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# Thinking Change Inclusively: Views of Educational Administrators on Inclusive Education as a Reform Initiative

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to delve into the debate about educational change and evaluate this concept around the paradigms introduced by inclusive education. The paper embarks on views of 27 educational administrators working in different educational institutions in Turkey. Participants are asked to provide their views on educational change and the role which the movement of inclusive education in Turkey can play within this context. Several key themes emerged out of the interview survey: (a) participants had various conceptualizations of educational change; (b) inclusive education was conceived as an opportunity (though difficult to implement) to realize educational change towards educational improvement; and (c) the current competitive and centralized system left little space to utilize inclusive education to catalyze positive educational change. Findings are discussed in relation to relevant literature and suggest that future educational reforms oriented with principles of inclusive education can lead to constructive educational change.

**Keywords:** educational change, inclusive education, reform, Turkey

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Reform Initiatives and Educational Change*

Educational change has never been an agreed-upon concept. Stakeholders in the education system have looked into the concept of change from different perspectives; those claiming to have realized change have been confronted by those seeing nothing new and vice versa. Although Fullan (2001) shows the difficulty to reach an objective definition of educational change, he points out to the multidimensional aspect of change and claims that change involves (i) the possible use of new or revised materials (instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies), (ii) the possible use of new teaching approaches (i.e., new teaching strategies or activities), and (iii) the possible alteration of beliefs (e.g., pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies or programs).

For decades, a series of educational reform initiatives have been introduced to education systems around the world in order to realize change in any unsatisfactory aspect of the system. Several reasons account for the dissatisfaction and the need to implement initiatives, such as improving teacher education, raising achievement and so on. Several internal resources (e.g., teachers or school administrators) and external resources (e.g., parents and policymakers) may constitute the initiatives to realize change through reforms. For example, in the past half decade reform efforts generated alternative definitions and roles for teachers as scientists, knowledge transmitters, and technicians whilst they thought of teaching as scaffolding, apprenticing, and a persuasive practice (Rogoff, 1990). These initiatives have aimed at bringing about changes in the existing theoretical orientations behind the existing pedagogy and develop alternative trends in research and practices of the time.

Despite these efforts, however, most initiatives have been short-lived and left aside in later years. For example the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) reported that only around one in 10 of the 450 different reforms put in place between 2008 and 2014 were evaluated for their impact by governments. As a result of such a failure, only a small percentage of the initiatives for improving teaching and learning are able to produce broad and durable outcomes (Alexander, Murphy, & Woods, 1996). The duration between the appearance and disappearance of many of the innovations in most schools is relatively short while only a few initiatives to realize change in the education system are systemic and actually result in long-run gains.

Upon the failure of many change initiatives around the world, there have been severe criticisms and reports, followed by an appropriate search for alternative workable solutions. This situation inevitably has some causes such as lack of a holistic approach to educational change and insufficient professional, social and intellectual capital to achieve the

planned targets of each reform initiative. It is almost impossible to ignore the fact that, while high and realistic expectations are the drivers for educational change, these need to be accompanied by other factors embedded in education such as better practices in teaching and learning, the nature of schooling, and technology (Caldwell & Spinks, 2007).

### *1.2 Inclusive Education and Educational Change*

Since its rise as an international movement, inclusive education has been perceived as an opportunity to bring about changes in the structures of contemporary educational systems in ways that increase the variety of educational and pedagogical experiences in schools (Ainscow et al., 2006). Inclusive education has risen rapidly around the world from the concepts of mainstreaming and integration in which the child is placed in a mainstream setting and given support to help them fit in. Rather, an inclusive approach is one in which the school and its practices develop in a way to accommodate a diverse range of learners (Long, Wood, Littleton, & Passenger, 2011).

The concept of inclusive schools is based on the notion that mainstream schools should undergo a process of reform in all aspects of the education if the aim is to accommodate students with a range of individual and educational needs and provide them with appropriate education (UNESCO-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009). This is an issue of equal concern to countries adopting the notion of inclusive education; inclusive education has to form part of an overall educational strategy and it calls for major reform of the ordinary school (UNESCO, 1994).

