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TITLE: THE ROLE OF FOREIGN AND TURKISH SCHOOLS IN CHANGING LATE OTTOMAN
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PAGES: 5-21

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/474333>

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN AND TURKISH SCHOOLS IN CHANGING LATE OTTOMAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY: ROBERT COLLEGE AND MEKTEB-İ SULTANİ

Evrim ŞENCAN GÜRTUNCA*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to present the changes and innovations in the field of education during the late Ottoman era, by using examples from the education sector (schools). Robert College, as it shines amongst the others due to its distinctive mission and vision and because it has continued its existence until today, have been chosen to represent foreign schools. The *Mekteb-i Sultani*, known as *Galatasaray High School* today, for it was the first local educational institution that modeled its curriculum on the modern educational system of the West, have been chosen as the sample Turkish school for analysis. With their contributions in developing the Turkish education system; in conclusion, the changes in the educational system and their role in transforming the society during the late Ottoman era have been studied, by considering these two schools, which are seemingly different but actually closely associated with each other.

Keywords: *Foreign Schools, Robert College, Mekteb-i Sultani, History of Education.*

GEÇ OSMANLI EĞİTİM POLİTİKASININ DEĞİŞİMİNDE YABANCI VE TÜRK OKULLARININ ROLÜ: ROBERT KOLEJ VE MEKTEB-İ SULTANİ

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, eğitim kurumlarından (okullardan) örneklerle, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde eğitim alanındaki değişim ve yenileşmeyi ortaya koymaktır. Yabancı okullar içinden seçilen örnek, misyon ve vizyon farklılığıyla diğerleri arasından ayrılan ve günümüze kadar varlığını sürdüren Robert Kolej'dir. Türk okullarından seçilen örnek ise, batının modern eğitim sistemini örnek alarak ders programını oluşturmuş ilk yerli eğitim kurumu olan Mekteb-i Sultani, bugünkü adıyla Galatasaray Lisesi'dir. Çalışmanın sonucunda, görünüşte birbirinden farklı, ancak birbiriyle ilişkili olan bu iki okulun, Türk eğitim sisteminin gelişimine katkıları ortaya konularak, Osmanlı'nın son döneminde eğitim sistemindeki değişimler ve bu değişimlerin toplumun yenileşme çabalarındaki rolü incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Yabancı Okullar, Robert Kolej, Mekteb-i Sultani, Eğitim Tarihi.*

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The Educational Reform Process During The Late Ottoman Era

For understanding the importance of Robert College and Mekteb-i Sultani in the field of history of education, the educational reform process during the late Ottoman era should be examined and this process can be studied in four main phases: The first phase was the period between the mid-18th century and the Tanzimat reform era (1776-1839); the second phase was the Tanzimat reform era itself (1839-1876); the third phase was the First Constitutionalist and soon after absolute monarchy eras (1876-1908), the fourth and last phase was the Second Constitutionalist era (1908-1918).¹

During the first period between the years 1776 and 1839, the madrasas which had shaped society until that time became very inadequate as they were not able to follow the developments in the modern world. As a consequence, some innovations had been tentatively introduced. During this period, mostly new military schools were opened, primary education became compulsory, the number of civilian schools was rapidly increased and most importantly, students were sent to European countries.² The second phase, Tanzimat Reform era, was the period during which the modern educational institutions were increased in number. Before proceeding to this period, I would like to emphasize that the innovations that took place during the Tanzimat Reform era were continued in the following Constitutionalist Eras and great emphasis was placed especially on the development of Junior High Schools (*Rüşdiyes*) and High Schools (*İdadis*). During the third phase (1876-1908), three articles of the Ottoman Basic Law (*Kanun-i Esasi*) were reserved for education and both general (that is primary, junior high and high schools) and private (that is foreign and minority schools) educational institutions were included. In line with the libertarian ideas introduced by the Second Constitutionalist Era, the schools opened during this period were categorized as libertarian schools since the emphasis was laid on the concepts of *individual* and *citizen*.³ Importance was placed on preschool education while at the same time an Ottoman University called the *Dar'ül-Fünûn* was created, where all Ottoman citizens could receive a modern university education. Together with these reforms, an all-girls private higher education school laid on the concepts of *individual* and *citizen*.⁴

