

Evaluation of Boarding School in Turkey

(Case Study)

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Abstract

This research addresses some of the questions by offering a portrait of one boarding school in a rural province of Southeastern Turkey. The research focuses on the boarding arrangements at the school. Data was collected through fieldwork, school records and interviews with stakeholders in town of Musabeyli in Turkey. Results provide information about Boarding School but also give ideas as to what happens in others. The first part of the study is a description of the school. After that, I explored concerns and issues around the boarding school counting on the voices of parents, students, teachers and school administrators. Finally, the study includes some recommendations to improve the boarding school.

Keywords: Boarding school, rural education, primary education

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One of the biggest challenges in Turkish education system is to schooling rural children for middle school level. Until the recent past, much schooling in many rural areas was provided by way of small one-teacher village schools, enrolling students from grades 1—5. Appointing one teacher to a multigrade village school is cost-effective. These schools help to improve access in rural communities. The main problem is here to provide quality education.

After 5th grade, Turkish education system requires many expert teachers but building modern schools to small villages and supplying many teachers and facilities are not economic. The solution is more difficult in rural areas because of the many small settlement areas. In Turkey, there are 79.319 small settlement areas: 35.000 villages and 44.319 sub-villages (Ministry of National Education, 2006). In order to address quality problem in such schools and to make possible the extension of an enriched compulsory schooling to grade 8, beginning in 1997 the Turkish government initiated a policy of consolidating rural students into regional consolidated and, where necessary, boarding schools (Dulger, 2004).

The industry revolution in the late nineteenth century contributed to boarding and consolidated (bussing) school movement. Decision makers adapted the organization techniques from industry to school system (Orr, 1992). The belief in industrialized society was that small schools are ineffective to educate human capital for the country needs and large schools were the best way to raise children for future of the country. Boarding schools are more effective to change children behavior because of lack of parent affects. Moreover, after industrial revolution, many villagers migrated to urban areas to find a better job. As a result of migration, rural area population and enrollment rates were decreased and the educational cost was increased. The situation also contributed to boarding schools and closed to small rural schools (Kuitunen, 2004).

The first boarding school in Turkey was built in 1958 in Adana-Ceyhan district. Its students are just male but after 1963, the school started to accept female students too. In 1962, “Regional boarding school law” was prepared. Its first article states that, “Regional boarding school can be opened in the regions if they have not schools because of variety reasons; if a few villages are very close each other; or village houses are spread to large area”. The purpose of regional boarding school is to provide education 1—8 grades to students who have not school in their villages or who are from poor families. The government provides foods, clothes, course books, notebooks, and other course materials for these children (Ministry of National Education, 2007). After the compulsory eight-year primary education in 1997, regional boarding schools are expanded to all through country. Between 1997 and 2002, the

number of regional boarding schools was increased of 235%. In 2005, the number of regional boarding school is 301 with 146.006 student capacity (Ministry of National Education, 2005).

Boarding school is useful for children who do not have a school available in their village or they have transportation problems in reaching schools. In addition, boarding schools support poor families with its free food, clothes and books. Boarding schools can provide more quality education with their expanded curriculum than village schools. They are graded and have more facilities, like computer lab, gymnasium, etc. On the other hand, boarding school policy brings its new problems such as homesick and less parent-teacher involvement.

In this paper, I address some of the questions that follow from the 1997 school reform by offering a portrait of one boarding school in a rural province of Southeastern Turkey. My focus is on the boarding arrangements at the school. Thus the Musabeyli Regional Boarding School is only one of the ‘new’ consolidated schools in the district, offering education from grade 1 through 8. However at the other consolidated schools children return to their homes and villages at the end of the school day. At the boarding school, they are given leave to return home for one weekend every two weeks but often cannot do so because of distance and the lack of availability of transport.

This study results provide information about Musabeyli Regional Boarding School but also gives ideas what is happening in others. The first part of the study is a description of the school. After that, I explored concerns and issues around the boarding school by bringing the voices of parents, students, teachers and school administrators. Finally, the study submits some recommendations to improve the boarding school.