According to Ainscow, Howes, Farrell and Frankham (2003), the responsibility to accommodate the needs of all students belongs to schools, rather than requiring the students and their families to have to adapt to the school structures. This notion requires schools to acquire mechanisms that are necessary to educate all children, regardless of their characteristics and ability levels, and make changes in the existing structures when necessary. However, realizing this expectation in traditionally oriented schools is difficult when we consider that schools have organizationally had conservative structures that are resistant to change (Ainscow, 1991; Skrtic, 1995). In addition, principles of competition which favour those achieving high attainment and marginalize and/or exclude those with low attainment levels have increasingly dominated the education systems around the world (Barton & Slee, 1999; Rouse & Florian, 1997). Looking at this scenario, it is not surprising to see that students and families are often blamed for under-achievement. However, many miss the point that the way in which schools are structured and organized accounts for many of the difficulties experienced by students and their families. This highlights the need for schools to improve the pedagogy in ways that individual differences are respected and responded, and recognize diversity as an opportunity, rather than a problem, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2009).

Despite the apparently negative picture, there are steps on the international stage that aim to boost the idea of change as a driving force for schools to take steps to respond to students with different educational needs. This view was pronounced in the United Nations Salamanca Framework of Action:

Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school (1994, p. 11-12).

Realizing the change in the structures and organizations of schools to help them establish inclusive structures entails a holistic approach and focus on the whole school as a system (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Contrary to the common belief that there is a need for a torrent of external resources to initiate change in schools, Ainscow (1999) claims that change can begin by utilizing existing practices and knowledge as starting points for development; seeing difference as opportunities for learning rather than problems to be fixed; scrutinizing barriers to pupil participation; making effective use of available resources to support learning; developing a language of practice; and creating conditions that encourage a degree of risk-taking. With carefully planned, implemented and managed inclusive practices, schools can improve the quality of education, teaching and learning.

### *1.3 The Case of Turkey*

Turkey has experienced similar trends regarding the reform movements in education; initiatives have often resulted in inadequate educational impact. Aksit (2007) reports that there has been a piecemeal way of implementing educational reform initiatives in Turkey, and these steps have not generally touched core educational areas. The content of these initiatives has been superficial and it mostly aimed to modify, rather than change or revise. These fragmented initiatives have often been designed and implemented to gain political advantage; therefore the basic systems to a large extent stayed the same (Aksit, 2007).

Especially in the last decade, as a requirement of the European Union (EU) candidacy Chapter 26 premises, Turkey has made some changes in the education system to upgrade educational provision. To meet the strategic educational objectives of the EU, three basic reform initiatives have been implemented. First, a curricular reform was launched in 2005, and the aim was to design a constructive curriculum with the aim of preparing young students better for the real world. The other initiative aimed to provide local determinism to local education authorities and therefore decentralise educational provision in Turkey. However, evaluation research has shown that these steps fell short of achieving the intended aims (Aksit, 2007; Nayır, Yıldırım, & Koştur, 2009).

The third movement, though never been considered as a reform initiative in Turkey, has been the movement towards developing inclusive education in mainstream schools. Mainly conceptualized as integrating students with disabilities in mainstream schools, this movement has attracted criticism more than praise due to various structural and psychological factors (Erkılıç & Durak, 2013; Sakız & Woods, 2015). Several reasons account for the lack of success in inclusion such as the narrow understanding of inclusion as only a placement issue, rather than an overall approach to educational improvement, lack of qualified human resources, and exclusionary school cultures containing negative attitudes towards diversity. However, there is still hope to transform the increasingly popular idea of inclusive education into successful practices that can result in changes in the system and improvement in education. This opportunity is in place for Turkey and other countries undergoing similar experiences.