Tanzimat era, the main period of this study, that spanned the years 1839 to 1876, was a period of reconstruction and modernization for the Ottoman Empire. The governing idea of this period was considering all citizens equal regardless of their class, religion, language or sectarian affiliation, as was emphasized in the Imperial Edict of Reorganization. This equality was also valid in the field of

1 Yahya Akyüz, *Türk Eğitim Tarihi*, Pegem Akademi, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 143-314.

2 Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Osmanlı'da Eğitimin Modernleşmesi (1839-1908)*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, pp. 41-44.

3 Akyüz, *ibid*, p. 265, p. 267.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 265, p. 267.

education. This reconstruction period when the Empire took a heightened interest in looking to the example of the contemporary West, had created an observable change in the social habits and daily life of the people. At the dawn of the era, the education given at the madrasas, primary schools, mosques and lodges was insufficient, to keep pace with the changes and developments introduced in the Tanzimat era. Consequently it became clear that a different style of education was needed and it was necessary to make fundamental changes within educational institutions and to the system for delivering education.⁵ For this reason, the Tanzimat era was veritably a milestone in the history of the Turkish educational system. Studies on the field of education, regarding both the quantitative and qualitative changes have determined that the major flaw was the lack of priority placed on higher education until that time.⁶ The educational institutions that met this deficiency and enabled the students to graduate from higher schools were colleges, namely the foreign schools, opened during the first years of the reconstruction period.⁷ One of these colleges was definitely Robert College founded by a missionary named Cyrus Hamlin. When it was first established in 1863, the founders laid great emphasis on secular education, a concept which had never seen in other schools in the Empire up to that time and implemented a brand-new curriculum. Thus Robert College became an out of the ordinary school and put its stamp on both the Ottoman and Republican eras.⁸

Robert College

Founder Hamlin arrived in Istanbul, the capital of the Empire, in 1839, as a missionary. He lived there, founded *Bebek Seminary* where he worked as a missionary teacher, researched and observed the people and consequently became convinced that the transformation of the Empire and the changes in the internal structure of the society were creating new needs and demands regarding education.⁹ In this manner, Hamlin, decided to accept the offer of Christopher R. Robert, a philanthropist merchant, about opening a New-England style secular College.

Robert College was the first American school founded in Istanbul, in 1863, and moreover, even though its founder was a missionary, the school was not related to any missionary group of the time. Robert College aimed to give a secular education based on equality to its students regardless of their religions, languages and races and provided an opportunity for thousands of students to have high level education. When the American College for Girls was founded in 1871, they worked cooperatively. These two schools gathered under the

5 Somel, *ibid*, pp. 38-41, p. 104.

6 *Ibid.*, 35-175; Mehmet Ö. Alkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Modernleşme ve Eğitim", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, Vol. 6, Issue. 12, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 24-35. For improvements of education during the Tanzimat Era, see, Akyüz, *ibid*, pp. 157-222.

