community development. Reformist Community Development: Community development will prove productive and meaningful when constructed upon structures such as land reform, agricultural and livestock cooperatives, and collective production institutions (*imece üretim kurumları*) (Cumhuriyet, July 23, 1968, p. 2).

Public education constituted merely one dimension of achieving community development. For the dissemination of public education and the attainment of necessary progress, the establishment and effective operation of units ensuring inter-institutional coordination represented a highly desirable trajectory. Alongside infrastructure initiatives such as resettlement, land distribution, agricultural enterprises, and public works, educational services were also present. Within the scope of educational services, primary education, public

education, vocational courses, farmers' camps, agricultural education and extension services, along with instruction on self-help housing methods were included; whereas social services encompassed healthcare services and facilities, home economics, reading rooms, and libraries. However, coordination among these institutions was absent. There existed two distinct mobile village courses affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, respectively. Due to the lack of coordinated operation between the two ministries, certain villages received no courses whatsoever, while others were provided with multiple course opportunities. Meanwhile, efforts undertaken to establish coordination between central and local governments to resolve this issue progressed with insufficient speed (Cumhuriyet, June 20, 1963; Geray, 1963).

Conclusion

In Turkey, the concept of public education constituted an imperative option, as was typical in countries with low literacy rates. Although public education initiatives were implemented across various periods, stability could not be sustained, and consequently, the literacy rate could not be significantly elevated. Furthermore, the participation of the populace—whose overall level of education remained low—in vocational training courses beyond basic literacy instruction proved inadequate. Following the 1960 military coup, the military group that assumed power launched public education activities immediately after the coup to raise the nation's educational attainment level. Relevant legislation was enacted, and new institutional structures were built within the bureaucracy. An ambitious target of achieving a one-hundred-percent literacy rate nationwide within a short timeframe was established. However, these targets could not be attained.

The reflections of public interest and state-led endeavors regarding public education were tracked through *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. While publications directed toward public education were frequently encountered during the initial years following the coup, a marked decline was observed after 1970, with such coverage nearly disappearing after 1975. Within the framework of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper and government programs, it can be asserted that public education activities intensified during periods when successive governments prioritized the issue. Another crucial dimension to consider is the chaotic environment into which Turkey plunged during the 1970s. In this climate characterized by ideological polarization, political actors failed to include public education among their primary agenda items. On the other hand, the jurisdictional transfer of the Public Education Center—initially affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and subsequently reassigned to the Ministry of Village Affairs—coupled with the operational fragmentation of public education courses across different ministries, diminished the expected productivity of these educational programs.

Despite the fact that intellectuals authored articles addressing these systemic issues, permanent solutions for public education could not be produced. Consequently, following the 1980 military coup, the junta once again focused on the exact same issue, launching a nationwide literacy campaign. This study analyzed the reflections of public education policies implemented by the National Unity Committee (*Millî Birlik Komitesi*—MBK) and the governments in power during the 1960–1980 period as mirrored in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper. The superficial handling of public education within daily political agendas impeded the attainment of lasting outcomes. In a similar vein, examining the literacy campaigns initiated after the 1980 military coup and conducting a comparative analysis between the two periods could reveal the policy errors embedded in these implementations. Furthermore, nations that initiated public education

projects after the 1950s—when UNESCO launched its global educational campaigns—could be examined to draw comparative insights with the Turkish case.

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