Research questions:

- (1) What is going on in the Musabeyli Regional Boarding School?
- (2) What are the concerns and issues in Musabeyli Regional Boarding School?
- (3) How can Musabeyli Regional Boarding School be improved?

Method

I used descriptive case study method for this study because it was helpful to develop an understanding of the boarding school system and concerns of the stakeholders. Descriptive case study research is better to gather information of a greater depth than would be possible using another methodology such as survey data. Patton (1990) asserts that “qualitative methods permit the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail; the fact that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data” (p. 165). Merriam (1998) defines a descriptive case study in

education as “one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon” (p. 38). Yin (1994) states that “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Under these definitions, I decided to a descriptive case study in education for this research.

Data was collected through fieldwork, school records and interviews with stakeholders in town of Musabeyli in Turkey.. I conducted informal observations to gain a more thorough understanding of the school and its climate in Musabeyli. I observed the buildings, students, teachers, school administrators, parents and other staff to see how this school runs. I also visited two villages and stayed with three families to observe their daily life and to understand their feelings better. Entry was not a problem because I had already friendship with these families.

School records and documentation were helpful and supportive sources in this evaluation. I reviewed the government records, briefing files of the schools and documents to gain information on the number of teachers, number of students, girls’ enrollment rate, etc. In addition to fieldwork and school records, I interviewed students, teachers, parents and school administrators. I interviewed 49 people: 18 students, 17 parents, 11 teachers and 3 school administrators. I also had informal conversations with others from Musabeyli, about 30 people. All interviews were informal with open-ended questions. I used pseudonyms for the names of people, school and district to protect the identities of my informants.

Results and Discussion

Musabeyli Regional Boarding School

The case site was chosen as a Musabeyli Regional Boarding School because the school is a typical regional boarding school—provides elementary level (grades 1-8) education to children who do not have a school available in their village or they have transportation problems. Musabeyli Regional Boarding School opened in 2000 and located on a 30.000 square meter land in the southern part of Musabeyli town. The area around the school is bare and there are no shopping places or housing around the school. The school provides elementary level (grades 1-8) education to children who do have not a school in their village or have transportation problems to reaching a school. Transportation problems are related with distance, road and weather conditions. Distant villages with dirt roads have transportation problems especially in winter time. In addition, many villagers have no car and it creates transportation problems.

Musabeyli Regional Boarding School enrolls 291 students from 21 villages - 129 female and 162 male. Fifty-four of them are in 7-10 age-group. Students are boarded 7-days of a week and they go to their village (family) on weekends for every two weeks. The school provides health insurance, food, clothes and books for them.

The school has three main buildings; school, dormitory and apartments. There are apartments for teachers, administrators and other staff but they do not meet the total needs. The school building has three floors and includes a science laboratory, technology classroom and a played space. Technology classroom (computer lab) has 8 computers. It is not enough for students so 3-4 students use one computer together in technology courses. There is no internet connection in the computer lab but school principal said that in a few weeks ADSL connection will be provided by government. The school canteen is small and services to students and staffs. It includes course materials (notebooks, pen, pencil and so on), some chocolates, gums, crackers and coke. Assigned school children run the canteen. The children do have not much money for shopping. In the basement, there is a big bare multipurpose room used on rainy days for ceremonies and physical education, sometimes for theater performances and other social activities, or watching movies.

The paved playground area is between dormitory and school building area. There is a basketball field in front of the school building and volleyball field in front of the dormitory. There is no art and craft room, gym and theatre room in the school. In addition, the school has not surrounding wall and creates problem to keep students in school area.

There are 14 teachers working in the school. One consultant teacher works in the school to help students with their educational, social and physiological problems.

My role is to improve the learning and development process of each child and my role is not limited with students. I also work with teachers and parents to understand and seek solutions for many challenges of children in boarding school. (Consultant teacher, his second years in the school)

There are 5 classroom teachers working in 1-5 grades. In grades 6-8, teachers are organized according to subjects. Assistant school principal said that “The school needs an English, art, physical, and computer teachers and one health staff.”