7 Somel, *ibid*, 254-256.

8 Orlin Sabev, *Spiritus Roberti*, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2014, pp.136-138, p.120.

9 Cyrus Hamlin, *My Life and Times*, The Pilgrim Press, Chicago, n.d.

same school master in 1932 and were merged in 1971 to transform into Boğaziçi University. Since then the university has gained a prestigious place in the higher education system of Turkey. During the early years of its foundation, Robert College was mostly preferred by foreigners and Turkish students were not willing to attend there. When the college commenced its educational activities in 1863, it introduced a brand-new educational system having a curriculum consisting of positive sciences, with only five instructors and four students.¹⁰ It was stated in the reports written by the Board of Overseers that, the most important aspects of its difference, were the language-based structuring, instead of a religion-based one, and the determination of its vision, mission, aim and curriculum in advance. It was also emphasized in the same reports that, the aim of the college should be shaping a new class of people in the East which would be completely different from the previous one, that its educational system should endeavor to improve the intellect of the students and the graduates should necessarily be experts in a profession. Thus it aimed to provide an education that would have an impact on shaping the character of its students. Moral and spiritual improvement were also considered within this scope. Even though the language of education was English, there was a separate "Foreign Languages Department" where the students would have elective courses to learn Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, German, French and Slavic.¹¹ The Preparatory Department became a part of the education system of the college in a short while and importance was attached to teaching languages other than English as well. Courses like Geology, Algebra, Music, Latin, Physiology, Analytical Geometry, Rhetoric and Philosophy were new fields of education within the borders of the Empire.

Over the years, the college continued to renew not only its outer appearance, but also its curriculum. Also, the college brought in something new with the method allowing elective courses. During their five years education, beginning from sub-freshman class to senior class, the students were able to register to elective courses in line with their wish and abilities in addition to required courses. It is interesting that the Turkish language was also regarded as one of the foreign languages and the Turkish course was included in the elective courses. In other words, Turkish was not one of the required courses.¹² In addition, Botany, History, Logic and Hygiene courses which was not noticed in the curriculums of any other Ottoman school, were included to the schedule.¹³ One of the other features differentiating Robert College from other equivalent

10 Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Anadolu'daki Amerika*, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara, 2000, p.141.

11 *Report of the President and the Faculty of Robert College 1883-1884*, Bible House, İstanbul, 1883, p. 21. For the curriculum of the college, see, *Report of the President and the Faculty of Robert College 1896-1921*, pp.23-25. For foreign language education, George Washburn, *Robert Kolej Hatıraları İstanbul'da Elli Yıl*, Meydan Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, p.47.

12 *Robert College Catalogue 1912-1914*, pp.51-53; Keith M. Greenwood, *Robert College: The American Founders*, Boğaziçi University Press, İstanbul, 2003, pp.91, 92.

13 *Report of the President and the Faculty of Robert College 1912-1914*, pp. 51-54; Robert College Archive Arnavutköy Campus, *school report of Özer Sevüktekin*, his student file, 1944.

educational institutions was that, it attached great importance to physical development. By adding a course in Athletics to its curriculum, the college went one step further beyond the classical gym class and by opening athletics and gymnastics clubs, the sports were pushed to the forefront.¹⁴ Then, sports clubs were established, and these clubs led to the establishment of baseball, football and basketball teams in due course. Here I would like to emphasize that basketball was not a prominent sport even in Western Europe in 1891 but the teachers of Robert College brought basketball for the first time to Ottoman territories and the Robert College Basketball Team was established in 1920.¹⁵ When we have studied school files of the students in the archives, we discovered a document, named *Permanent Record Card*, which shows us the sports clubs had been improved due to the demands of the students and emphasis was placed on arts along with sports, and consequently photography, theater, music, philately, reading and travel clubs were opened.¹⁶ In brief, this type of a curriculum and the vision of placing emphasis on sports and arts along with regular courses could not be found in any foreign or Turkish school at the time Robert College was founded. As a matter of fact, it is obvious that courses like botany, sociology, psychology, analytic geometry, mechanical drawing, philosophy, history of philosophy, philosophy of history, history of civilization and pedagogy had been unknown in the Ottoman educational system.¹⁷

As is well known, people having a different knowledge base, thoughts and world-view, had been graduated from various educational institutions like madrasas, military schools, minority schools and foreign schools in the Empire.¹⁸ However, during the late period of the Empire, when Turkish students did not prefer to register in foreign schools, the youth who grew up with aforesaid curriculum were only foreigners and minorities. Thus Turkish students fell behind and consequently, when we consider the Ottoman citizens as a whole, an imbalance in the educational levels of the youth came into existence. In order to eliminate this imbalance, keep pace with the internal reconstruction of the empire, educate Turkish-Muslim civil servants in speaking foreign languages, create a knowledge-based society and have literate and well educated people, the founding of educational institutions was expedited and educational reforms were made.¹⁹ Some of these reforms which can be regarded as gains, provided to Turkish schools by the western style education included: the transition to

14 Washburn, *ibid*, p.285. Physical education was only known as military training at that time throughout the Empire: Dağhan Irak, "At the Heart of the Sports: Robert College", *The Anatomy of a Tradition: 150 Years of Robert College*, İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 2013, p. 239.