#### *1.4 The Current Study*

All in all, inclusive education is a holistic approach in which all elements interact and influence each other to reflect the change needed by the increasingly diverse structure of society. I am in agreement with UNESCO (2001) and Ainscow et al. (2006) in considering inclusive education as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners and aims to improve the school culture, practices and policy in ways that teaching is enriched, learning is extended and future goals are achieved. Therefore in this paper, I investigate the extent to which inclusive education is seen by administrators as a factor that enables constructive educational change. More specifically, the current study aims to answer the following three questions:

- 1) How is educational change conceptualized by educational administrators in Turkey?
- 2) What do educational administrators think about the movement of inclusive education in mainstream schools?
- 3) What is the role of inclusive education in enabling constructive educational change?

## **2. Method**

This study was designed in lines with the interpretative paradigm of the social sciences and utilized a qualitative interview survey to allow the researcher to collect rich accounts of the participants' opinions (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2002). Therefore, in this study, the opinions of the educational administrators were explored through semi-structured interviews regarding the phenomena of educational change and inclusive education. In qualitative studies, semi-structured interviews are frequently used because they can allow researchers to investigate personal perspectives of the educationalists by exploring their experiences and the educational matters which might influence their opinions (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

### *2.1 Participants*

The Ministry of National Education in Turkey (Turkish: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı) manages the education in all public and private schools across the country in a highly centralized manner and assumes the role of producing education policies related to all aspects of education. The higher education is managed by the Higher Education Council (Yükseköğretim Kurumu).

This study took place in Turkey. Participants were Turkish citizens and included 27 educational administrators working in different educational institutions. They were (a) five educational specialists (18.5%) working in the Ministry of National Education usually for policy-making purposes; (b) eight university academics (29.6%) in the field of education, most of whom had field experience as inspectors; and (c) 14 school administrators (51.8%) actively serving the purpose of managing state schools. Out of 27 participants, there were 18 males (66.6%) and 9 females (33.3%).

In this study specialists working in the Ministry of National Education were in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara. The academics worked in three different state universities located in the South-Eastern Region and Marmara Region. Finally, the schools from which administrators were recruited were in two different cities in Turkey, Mardin and Istanbul. The cities, schools and participants were selected with a purposive sampling strategy (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Robson, 2011). In this strategy, participants and contexts are selected based on specific criteria. The two cities were chosen because they represented differences in regions and diversity in populations. Participants were determined based on previous professional acquaintance with the researcher and accessibility. To be recruited, all participants were

required to have worked in the field of education in a decision-making position.

The age of the participants ranged between 36 and 58, which gave the chance for both experienced and younger administrators to reflect on their experiences and provide their opinions. It is important to note that all academics and school administrators had served in schools as teachers. Only the four Ministry specialists did not work in schools previously.

### *2.2 Data Collection*

In this study, I used a semi-structured interview schedule with 12 open ended questions for all groups of participants. Despite a similarity in the content, some questions were replaced or revised slightly in order to match the professional concerns of each participant group. Two main sources were utilized to design the interview schedule. First, international and national literature on educational change, reform and inclusive education was reviewed carefully. Second, expert opinions were sought in order to suit the questions well to the purpose of the study. In addition to the main questions, as needed, I asked some probing questions to explore the responses in a more detailed way (e.g., ‘Can you tell more?’, ‘Could you please give more details?’).

In this study, all interviews were carried out outside the institutions where the participants worked. Personal consent was received from all participants and their questions were answered after being informed about the aims of the study. The interview protocol entailed that participants should be informed about the voluntary nature of joining the study and the freedom to withdraw from the interviews at any time without specifying any reason. Participants were informed that no information disclosing their identities would be revealed at any stage of the study, which is expected to enhance the trust towards the study and allow participants to express themselves freely. Participants were also informed that the questions did not have right or wrong answers and that their responses would not be judged and tested. The participants gave consent to audio-recording the interview. Interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. After the sessions, interviews were transcribed for further analysis.