Tutor teachers work in dormitory to supervise and help students after school hours. Their duty starts at 8 pm and ends at 8 pm. They sleep in a tutor teachers’ room in dormitory. Until 100 children, one tutor teacher is assigned.

There are three employees in the school. One employee works as security staff and night times check the safety of buildings and students. Another employee takes care of the central heating system. Another works as storekeeper. He keeps foods and oil in depot.

Employees are responsible to administration. They work in other school works if school principal assign them.

Dormitory

Some problems in Musabeyli Regional Boarding School are the same with other consolidated schools around but some problems are distinctive and coming from its dormitory structure. The dormitory building has three floors. Male and female sections are separated. The total student capacity of the dormitory is 300. All 291 students from the school accommodate in the boarding between 7 and 15 ages. In addition to students' bedrooms, the dormitory has administrator's room, store rooms, tutor teacher's rooms, guest room, and study rooms. In the basement of the dormitory, there are baths for male and female students separately. At the entrance of female dormitory, there is a patient room. In addition, there is a laundry, bathrooms, central heating, and spare equipment rooms in the basement.

The students' bedrooms contain 4-8 bunk-beds furnished with one pillow, one blanket, sheets, and steel wardrobes. The rooms are heated by radiator. Bathrooms are located in every corridor. They include a few sinks, mirrors and urinal. The toilets are Turkish style: there is a tap on the wall and hose on it.

There are no any restrooms in many village houses so many children in the early grades do not know that how to use the restrooms. Intolerable smells come from restrooms and affect all corridors. The teachers instruct students how they should use restrooms but it does not solve the problem. (Tutor teacher, her third years in the school)

Study rooms include some tables and chairs and blackboard. The dining room and kitchen are located at the entrance level of the dormitory. Food is prepared in the school kitchen. All pots, dishes, oven and cupboards are steel and dishwasher is used to clean pots and dishes. The dining room is near the kitchen and has a total capacity of 170 students. The foods are distributed by cook with one or two older students helping. Students line up and take their food and go to the tables. Older children help younger children by carrying their food to the tables. Each meal includes three kinds of foods. In the festivals such as Ramadan or Sacrifice festivals, special meals are provided. There are no snacks provided between the meals. Everybody accept that some snacks should be given between meals but there is a budget problem.

Generally, children who are from the same villages reside in the same room without the age division. First grade and eight grade students stay in the same room. Sometimes, it is demanded by parents.

Students wake at 6:30 am. Breakfast is at 7:00 am and school starts at 8:00 am. The lunch break is between 12:10pm and 13:20 pm. School is over at 3:00 pm. After that students

are free. Some of them spend time in the playground playing volleyball or basketball and some watch them or walk around. Some students watch TV in dining room and some take a rest in their bedrooms. Tutor teachers spend time in the office of the dormitory or join the activities with children such as playing volleyball or watching TV. Students and teachers relationship is very informal.

There is no school on weekends. They spend time playing basketball, volleyball, watching TV, studying lesson or resting in their bed. Every second weekend, children can visit their families.

The school has 16 professional staff, including one school principal, three principal assistants and 12 teachers. An assistant principal is responsible for dormitory. He supervises and manages teachers and other staff and prepares the duty chart. He deals with students problems related with dormitory. He arranges and signs permission papers of the students to go outside of the school. He is responsible to set up discipline, cleanliness and order in the dormitory. He controls the food storage, dining room, laundry, bedrooms, and bathrooms to keep clean and tidy. A second assistant principal has responsibility for the budget.

Tutor teachers work in the dormitory. They are selected from the teaching staff by school principal and approved by the local governor. Tutor teachers can work maximum three days weekly. According to boarding school law, only one-tutor teacher supervise the 100 dormitory students.