15 *Ibid.*, 254.

16 Robert College Archive, Arnavutköy Campus, see for example Fatih Üçer and Ferdi Hüsnü Yüksel's student files.

17 Sabev, *ibid*, pp.142-148; Washburn, *ibid*, pp.126, 127.

18 Hidayet Vahapoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Azınlık ve Yabancı Okullar*, 2nd edn, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 2005, p. 84.

19 Gülsün Düzenli, "Mekteb-i Sultaniden Bugüne Galatasaray Lisesi", *Toplumsal Tarih*, Vol. 5, Issue. 26, İstanbul, 1996, pp. 20-42, pp.20-21.

passing a grade level instead of passing a course, conditions of the granting of diplomas, hiring qualified teachers, continuation of post-school training, addition of positive sciences to the curriculums, placing importance on physical improvement and provision of language instruction.²⁰ In the same period, teacher training schools gained prominence, and alongside these, technical schools were also opened.²¹ When it was observed from colleges that female students were being highly valued, it was ascertained that the education of Muslim girls was insufficient in comparison with the education of non-Muslim girls and consequently schools for girls were also considered important.²² Thus innovations in the educational institutions had begun to be applied step-by-step. The greatest and most important step was establishment of the Mekteb-i Sultani in 1868. In other words, the Mekteb-i Sultani was the most tangible example of the positive contribution of the western educational system to the Turkish one.

Mekteb-i Sultani

Beginning from their establishments and over all the years after that Robert College and the Mekteb-i Sultani remained two of the most important, most prestigious, most talked-about, most salient and most preferred educational institutions. While the first one has a different status, vision and mission from other foreign schools, the second one is rather different from other Turkish schools in the same way at that time. As the Ottoman Empire could not obtain the expected results from the students who had been sent to France and other European countries beginning from the reform era, they found the solution by working on an educational institution offering western style education within the Empire.²³ In other words the solution was opening up to the West, through education.

Upon the directive issued by The Ministry of National Education (*Maarif-i Umumi Nezareti*), established in 1857, it was decided to open a Turkish school compatible with the standards of the French high school where Muslim and non-Muslim citizens would have an education together with the aim of protecting the Empire's territorial and political integrity. In order to achieve this, the new school should be unifying and binding and should take secularism into consideration.²⁴ In the end, opening a high school which would have a positivist and liberal educational system in Istanbul was brought to the agenda. This high school should be controlled by the state and the language of education would be French. Both the capitulations and the French Catholic schools in Ottoman territories had a great impact on the inclination towards France by the Ottoman

20 Akyüz, *ibid*, pp.203, 235, 236.

21 Somel, *ibid*, p.168.

22 Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamit Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1991, p. 27.

23 Necdet Sevinç, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Misyoner Faaliyetleri*, BilgeOğuz Yayınları, İstanbul, 2005, p. 84.

24 *Ibid.*, 83- 84.

authorities in their attempt to modernize national education. Sultan Abdülaziz was in France at that time and it made it possible for the Turkish government to discuss this matter with the French ambassador in Istanbul and consequently, by merging the Ottoman education with French system, the Mekteb-i Sultani was opened.²⁵ The school that was taken as an example was Robert College, which was opened only five years previously and which would be its main competitor in the future.²⁶

The mission of the establishment of the Mekteb-i Sultani was unity in education. While its primary aim was providing civil servants for the state whose input was needed due to the reforms implemented during the Tanzimat era by educating elites and then satisfying the need for literate and cultured class of people who were nourished by the western science its educational approach based on approaching all classes in the country as equal lent support to the concept of Ottomanism.²⁷ Because of this aim, the school emerged as the school of an ideology which defended the unity of the empire.²⁸ Even bringing shaykh al-islam (*Şeyh-ül İslam*) and the representatives of other religions together at its opening ceremony, was clearly intended as a sign of the equality principle being pursued by the school.²⁹

