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Counseling in Turkey: Current Status and Future Challenges

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Abstract In this article a special emphasis is placed on the current status and the future challenges of counseling in Turkey. A brief history of counseling in Turkey, current developments, and the basic issues in this field are pointed out. Finally, the future challenges and recommendations to improve the current status of counseling are discussed.

Counseling in Turkey: Current Status and Future Challenges

The Turkish Republic was built on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and started her existence under the able leadership of Ataturk in 1923. Turkey is a country of over 63 million people. Situated in both Europe and Asia and controlling the major waterway between the Black Sea and the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, the country has long been a crossroads between east and west and north and south. A developing country, Turkey is subjected to the usual problems of industrialization and urbanization, including a significant increase in the breakdown of family networks, and the modification of traditional of cultural patterns (McWhirter, 1983).

Turkey has already made major efforts in the education development, and has set ambitious goals in education and training as a part of its strategy for economic adjustment and national development. The objective of national education is to train "good people," "good citizens," and "qualified manpower," which thus carries

implications for counseling in education (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1989).

The practice of counseling has become international in scope. Counseling is not only emerging in developed countries but also in developing countries, as industrialization replaces traditional paradigms of decision making and career selection (McWhirter, 1988). It is being interpreted differently in different countries, with its form and expression influenced by political, sociological, and economic considerations.

This article aims to provide readers with an overview of the current status of counseling in Turkey in order to enhance awareness of how specific cultural, political, and economic factors have impacted counseling and its delivery systems and how international perspectives have influenced the counseling profession. It may also enable counselors to develop a better perspective of current issues in the counseling profession throughout the world.

The Emergence of Counseling in Turkey

Earlier historical forces that created a need for counseling in the United States are currently active in Turkey. Psychological testing, vocational career choice, and mental health concerns are currently paramount in defining what counseling is and what counselors do (McWhirter, 1983).

As in the United States and most other countries, counseling in Turkey began in the schools (Kepceoglu, 1986). Turkey has been making efforts to develop a system of counseling in schools for about fifty years. The first school counselors were primarily teachers, and counseling was a function they performed in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Their major duties involved career and educational counseling.

The main factors that have influenced the emergence of counseling in education settings in Turkey may be listed as follows:

1. Social changes, such as modernization, technological development, democratization, and changing family patterns, have created the need and the desire for counseling in education (McWhirter, 1983).
2. Counseling has been viewed as an effective means for developing human potential (Kepceoglu, 1994).
3. The individual differences emphasized in education have contributed to the emergence of counseling in the schools (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1989).
4. The counseling services have been seen as a useful means of modernizing and democratizing the school system (T. C MEB Turkiye Egitim Milli Komisyonu Raporu, 1960).

A Brief History of Counseling in Turkey

The Turkish counseling movement dates back to 1950 and derives largely from advances and developments in the United States system of counseling, such as Rogers's person-centered approach. The history of counseling in Turkey may be organized around five identifiable historical periods. To better understand the development of counseling movement in Turkey, it is necessary to review each period and reflect on the significant events from 1950 to the present.

Taking Initial Steps (1950-1956)

This period between 1950 and 1956 marks the beginning of the counseling movement in Turkey and is considered as the most active period in terms of developments in the counseling field (Kuzgun, 1991; Tan, 1986). The visits of some American counselor educators and the efforts of pioneer counselor educators trained in the United States played a significant role in bringing counseling concepts into Turkish education in the 1950s (Baymur, 1980; Tan, 1986).

This period witnessed the several important developments in counseling. The Ministry of National Education set up a Test and Research Bureau to standardize IQ tests as well as personality and achievement tests for diagnostic and educational purposes in 1953 (Dogan, 1996). A Center for Psychological Services was established in Ankara in 1955. It was later changed to a Guidance and Research Center and exported to other provinces (Oner, 1977). About 100 such centers have been created and 606 counselors called "guidance teachers" were employed in these centers by the 1997-1998 academic year. Neither the quality nor the number of such centers is adequate to meet the demand. These centers focus on "correction" and "remedial" functions, and cater primarily to students in need of special education (Education in Turkey, 1995). The centers cannot reach a large part of the student population, either rural or urban, and the majority of the students, teachers, and parents are uninformed about their purpose and function.