### *2.3 Data Analysis*

In this study, the main method for analysing the transcribed interview data was thematic analysis, an appropriate analysis method when the current research problem belongs to an under-researched area, and participants’ views related to the area are not sufficiently known (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, I explore two important phenomena, inclusive education and educational change, which are rising within contemporary education but are not well-researched and well-understood yet. In addition, thematic analysis was an appropriate analysis method in this study because it provided a rich thematic description of the data in order to determine the significant and dominant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of thematic data analysis included three steps. First, the interview transcripts were read carefully until gaining familiarity with the content (Flick, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Later, considering the relevance of the data to the related literature and research questions, the interview content was selectively divided into codes. In the final stage, I focused on the broader theme level and brought together the previously identified codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By the end of the process, the codes had crystallized into three over-arching themes and eight sub themes.

### *2.4 Trustworthiness*

In qualitative studies, establishing trustworthiness is a prerequisite of a robust methodology. In this study, I adopted several techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. First, right after the analysis of the interviews, nine participants were provided with the interview transcripts to check for accuracy as well as the table of codes drawn out of the transcripts, a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, I provided detailed information regarding the participants, the study context and the data collection and analysis procedures in this article, a technique expected to enhance the transferability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, findings of the study are presented systematically and in a detailed way, including verbatim quotations to ensure the opinions of the participants are accurately reflected and support the researcher’s interpretations.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

In this section, the over-arching themes and subthemes are presented and discussed in relation to the relevant literature (Figure 1).

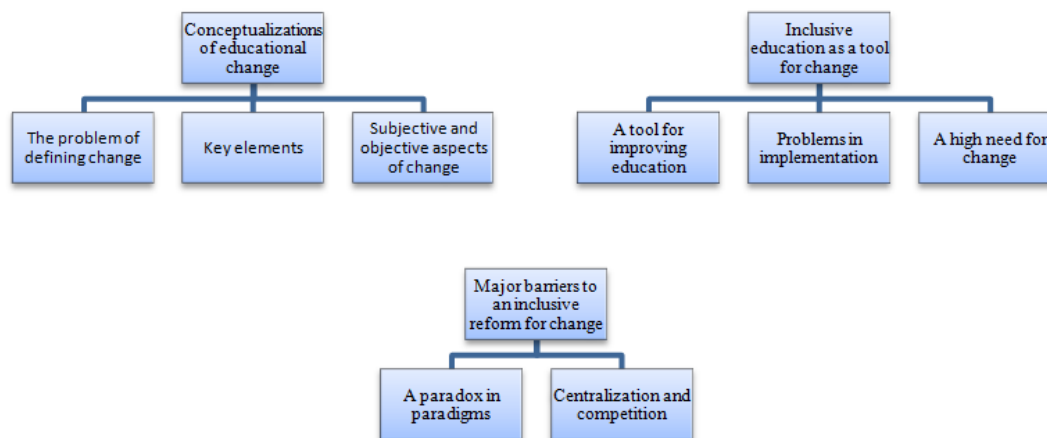


Figure 1. Thematic map indicating main themes and sub-themes drawn from the interviews

### 3.1 Conceptualizations of Educational Change

The educational literature in the past decade has been filled with numerous studies on the topic of educational change, reporting individual and collective efforts towards new educational policies and practices aimed at school restructuring and reform (Nolan & Meister, 2000). Despite the presence of the topic of change in forms of new policies and practices, there has been an underestimation of what change is and the importance of constructing a common discourse as far as educational change in specific areas is concerned (Fullan, 2001). In terms of conceptualizing change, participants in this study highlighted the difficulty to make a definition of change. However, they stated some key elements and subjective and objective aspects of educational change.

#### 3.1.1 The Problem of Defining Change

Many stakeholders in the education system become involved in change voluntarily or involuntarily. However, they experience difficulty in conceptualizing and defining it in either case. Participants in this study agreed with the difficulty to define educational change within an environment where the concept dominates discourse. This is remarked by the following Ministry specialist:

What we all understand from change is not the same because the policy does not guide well. We talk of change but the change of what? It became a superficial concept despite its importance. We need context to define it.