Like Robert College, Sultani provided paid education and was open to students from every nationality.³⁰ In order to apply its equality principle, Sultani had determined its student quota half and half for its opening year, to contain both Muslim and non-Muslim students (provided that total did not exceed 600 students); but as a result of this, the school had to face harsh religious criticism.³¹ Following the forbidding of Catholic students to register in the school by the Pope, the Russian embassy also forbade the Russian students to attend this school. Jews on the other hand accepted to send their children to Sultani, provided that appropriate meals be prepared for them.³² Even though some Muslim families also did not want to send their children to Sultani, the State announced that there would be no need to send students to Europe anymore and warranted that successful engineers, teachers, economists and linguists of the future would be graduated from this school.³³ When we consider the prestigious professions and

25 Süleyman Kocabaş, *Misyonerlik ve Misyonerler*, Vatan Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006, p. 136; Sevinç, *ibid*, p.84; Kodaman, *ibid*, p.134; Washburn, *ibid*, p.54; Vahapoğlu, *ibid*, p. 87.

26 Washburn, *ibid*, 54-55.

27 Kodaman, *ibid*, pp. 134-135; Adnan Şişman, "Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultanisi", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 13, Ankara, 1996, p.326.

28 İhsan Sungu, "Galatasaray Lisesinin Kuruluşu", *Belleten*, Cilt 7, Sayı 28, Ankara, 1943, p. 324.

29 Şişman, *ibid*, 324.

30 Kodaman, *ibid*, p.139; Düzenli, *ibid*, p. 22; Sungu, *ibid*, p. 324.

31 Hasan Hüseyin Dilaver, "Sultaniler", *Osmanlı*, Vol. 5, Ankara, 1999, p. 315; Şişman, *ibid*, p. 324; Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2007, p. 242. There were only 300 applicants in the Sultani initially: Sungu, *ibid*, p. 324.

32 Sevinç, *ibid*, p.80; Alkan, *ibid*, p.29; Sungu, *ibid*, p. 331.

33 Berkes, *ibid*, p.243; Emel Engin, *Galatasaray Lisesi (1923-1950 Dönemi)*, Marmara Üniversitesi, unpublished master's thesis, İstanbul, 2007, p. 11.

social status of the graduates of this school, we would say that they were right. In conformity with their assertion, The Mekteb-i Sultani (Galatasaray High School) progressed rapidly and became an educational institution graduating successful and distinguished students in a short time.

All positive contributions of and transferred innovations by foreign schools to Turkish ones, were realized both between Robert College and the Mekteb-i Sultani: Rewarding successful students, offering scholarships to needy students, boarding opportunities, yearbooks for alums and driving the foreign language education forward, can be regarded as some of these positive contributions.³⁴ Also the bedframes, used only in boarding foreign schools up to that time, started to be brought from France for Mekteb-i Sultani.³⁵

Courses like geography, arithmetic, drawing, rhetoric, handicrafts, law³⁶ (the law course was included for the first time in Ottoman territories in this school in 1874), chemistry, painting, literature and physical training were not conventional courses in Turkish schools of the time, but in Robert College. Furthermore, exactly like Robert College, the Mekteb-i Sultani also did not stick to its earliest curriculum, but brought novelties in the course of time.³⁷ When we compare the curriculums of both schools, their contributions with respect to positive sciences to Ottoman educational system, can be clearly seen.³⁸ The epitomes of western educational system such as secular education, caring about sports and physical improvement, foreign language instruction, rewarding, scholarship possibilities, boarding educational opportunity, student registration based on the equality principle, giving importance to positive sciences and forming student societies, sprung up in these two schools. I believe that one of the most important reasons for their still being very prestigious schools, is the fact they have always broken new ground and made no compromises regarding their educational stance.