Formative Years (1957-1969)

The second period of counseling, from approximately 1957 to 1969, was the formative years. Although this period is considered an inactive stage for counseling, it witnessed significant events that played an important role in the movement of counseling in Turkey. This period included the adaptation and development of some group tests and rapid changes in school curricula (Oner, 1977). Delivering counseling in secondary schools, especially career counseling, was considered to accomplish the training of qualified manpower through the school years and to solve the unemployment problem as a long-term objective in the 1960s (Tan, 1986). Counseling was proposed as a means of enhancing pupils' well-being by the Seventh Council of National Education in 1962 (Baymur, 1980). Some Turkish universities began to set up either undergraduate or graduate counselor education programs based on the counselor education models of the United States, such as Rogers's person-centered approach (Kuzgun, 1993; Ozguven, 1990).

Establishing Counseling Services in Schools (1970-1981)

In many ways this period was a golden era, very active for school counseling. It marked the beginning of professional counseling practice in schools and witnessed many developments in the counseling field.

The Ministry of National Education implemented some essential policies and then employed 90 counselors to start services for 24 selected secondary schools in the 1970-1971 academic year. Although the number of schools having counseling services and the number of counselors employed increased every year, the rate of increase was very slow (Kepceoglu, 1986). (About 2,199 school counselors were working in 2,033 schools, mostly secondary schools, accommodating 12 million students in Turkey by the 1997- 1998 academic year.) The Ministry of National Education directly addressed counseling (guidance) in the schools in its official documents. These years of the Turkish counseling movement witnessed guidance programs in the secondary schools consisting of extracurricular activities during students' homeroom hours. Homeroom

teachers assumed the duties of educating students through various group guidance activities and undertook the responsibility for conducting counseling in schools. The Basic Law of National Education, which was enacted in 1973 and updated in 1983, accepted orientation as a basic principle to be accorded through the education system. Orientation and evaluation of the success attained are to be effected via objective evaluation, test and measurement methods, and guidance services (Education in Turkey, 1995). Both the Tenth National Education Council in 1981 and the Eleventh National Education Council in 1982 focused on the need for counselors in education settings and the establishment of counselor education programs at three different levels in universities. These councils also recommended "counselor" as a title for the graduates and confirmed "guidance" as a specialty field in education (Dogan, 1990).

Establishing Undergraduate Programs in Counseling (1982-1995)

During this period the number of four-year undergraduate counselor education programs rapidly increased. In 1982, the Turkish universities began admitting students to a four-year bachelor of education program with a major in guidance and counseling. (About 19 universities currently offer four-year undergraduate programs, which primarily emphasize school counseling.) The number of masters and doctoral degree programs was also increased. As in the United States, counseling is flourishing in Turkish colleges of education rather than in departments of psychology (Whiteley, 1984). Each university was obliged to establish a counseling and guidance center to be in charge of individual, educational, and career counseling of students as a division of the medical-social, health, culture and sports activities department by the new Higher Education Law in 1984 (Resmi Gazete, No. 18301, 1984).

The Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association was founded in 1989 by a group of counselor educators at Hacettepe University in Ankara. Its current membership of almost 450 is made up mainly of school counselors and counselor educators. The association began to publish the respected *Journal of Psychological Counseling and Guidance* in 1990 and added a newsletter entitled "Psychological Counseling and Guidance Bulletin" in 1997.

The Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association held The First National Psychological Counseling and Guidance Congress in 1991 with subsequent national congresses held every two years. In 1995, the association designated the ethical standards of the counseling profession in order to heighten the standards of the profession (Psikolojik Danisma ve Rehberlik Dernegi, 1995). Three different but complementary counselor roles were identified in the ethical guidelines: the remedial, the preventive, and the developmental.

Assigning Counselors to Schools (1996-The Present)

A rapid increase in the appointment of counselors has taken place during the last few years. The Ministry of National Education has also begun to assign counselors trained specifically as counselors to both elementary and secondary schools. Elementary school counseling was emphasized and reviewed in the Fifteenth National Education Council in 1996. Sponsored by the collaboration of the Higher Education Council and the World Bank, the National Education Development Project for Pre-Service Teacher Education further developed guidance and counseling four-year undergraduate, and master's degree programs in 1996 (YOK/World Bank National Education Development Project Pre-Service Teacher Education, 1996). The government was determined to realize the total implementation of reforms in elementary education and extend national

obligatory education from grades 1 through 5 to grades 1 through 8 in 1997. Some new steps are being taken to establish a new structure for elementary schools, including counseling.

The Current Status of Counseling in Turkey

The history of counseling in Turkey is closely related to the history of educational practice and problems in the schools. As each country has its own unique historical background, political system, and economic conditions, any counseling model being appropriated from one society into another will naturally be affected by these factors.