As a tutor teacher, I supervise students after school times and am on duty during nights. I help students about their homework in scheduled time. I watch students to be sure that they are eating, studying and going to bed in time. I organize students in laundry and bath times. I take attendance in study and sleep times and submit report to responsible assistant-principal. I deal with sick students. I welcome visitors and control the night-security staff. (Tutor teacher, his two years in the school)

There are three employees in the school. One employee works as security staff and night times, he check the safety of buildings and students. Another employee takes care of the central heating system. Another works as storekeeper. He should be present during receiving items to check and keep them in store. He keeps foods and oil and other items in the depot and keeps records of them in an official store notebook. He delivers daily supplies to teacher in duty and takes his/her signature. Every year, he arranges a report for coming and going items to submit to the school administration.

Students are also assigned for some duties in the school and dormitory after 4th grade. They help tutor teachers to count students and to keep bedroom cleanness and tidy. Big children help small children to wake up, dressing; clean their cabinet and bed. I do not believe that this is the correct way but it is unavoidable results of lack of the staffs. (School principal, his fifth years in the school)

Girl students take care of their small sisters and brothers or sometimes neighbors' children in their village pattern so in the board, their roles are the same. On the other hand, taking care of the small children in the board is a new role for boys. (Consultant teacher)

Continuing Concerns and Issues around Musabeyli Regional Boarding School

Musabeyli Regional Boarding School has some physical problems. Some problems of the school are direct related with lack of the municipality services. The school and dormitory have drinking water and garbage problem.

Musabeyli municipality provides water for the school but the water is not healthy and it is given to students by adding chlorine. The municipality does not have any garbage truck so school garbage could not be taken regularly. (School principal)

In addition, there is no sewage system of the school as well as the town. One big hole is used to storage waste matter. The hole is full frequently and the municipality has no vehicle to clean it. As a result of these, dirty waste liquids drain the school around and create unhealthy environment. Another consolidated school in the town has the same problem. (Assistant principal, his second years in the school)

Moreover, the school needs an electric generator. Power cut happens frequently in the rural area because of the bad infrastructure of electric network, especially in winter times. This decreases the education quality in the school and creates security problems in the dormitory. (Another assistant principal, his third years in the school)

The school has no surrounding wall and this creates problem to keep students in the school area and playground is bared and needs to be afforested. School facilities are limited: no art and craft room, gym and theatre room in the school. These problems limit the social activities for children. Some days in winter time, children cannot play outside because of severe whether condition and they are bored. The school building has one multipurpose room but it is not enough big.

The school has lack of staff problem, especially in dormitory section. Classroom teachers have no responsibility for dormitory students. Tutor teachers take care of the students in the dormitory but this care is limited.

When students pee their bed the tutor teachers organize older students or employee and they clean the messy situation. Tutor teachers guide to students in laundry and in the study rooms. But when students have nightmare etc, other older students in the room take care of them. Obviously, the dormitory needs many child care staff to clean dormitory, beds, and help children for laundry, dressing and so on. (Consultant teacher)

There is no nurse and doctor in the school. Tutor teachers deal with health problems of the students and report important case to school administration. School administration can take sick students to city hospital or can invite doctors and nurses to the school to exam students or a lice problem etc. This is a free service by government health centers around. All students in boarding schools have full health insurance.

Transportation of Students is another problem in Musabeyli Regional Boarding School. Every second weekend, children go to their villages to visit their families. If the parents want they can come and take their children every weekend but there is a transportation problem. There is no mass transportation system between villages and the school.

Many parents have no car. I and other three parents rent a car together and bring our children but many have not enough money to do it. Some children cannot go to their villages because of money problem. Some children walk their village and some hitchhike. Some parents come to the school with a tractor and take many children on it to carry near villages or 5-6 persons travel in one motorbike. (50 years-old, farmer, parents of two children in the boarding school)

Attendance problem is another important issue in the school. There are three kinds of attendance problems in Musabeyli Regional Boarding School. First, in the first and last month of the school year (September and May), parents have much works in villages and many students help their parents instead of going to school. School principal said that “Average 20% of students do not attend to school in May through September.”