The above statement can apply to any topic in educational sciences which involves relativity to different stakeholders. However, the importance of talking about change in education and defining it has a distinctive importance in an age of accelerated social mobility and diversity in education, post-standardization, a crisis of demographic renewal in teaching and leadership and so forth (Hargreaves, 2008). It is not only the awareness of the need to change amid the aforementioned developments which should be in place; but it is also the need to use an internally driven shared language while talking about change, especially before we design policies and practice reform initiatives in schools (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Unless there is a shared language of the key concept, policy may remain ambiguous and reforms may remain scattered and short-lived (Scott, 2000).

#### 3.1.2 Subjective and Objective Aspects of Change

The balance between the need for a shared understanding of educational change and the danger of assimilating the position and reality of the individual is a critical one. At the individual level, and especially within a particular school or classroom, educators face the reality of the influences involving the need to change. For example, the following school administrator said:

The reforms are out there, but I think a reform package should consider what happens behind classroom doors. Destabilizing matter can inhibit what we are already used to. However, we are also aware of what we should change. There is pressure to change from everywhere; families, children and so on.

Consideration of the subjective reality in education is crucial while, at the same time, the construction of some social phenomena by individuals and groups who constantly interact is remembered (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This brings the possibility of some objective reality as far as educational change is concerned. The following academic illustrated this:

I acknowledge it [change] is not a single entity. However, unless the commonality is considered we come up with ambiguous policies and practices. Then everyone will act independently without necessarily understanding what

the change is aimed at. It is a question of accumulating the specific into a shared initiative.

As the above academic states, understanding educational change entails the merger of the specific and the general. That is to say, change requires a multidimensional look involving consideration of the individual experiences of stakeholders and thick descriptions of the separate dimensions of educational change at a given time and space (Bausell, 2011). However, what most reform initiatives which failed to achieve the intended outcomes show us is that a big proportion of these movements focus on restructuring the whole system often superficially while ignoring a deeper look at the individual culture and characteristics (Fullan, 2001). Ball and Cohen (1999) provide a sound example of this case. They report that a considerable amount of financial resources are allocated for staff development trainings. However, these trainings are fragmented and intellectually superficial. What they argue for is connectedness with the school cultures which involve issues of curriculum and learning and changes in beliefs and attitudes, which is difficult to achieve only through training.

### 3.1.3 Key Elements

The issue of the separate dimensions of educational change was discussed by the participants in this study. Despite a heavy focus on the subjective experience of change as highlighted above, participants mentioned that there were key elements of educational change that needed to be highlighted. The first of these was *participation*, as exemplified by the following academic:

Changing anything in education on your own is not possible. You need emotional support or extra power from outside. Everything should be co-constructed to have lasting effects. Especially change at the big picture should involve everyone, especially in making the policy.

The above remark of the participant points to a highly emphasized element discussed in education, particularly when it comes to educational change. Commonsense may conceive of educational change as a technical and one-dimensional process (Louis, 1994). However, Datnow et al. (2002) believe that such conceptions are not enough to understand the complex nature of educational reforms and their implementations. They believe that realizing change and improvement in schools requires consideration of the co-constructed nature of change and involves a dynamic relationship between the culture of the school and various peoples' actions in many interlocking settings. However, achieving a set of goals depends on whether change occurs in practice (Fullan, 2001); therefore the change in thinking should be reflected on changes in *beliefs and practices*, which is the second key element of change emphasized by the participants of this study. For example, a Ministry specialist said:

Implementation matters a lot. Mostly, what we design on paper remains on paper because of the reluctance of schools to implement the reform. How can we succeed if they do not think it is necessary and implement it?

Pointing to the importance of beliefs and practices, the above specialist expresses resentment towards schools for maintaining the status quo and avoiding change, whilst the following school administrator mentions the other side of the issue:

Unless we are asked about what should change, we cannot do what is imposed on us. Implementation brings good outcomes but it should be cooperative.