On the other hand, even if these two schools have many similarities, it's also worthwhile to explore the competition between them, because Mekteb-i Sultani became a rival of Robert College after its establishment.

Robert College Versus Mekteb-i Sultani

The language of education in Robert College was English from the time of its establishment. Later on, other languages including Turkish were all elective courses (German, Greek, French and Turkish). When Sultani was opened on

34 "Galatasaray Lisesi", *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 11, İstanbul, 1958, pp. 5943-5942; Emine Kocamanoglu, *Yabancı Okullarda Din Eğitimi, Robert Kolej-Mekteb-i Sultani Örneği*, Marmara Üniversitesi, unpublished doctoral thesis, İstanbul, 2003, p.166; Sungu, *ibid*, p. 326.

35 Düzenli, *ibid*, p.23.

36 Sungu, *ibid*, p. 325.

37 Düzenli, *ibid*, 26-27.

38 For compare the curriculums of both schools during Ottoman period based on foreign language, religion, sciences, mathematics and humanities bases, see, Sabev, *ibid*, pp.294-297; Sungu, *ibid*, p. 325, 328.

the other hand, the Ottoman Porte demanded that the language of education should be Turkish, but this demand was not accepted and it was decided that the compulsory language of education should be French, provided that some courses would be taught in Turkish.³⁹ Later on, beginning from 1890, both French and Turkish were used as languages of education at the same time.⁴⁰ While it was compulsory to prefer either one of the Science or Literature departments in other high schools, there were Turkish and French departments in Sultani.⁴¹ While literature courses were in Turkish, science courses were in French. Another novelty was also applied in 1890 and as of this year, the diplomas for two languages (Turkish – French) and two departments (Literature – Science) were combined into one diploma.⁴²

Even though both schools were proudly speaking of religious liberty at their establishments, the Holy Scripture and Biblical Literature courses were included in the curriculum of Robert College as required courses. These lessons were being organized by the Young Men's Christian Association and maintained under the chairmanship of teachers.⁴³ In addition, all students attended church services on Sundays.⁴⁴ In the Mekteb-i Sultani, there was no religion lesson in the first curriculum by name; it was officially added to the curriculum in 1896 but only required for Muslims and it was allowed for non-Muslims to attend the religion lessons on a voluntary basis.⁴⁵ In Robert College, religion lessons were not elective but upon request of the parents or custodians of students, the students could be exempted from this course. Furthermore, all students in the College were obliged to attend the morning prayers and listen to the readings from Bible.⁴⁶

Physical education was in the foreground in both schools. This point which I have analyzed shortly before for Robert College is also valid for the Mekteb-i Sultani because if we consider that Galatasaray Sports Club established in 1905 and still has a very important place in today's sports emanating from this school, it would be unfair to say that physical education was not in the forefront for Sultani.⁴⁷ Both schools aimed to improve the youth not only mentally but also physically. In order to provide this, they added new lessons to their curriculums. I have already mentioned that Robert College had attached importance to gymnastic classes and physical improvement by establishing

39 Sevinç, *ibid*, p.86; Şişman, *ibid*, p. 326.

40 Sabev, *ibid*, p.90.

41 Kodaman, *ibid*, p.141.

42 *Ibid.*, 143.

43 For religion lessons in the college: Washburn, *ibid*, pp.109, 46, 47; Kocamanoğlu, *ibid*, p.180; For its curriculum at that time, see, *Robert College Catalogue 1912-1914*, pp. 51-53.