My father, mother and big brother work in the garden. They have much works. I stay at home and take care of my small sisters and brothers, clean home and prepare foods for my family. (7th grade, unattended boarding school student in May)

Secondly, there is a family visiting every two weeks. Children go to their villages Friday afternoon and come back Monday afternoon. It means that one school day absentee in two weeks. Third, the more important attendance problem is girl students’ absentee.

There are 291 students in Musabeyli Regional Boarding School: 162 males and 129 girls. Fourteen male and 41 female students are absentee permanently. These are formal results. In addition, there are hidden absentee students. Many children have not enrolled to the system when they born, especially girls so they do not have official ID cards. After marriage, they apply to government office to take ID card and they can stay out of education system. (School principal)

Musabeyli governor implemented some radical solution ways to increase school attendance, especially for girl students. He threatens poor villages to cut their health insurance if they do not send girls to the school. He also encouraged parents with some money awards: average \$25 monthly for per child. The amount is important for poor villages. The governor started family visiting program. Many teachers visited rural families to encourage and convince them to send girls to the school. Parents are invited to the boarding schools and they stayed in dormitory one night as guest. Consultant teacher said that “The effects of these policies are limited: at the beginning, some parents send children to school but later, many gave up again.”

Lack of Parents’ interest is another issue for Musabeyli Regional Boarding School.

The majority of the parents do not come to parent-teacher meetings. Many of them have no car to come to school from villages but I believe that if they had a car the result would not be changed. Many parents send their children to school because it is compulsory and after eight years compulsory period, they do not think to send their children to upper level education. (School principal)

There are some reasons of parents’ indifference. First, they do not have enough money to meet educational needs of their children. They say that "We don't have money for bread. How can I send my girls to school?" Second, Labor of children is very important for Musabeyli villagers. Children help their family by working in many different job such as gathering grapes, olives; grazing livestock; teenage girls take care of their small sisters and

brothers. When children go to outside of their village, they also could not take labor training. This is a real economic loss for poor villagers.

Third, parents do not want to send small children to the boarding school.

My child is too small to live away from family and other big children can hurt them in the dormitory. He can live adaptation problems. Boarding school should receive students after 3rd or 5th grade. (40 years old, housewife, agriculture worker)

Boarding school is not good especially for small children. Living separate from family and lack of affection creates physiological problems on children. They also do not have skill to take care of themselves. (Consultant teacher)

Fourth, parents in rural Musabeyli do not want to send their girls to school if the school is out of the village and girls are big.

Girls are married when they are 15-16 ages. After marriage, her husband can meet her needs so girls' education is not important. In addition, I do not like to send my girls to the same school as boys. (Farmer, 55 years old)

On the other hand, many students like to go to boarding school.

I am happy to be part of the boarding school community. The school gives me pocket money, pajamas, clothes, shoes and underwear and I sleep in my own bed. I can play basketball, volleyball and football here instead of working in village works. (Sixth grade female student)

The school distance is very important for parents even if it is boarding school. The priority of the villagers is where their children go to school instead of what happens there.

Recommendations

The school dormitory provides three meals food for students. The school buying committee buys large amount food items and stocks them but food storage rooms are not enough and the school needs storage with temperature control to keep foods long time. The school needs staff; especially many female child care staffs for night and day time to take care of children needs under the teachers' control. Readily available health care is a problem. At least one health staff should be assigned for boarding schools. In order to solve attendance problem, courses can continue on weekends and winter break can cancel in favor of extend summer holiday.

Small children should not send to the boarding school but the policy makers cannot find any alternative policy for these inaccessible rural areas, then there should be age-group arrangement in the dormitory. For example, the first two floors can be arranged for 1—3 grades and their restrooms, bunks, mirrors, wall colors should be arranged according to needs of this age-group. Moreover, the dormitory rooms should be rearranged from large room system to small room system. One room can accommodate two children in the same age group.

There is a long period between dinner and breakfast (13 hours) for students so the school should provide a snack after dinner. Government should increase the meal budget to add additional snack for menu. The government can use some policies to encourage teachers to work in boarding schools such as; more salary, free apartment or transportation service. In addition, the government can provide a transportation service for students to go to their villages and come back every two week.

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