The above remarks show an obvious controversy between the specialist and the school administrator regarding the practice of change. However, they both agree on the point that practice is a key aspect of change, along similar lines with Charters and Jones (1973) who claim that unless we focus on whether change in practice actually occurs, we run the risk of appraising non-events. What is also shown above is the complex nature of practice which should involve effective management. According to Anderson (2010), managing the practice of educational change should reflect the voice of the field practitioners and provide continuous support when the concerns intensify as the practitioners begin to cope with the new behaviours and approaches associated with putting the change into practice. At this point, the *new behaviours and approaches* were recurrently stated by the participants as a key element of educational change. The following academic stated:

I believe the actual change depends on the innovation of what is new. When you say change I understand the introduction of the new....The reforms are more effective when they change teachers' behaviours, the curriculum, the content. These are the core of education.

Indeed, these remarks remind us of the surface changes in education which fail to create new approaches and behaviours among practitioners and therefore have the least lasting effect. However, Fullan (2001, p. 26) believes that 'the majority of educational innovations extant in the field involve substantial changes'. As the above academic highlights, necessary changes especially in developing education systems need to prioritize new teaching methodologies, curriculum materials and resources including opportunities for active involvement of the child, using a variety of resources and techniques (Cuban & Usdan, 2003).

### 3.2 *Inclusive Education as a Tool for Change*

Inclusive education is a rising need and challenge to all education systems around the world (Ainscow, 2005). Its emphasis on the education for all within increasingly diverse communities and ordinary schools makes it an appropriate aim to meet the Education for All (EFA) targets (Hegarty, 2003). However, educational change in relation to inclusive education means more than a top-down process; the task at the policy level is to initiate or facilitate educational change in schools and therefore develop all aspects of the regular education system to provide quality education for all. In this study, there was an understanding of inclusive education as a potential tool for improving education, with current difficulties in implementation and a need to broaden the scope of inclusive education in terms of understanding and implementation.

#### 3.2.1 A tool for improving education

Understandings of and attitudes towards inclusive education differ among countries, schools and individuals. In many countries, inclusive education is considered as a technique to serve children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO, 2001). In this study, the majority of the participants thought of inclusive education as a radical approach that has already started to shake the existing paradigms in the education system and replace them with contemporary principles. For example, the following academic and school administrator said, respectively:

What makes this action [inclusive education] effective is that it obliges everyone to do something. Nobody can say 'I am not interested'. The teacher should improve themselves to teach everyone, the manager should manage well to help staff, families should do more, and the Ministry should make better policies and curriculum. Even us...We should explore what is better in education. This is a chance I guess.

It [inclusive education] is not only our job; but I support its ideas. Putting other children somewhere else...I cannot agree with that! All children should be here. This will empower all children.

The above remarks and many others are in line with the idea that well implemented inclusive models can improve social-emotional skills, academic achievement, school engagement, employment opportunities after graduation, transition to higher education, self-esteem, peer acceptance and sustainable relationships among children (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Tapasak & Walther-Thomas, 1999). Part of these developments is visible on policy and practice in Turkish schools (Erkiliç & Durak, 2013). However, as the above academic says, this improvement is possible when a systemic change occurs within school cultures, practices and policies with a participatory approach (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Dyson & Millward, 2002). Moreover, inclusive education acknowledges the interconnectedness of the elements within an education system and argues that it is compulsory to focus on these elements from a systemic perspective (Singal, 2005). Therefore, inclusive education systems can develop new learning opportunities for students from a variety of backgrounds, create new high stake accountability and management regimes, help understand and respond to local contexts and improve collaboration and professional development (Dyson, Goldrick, Jones, & Kerr, 2010).

#### 3.2.2 Problems in Implementation

Although inclusive education promises better educational outcomes for all children, reforming the education system in order to welcome students with a range of diverse needs is challenging; it requires identifying, implementing and evaluating a range of effective inclusive practices (Farrell, 2009). What is more, the level of success in developing and implementing such practices in Turkey and many other developing countries has been uneven up to now (Sakız & Woods, 2015). The following school administrator illustrated this point:

It is not easy to practice it [inclusive education] because we have problems in schools such as high population in classrooms....Teachers need more knowledge I think. They try to achieve the curricular objectives so there is no time for others [sic].