44 Kocamanoğlu, *ibid*, p.180.

45 For the curriculum of the Sultani at that time: *Ibid.*, pp.146-148, pp.153-154; Dilaver, *ibid*, p. 322.

46 Washburn, *ibid*, p.83.

47 Düzenli, *ibid*, p.38.

athletics and gymnastics clubs.⁴⁸ On the other hand, gymnastics class was regarded as an elective course in Mekteb-i Sultani in the *Aliye* (high) class.⁴⁹ The main reason that the lesson was elective was not because the physical education of students was regarded as unimportant, but in order to improve physical training also under the roofs of gymnastics clubs, instead of making the lesson merely compulsory. Also, a special room was allocated for physical training lessons, including gymnastic equipment exported from France.⁵⁰ Robert College on the other hand, had contributed a great deal to sports in Turkey by means of its traditional organizations such as “field day” or “sports festival” during which competitions were being held on various branches of sports as in the Olympic Games.⁵¹

The Mekteb-i Sultani, as a Turkish school, didn't blindly follow the leads of foreign schools, but took new steps to reveal and emphasize the characteristics of Turkish culture. For example, while the principals of Robert College were appointed from the United States, even though there was always control and intervention by the French, the managerial staff of the school had always been appointed by the Turkish government.⁵² When Robert College applied to the State for a new building in 1869, the Minister of Education of the time told them that they had to make a commitment, to renew their local managerial staff by using the model of Mekteb-i Sultani and the college had to undersign the written contract and promise that.⁵³ According to the Ministry of Public Instruction, the College would conform to the regulations of Sultani.⁵⁴ Even though Robert College started out with the goal of accepting the equality of all Ottoman people, they supported the Bulgarian nationalist movements and consequently, Mekteb-i Sultani expelled all Bulgarian students in 1876.⁵⁵ The directorate of Sultani adopted a course of action in 1880, and they began to keep all of the records of the school in Turkish.⁵⁶ While the principal of Robert College was American and the vice principal was Turkish; as of 1896 the Mekteb-i Sultani appointed a Turkish principal and a French vice principal. We know from the memoirs of George Washburn, the vice principal of Robert College at the time, that Mekteb-i Sultani made a provision for a large number of free students, and it created an anxiety in Robert College.⁵⁷ It is also mentioned in the

48 Washburn, *ibid*, pp.285-286.

49 Kocamanoglu, *ibid*, p.154; Dilaver, *ibid*, p.322.

50 Düzenli, *ibid*, p. 35.

51 Irak, *ibid*, pp. 259-264.

52 Akyüz, *ibid*, p.167.

53 For competition between the buildings of these two schools: Zeynep Çelik, “Kampüs, Şehir ve İmparatorluk: Robert Kolej ve Amerikan Kız Kolejinin Erken Mimarisi”, *150 Years of Robert College*, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 214-215.

54 Sabev, *ibid*, p.141.

55 *Ibid*, p.88; Kocabaş, *ibid*, pp.139-143; Washburn, *ibid*, p.28; Kodaman, *ibid*, p.138; Kocamanoglu, *ibid*, p.121.

56 *Ibid*, 126.

57 George Washburn, *Fifty Years in Constantinople*, Boston, 1909, p. 25.

same memoirs that the appointment of distinguished and experienced teaching staff to Sultani had caused the managers of Robert College to think that it would be their end.⁵⁸ When the competition between two schools escalated and the number of students registering to Mekteb-i Sultani began increasing rapidly, Robert College decided to decrease the amount of tuition.⁵⁹

As is seen, when the field of education expanded, competition increased and when the competition increased, the field of education expanded. While this cycle was going on continuously, Robert College opened a "Turkish Department" (known as Robert College Ottoman Turkish Branch).⁶⁰ Tevfik Fikret, a graduate of the Mekteb-i Sultani, was chosen as the Turkish and literature educator in the department. Later on, Robert College Turkish Students Association was formed within this department, again under his leadership.⁶¹ He had worked as a Turkish or *Lisan-ı Osmani* (Ottoman Turkish Language) teacher at the Mekteb-i Sultani between 1894 and 1895, where he had graduated ranking first in his class in 1888.⁶² When he was transferred to Robert College, he had the chance to analyze and to educate students at both schools. On January 6, 1909, Tevfik Fikret was appointed as the principal of Mekteb-i Sultani.⁶³ He then applied some novelties in the school and put conferencing and staging student plays into effect and opened a School of Medicine.⁶⁴ Another one of his novelties was applying experiment and observation method in all courses.⁶⁵ These novelties applied by Tevfik Fikret in a Turkish school are concrete examples of the educational improvements in the late Ottoman era. After working for a length of time in Sultani, Tevfik Fikret resigned from his post and went back to Robert College again. As we can see, the competition between these two schools was obvious even regarding their faculty members. Besides that, somebody who was graduated from a Turkish school where the western educational system was used, Tevfik Fikret, greatly contributed to cultural exchange between two schools by acting as an educator in a foreign and a Turkish school, both of which were using this system. Thus, he had witnessed the educational changes, conversion and the impacts of the new educational system on the Ottoman people during the late Ottoman era.⁶⁶