Counseling in Turkey is generally perceived as: 1) a corrective and remedial instrument (Kuzgun, 1991), 2) a means of orienting students toward the schools and regulating the manpower that the country requires (Tan, 1986), 3) a means of disciplining and controlling the students in schools (Dogan, 1995), 4) a means of special education, and 5) homeroom and various educational activities being carried out by ordinary teachers (Dogan, 1991).

Current Developments

Counseling is a new phenomenon in Turkey and there is a lack of information, knowledge and understanding of counseling among the public. The term "counseling" is only used by a small group of professionals. The more familiar term is "guidance" which has connotations of leading, directing, coaching, and advising the students at problematic times (Demir & Aydin, 1996).

The current status of the counseling field in Turkey may be briefly characterized as: 1) working primarily with normal individuals, 2) specializing in the interpretation of standardized tests, particularly group tests, 3) including the field of educational, vocational, and personal adjustment, 4) serving as a source of referrals to specialists in other related areas, and 5) being Rogerian in orientation.

Counseling in Turkey had been very much influenced by developments in the United States. The major models and theories adopted have accordingly been culture bound, being developed in the main for the white middle/upper classes in a different context. As Skovholt (1988) contended, both Rogerian ideas and standardized tests procedures have been imported from the United States in a way that is not completely positive. It is important to note that in the United States as well, applications of traditional models of counseling are being questioned in programs which respond to the needs of people whose cultural background is not white middle/upper class. With the increased migration of people globally, it is important that the skills and techniques of counseling be modified appropriately to work in other countries and cultures as well.

The concrete results of 50 years of counseling developments in Turkey are: 1) the establishment of guidance and research centers in each province, 2) the establishment of counseling services in some elementary and secondary schools, 3) undergraduate and graduate counselor education programs in universities, 4) "guidance" as an elective course included in the teaching knowledge certification program, 5) some in-service counseling training programs arranged by the Ministry of National Education, 6) counseling units as divisions of the medical-social, health, culture and sport activities department in universities, 7) the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association, 8) the national psychological counseling and guidance congresses held by the association every two years, 9) the *Journal of Psychological Counseling and Guidance* published by the association, 10) the guidelines of ethical standards, and 11) some tests and textbooks

in counseling.

Current Issues

Counseling in the accepted American sense is still very limited in Turkey. The counseling profession in Turkey has not been fully successful to date in spite of persistent efforts. Counseling is less developed, less organized, and still in search of its professional identity. Counseling, and in particular school counseling, is evolving very slowly because of failure to place it in the mainstream of school curriculum in Turkey. Neither the quality nor the amount of such services is adequate to meet the demand. Understanding of the nature and mode of delivery of effective counseling services in Turkey is lacking.

As a profession, counseling is still vaguely identified and confused with other disciplines such as psychology, social work, and even psychiatry. Counseling faces numerous obstacles and limitations in Turkey. Counseling in Turkey does not emphasize the development of the individual's potential nor does it require the receptivity of the person's thoughts and feelings. It is more or less guidance based primarily on the provision of information in a directive and advisory manner.

Both undergraduate and graduate counselor education programs have been increasing in number since 1982. There is great disparity in both the classes offered and the content of the courses from one university to another (Akkoyun, 1995). There is also a lack of standardized selection criteria upon which counseling students can be admitted to counselor education programs. There are no formally recognized requirements for certification as a professional counselor; neither are there procedures for, and official accreditation, of undergraduate and graduate training programs and an agreed upon specialty title and definition in counseling. The counseling field is seriously lacking textbooks and sufficient literature to be used in both undergraduate and graduate programs. There is still great dependence upon American literature and research in this field. The dearth of Turkish literature has reduced the quality of the education programs.

All counseling in Turkey is done under the auspices of the government; there is no private counseling practice.

The general style of education still overemphasizes cognitive learning and school achievement and neglects affective development at the secondary level in Turkey. Counseling is not perceived as being essential in such an educational system which does not recognize the concept of individual differences. Counseling was not instituted from the beginning as a separate and powerful department within the Ministry of National Education Organization, but as a supplementary unit of the special education department. School counseling services have not been presented as an integral part of the education process as defined by the curriculum. Some of the appointed counselors are specialized in different disciplines other than counseling, such as sociology, psychology, education and philosophy. Appointing unqualified graduates to school counseling services and guidance and research centers has caused the misunderstanding that counseling is ineffective and even not useful.

Counseling has a decidedly clinical flavor and the ratio of students to counselors appears to be typically about 4,500: 1. The delivery model is neither developmental in nature nor designed for all students. The students perceive school counseling activities as boring, cumbersome, unnecessary, and ineffective (Demir & Aydin, 1996). The school counselor is usually expected to do some tests in addition to school counseling duties.