The above remarks of the school administrator show the interconnected aspects of inclusive education and the fact that change requires a holistic plan and strategic implementation (Datnow & Park, 2010). Davidenko and Tinto (2003) report that most countries fail to realize that the kind of change required to accelerate all students' learning is deep and systemic and therefore they engage in a piecemeal way of implementing inclusive practices. For example in Turkey, as the above school administrator indicated, the education system is highly competitive and the curricular standards favour no one but the most eligible. In addition, teachers with limited knowledge and experience of inclusion may develop negative attitudes towards educating students with low achievement levels or those who cannot adapt well to schools (Educational Reform Initiative, 2011). In such a circumstance, the integration of students with different ability levels or those with low socioeconomic backgrounds within mainstream schools is perceived as nothing but a placement issue. Therefore, the lack of success which actually stem from a superficial understanding and implementation may be attributed to the nature of inclusive education. This is a reason for calling for a system change to establish schools that



contain a common mission, a climate conducive to learning and an emphasis on learning whilst keeping the equity-excellence balance and protecting the educational needs of those children and young people who are most vulnerable and marginalized (Rouse & Florian, 1996).

### 3.2.3 A High Need for Change

The negative image presented above regarding implementation entails changes in some areas related to inclusive education in Turkey. Two issues were frequently mentioned by the participants. These were the need to change how inclusive education was understood and, therefore, the way it was practiced in schools. The following academic and Ministry specialist illustrated these points, respectively:

The aim should be to include everyone, not only disabled students. Ironically, even these [disabled students] are not well included although they are the target. We see that they are left aside in classes.

They [students] are referred to schools and placed there. That is all. Schools need to do more. They aim at only socializing them. But this already happens.

These statements address the issues of contextual understanding and practice of inclusive education in Turkey and many other countries (Katila, Meriläinen, & Tienari, 2010; Sakız & Woods, 2014). In Turkey, the policy guides that inclusion should aim at only disabled students (Erkılıç & Durak, 2013), which limits the success of inclusive education as well as the process of educational change. However, new conceptualizations of inclusive education propose that schools should welcome all children and provide them with education of good quality in an equitable way, which can increase the sustainability of change and its impact on pupil learning (Dyson & Millward, 2002; Smith, 2006). However, when inclusion is conceived of narrowly and the policy lacks sufficient guidance and support, the mission to develop and implement inclusive practices can fail, as shown in the statement above. It clearly shows that inclusion is seen as an act to place disabled students in mainstream schools and exclude them from other educational processes which involve learning, development and achievement. Undoubtedly, many other factors or their combination, in addition to those mentioned before, may account for this situation such as inflexible curricula, lack of professional competence or school management. The primary aim for policy-makers should be to address these issues within educational reform plans and support the process of their implementation in schools.

### 3.3 Major Barriers to an Inclusive Reform for Change

The issues mentioned in the previous theme may provide clues as to what may limit the success of inclusive education as a potential tool for reforming the education. However, two major barriers, which may be considered as global, were drawn out of the participants' views. These were the paradox in the paradigms and the centralization and competition surrounding the education system.

#### 3.3.1 Paradox in Paradigms

In recent years, education systems around the world, including Turkey, have faced numerous educational reform activities motivated by conflicting paradigms and ideologies. On the one hand, they aim to decrease the learning and achievement gap by making inclusive policies while on the other, they commit to the aim of raising standards of the performance and promote segregated environments for students with different ability levels. This was well illustrated by a school administrator:

In most cases others [students with low achievement] either do not come to the schools when they national exams take place or they sent home. Everyone knows nothing will change.

This statement clearly shows that the aim to include students with low achievement levels is actually transformed to exclusionary practice. Some reasons may account for this situation such as the nature of the national curricula and assessment system, school cultures and limited learning opportunities which favor the highest achievers (Slee, 2006). Clark, Dyson and Millward (1995) state that directing the process of change from the currently perceived exclusive to more inclusive practices requires reforms in six dimensions: the policy, organizational, teacher development, resource, pedagogical and curricular and values. Ballard (1995) points to the need to establish the epistemological basis of how we understand and order the educational action. He argues that the ways inclusive schools function derive from different paradigms which define students and teacher responsibilities in different ways. This requires more than simply placing students who are vulnerable to exclusion in mainstream classrooms and let the the exclusionary paradigms (mostly embedded within policy) shape school cultures and practices. Changing the system in a more equitable and inclusive direction requires a look beyond a narrowly set of standards; a wide range of goals should be targeted such as developing a positive sense of self, being able to make informed choices about one's own life and self-development and becoming economically active. These goals and associated skills can help individuals lead fulfilled lives, becoming active members of a society and do well in a chaotic labour market (Dyson et al., 2010).

### 3.3.2 Centralization and Competition

Competing paradigms in an education system create conflicts within the community and individual schools in giving priority to inclusive education. One of the issues faced by the Turkish education system is the failure to understand and respond to the dynamics of local contexts, explore local cultures, the existing resources and how these can be utilized to support or limit inclusive education. The other is the competitive nature of educational achievement. These are mentioned in the following remarks of the academic and school administrator, respectively:

A top-down way of managing education will not help schools because they [schools] fight with internal problems but they are not understood well. How can they change things when they do not understand what they are?

We are obliged to finish a torrent of subjects within a semester because national exams contain these. This is a very limited time frame. To be honest, we have a few students who can understand achieve the objectives.

Dyson and Millward (2002) point out that educational change is not a simple top-down process. Skrtic (1995) proposes that schools and the communities they serve should be trusted, supported and approached as a problem-solving team in realizing improvement in their own structures. This will provide the chance for determining the needs of the students in a particular school locally, educate them in line with these needs and assess their learning through internal means of monitoring progress.

## 4. Implications of the Study

Findings of this study have several implications for stakeholders in the education system. Starting with the decision-makers in education, this study reminds them the reality that change is not an avoidable phenomenon. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to realize a paradigmatic change to improve the mechanisms of mainstream schools to educate students with a wide range of needs. Today, the idea of inclusive education has become part of the discussion on developments in education at an international level (Ballard, 1999), and is gaining considerable popularity at conceptual and practical levels. Therefore, decision-makers need to adopt the idea that all students should be educated in mainstream schools unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise. This requires decision-makers in the education system to revise the current organizational mechanisms of their schools against the needs of increasingly diverse social structures.

As inclusiveness in an education system increases, diversity and difference become more apparent and challenging (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). This requires practitioners in the education system to take into account the individual traits and characteristics of students and design individual and school-wide programs for them, while this programming should be embedded as far as possible within the general education curriculum. In order to achieve this aim, prospective and practicing educators need to broaden their knowledge, skills and perceptions in relation to educating students with a range of diverse needs and interests. Groups of practitioners, who provide special or general education services within mainstream schools, require a thorough professional training so that they can understand, take a stance on and support the changes that are involving their area of practice (Minke, Bear, Deiner, & Griffin, 1996).

Finally, the lack of success in planning a framework for change and implementing it in Turkey is also valid as far as inclusive education is concerned. Though difficult to realize, inclusive education is an opportunity to improve the educational capacity of schools in order to provide education of good quality to all students. To achieve inclusive education, first and foremost, educational policy-makers need to design a wider range of learning opportunities, understand and respond to what is happening in the local contexts in which education takes place and move the system from one driven by centrally determined targets to one where actions are motivated by public concerns, interests and definitions (Dyson et al., 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

Over the last ten years, the Turkish education system has undergone far-reaching reforms aiming to improve various aspects of education. However, these not only fell short of achieving their aims but also were left shortly (Aksit, 2007) usually because strategists or reformists have considered change as too simple to occur through top-down, intrusive and straightforward interventions. However, successful educational reforms can make change happen when they understand change as a developmental process in attitudes and behaviors for individuals attempting to put new ideas and practices into use (Anderson, 2010; Hall & Hord, 2006).

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