The lack of standardized counseling tools such as interest, aptitude, intelligence,

and personality tests and the unavailability of organized occupational information causes a great difficulty in the work of counselors. This issue has decreased the quality of counseling services both in schools, and in guidance and research centers.

According to the laws or by-laws regulating counseling services both in schools, and in guidance and research centers, counseling is considered as supplementary service of special education and a means of controlling and disciplining the students (Dogan, 1995). The occupational title of counselor is new and sometimes confusing to those who do not know or agree that counseling is an important "third force" in a school, next to the administration and teachers. There is still a certain resistance against the concept of counseling in schools; many teachers and administrators do not see counseling as an important discipline and think of it as a luxury. It is commonly held that counseling in schools can be offered by ordinary teachers rather than counselors since for years teachers have largely been charged with counseling duties.

There is a misunderstanding among the teachers and the administrators that school counselors are incompetent. Most of the counselors limit themselves to individual counseling and neglect all other guidance services, which gives the impression that such counselors do not perform their jobs adequately. School counselors tend to isolate themselves from the normal flow of school life, expressing an air of importance and a feeling that they occupy a higher status than the teachers. "Guidance" has either been included in the teaching knowledge certification program as an compulsory course or an elective course or completely excluded from this program from time to time. This issue has prevented school principals and teachers from developing a common and sufficient understanding about counseling concepts and practices during their pre-service training.

Future Challenges and Recommendations

Although it is generally considered that counseling will continue to grow and gain a broad base of acceptance and support in Turkey, there are a number of immediate challenges confronting counseling in the country. These include the following:

1. Presenting to the broader society its basic mission and the services which it can deliver to clients,
2. Regaining involvement in the field of prevention,
3. Generating more quality scholarly accomplishments,
4. Anticipating the consequences for client needs of pervasive shifts occurring in the economic structure of society,
5. Being recognized as professionals and having a type of certification similar to that offered by the National Board of Counselor Certification in the United States or the Canadian Counselor Certification,
6. Being accepted in community development centers where individual, group and family counseling can be offered.

During the nearly 50 years that have passed since its beginning in Turkey, counseling has emerged as the profession primarily responsible for planning, interpreting, and delivering counseling to students in grades 9-12.

The following recommendations may ameliorate problematic issues in counseling in Turkey:

1. Counseling should be expanded into non-educational settings, such as correctional

- institutions, mental health, social work, and rehabilitation facilities in order to promote its professional identity.
2. Training and accreditation standards for counseling programs and practices should be designated in order to gain a professional identity and obtain a legitimate role among other mental health professionals.
 3. The number of universities offering degrees in counseling should be reduced by the Council of Higher Education. The contents and the standards of the current counselor education programs should be developed and heightened by the qualified faculty and the use of excellent text books, and other media.
 4. The counseling unit should be separated from being a division of the Special Education Department and should be instituted as a separate and powerful department responsible for policy within the Ministry of National Education.
 5. An institute should be established and charged with producing tests and other counseling materials.
 6. The laws and by-laws regulating counseling services both in schools and in guidance and research centers should be revised according to contemporary counseling principles and concepts.
 7. School counseling should be extended to cover both elementary as well as secondary schools. School counseling programs should comprise much more than individual counseling.
 8. Each school should have a qualified and powerful counseling unit supplied with enough qualified counselors and all the required tools, materials, and tests. Unless this unit provides qualified services, the importance of counseling for the students may not be understood by parents, principals, and teachers.
 9. Counseling activities should be included within the school curriculum for two hours per week and these activities should be carried out as group guidance activities by the counselors. Otherwise, counseling will be perceived as an emergency service intervening in problems only after they occur.

Conclusion

Counseling in Turkey is seen as having an integral role in the educational process, through fostering the development and integration of an individual's many potentials. However, its place in Turkish schools has often caused it to be the target of criticism for regulating both the manpower that the country requires, and youth behavior, over which it has had little control. Most counselors still see students with special difficulties on an individual basis, their contacts being remedial or crisis-oriented. The next decade should give rise to the implementation of the developmental and preventive emphasis by counseling practitioners.

As democratization, industrialization, and urbanization continue to supplant traditional cultural models of decision making, career selection, and human service delivery, the awareness of counseling needs is growing in Turkey. As Turkey looks to the future, there seems to be some justification for optimism. Research, publication, and training programs in counseling have advanced and will continue to advance the counseling movement in a way that is necessary in a modern, democratic, and humane society.

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