58 *Ibid*, 55.

59 Sabev, *ibid*, pp.88-89; Kodaman, *ibid*, pp.140-141.

60 Transmitting: Kocamanoglu, *ibid*, pp.106, 107.

61 Cahit Kavcar, "Tevfik Fikret'in Eğitimciliği ve Yeni Mektep", *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 3, Ankara, 1994, p. 112, <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/40/492/5771.pdf>. (Accessed 24.10. 2013).

62 *Ibid*, 112.

63 *Ibid*, 111, 112.

64 Akyüz, *ibid*, p.305.

65 Kocamanoglu, *ibid*, p.132.

66 For all positive contributions of Tevfik Fikret see, Kavcar, *ibid*, pp.133-135; Düzenli, *ibid*, p. 24. His son, Haluk Fikret, also studied at Robert College between 1906 and 1909.

Conclusion

Foreign schools, the number of which had increased rapidly during the last century of the Empire, and the students graduated from these schools formed the groups which represented the western ideas and life styles and conveyed them to the Ottoman Empire. When the necessary weight was given to the education reform, new types of Turkish schools modelled after European schools were opened, where an educational approach attaching importance to foreign languages, secular education and having positive sciences represented in the curriculum were seriously considered. Mekteb-i Sultani, where all of these novelties were applied, became the first window of Ottoman Empire opening to the West, as Tevfik Fikret mentioned.⁶⁷ Even by taking merely two schools as examples and analyzing them, it is possible to see that the sufficient, improved and modern education system used in foreign schools had a positive impact on Ottoman educational institutions.⁶⁸ But there is a very important point to emphasize. The curriculums of foreign schools have been taken as examples in the innovation movement of Turkish education system but even so, the issues which were not appropriate to Turkish-Muslim culture, were taken into consideration and weight was given to such novelties to bring the Turkish culture forward by applying the modern system. Moreover, Turkish students were consciously registered to these foreign schools. The answers given by the students to the question of “Why do you prefer this school?” during the registry, clearly prove this. Most of the students said that they wanted to be beneficial to their country and desire to learn well.⁶⁹ In other words, the students who had registered in these schools, preferred them, both to improve themselves and to receive the training needed for the prosperity of their country. This preference of the students was valid not only for foreign schools but also for modernized Turkish schools. The graduates of these schools have become leading and successful traders and businessmen not only in Turkey, but also, both in Europe and in America and this is also true today.⁷⁰ These schools never reduced their quality from the time of their foundation to the present day, they have always been attentive in their selection of students and educators, and they never limited their activities merely to lessons but also led the way for the improvement of the social lives of their students. For this reason, they represent an elite group of people today

67 Necdet Sakaoğlu, “Galatasaray Lisesi”, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 3, İstanbul, 1994, p. 369; Düzenli, *ibid*, p. 23.

68 The main subject of my paper is education. That’s why i only underlined the positive sides of foreign schools. But at the same time, they played important roles in political problems or negativities throughout the empire, not only by exchange student programs but also by supporting the nationalist movements.

69 Robert College Archive Arnavutköy Campus, see, document of İrfan Koyunoğlu named *Candidate Student Application Form*, in his own student file.

70 Fatma Acun, “Robert Kolej Mezunları ve Meşhurları”, *Türk Tarih Eğitimi Dergisi*, Vol. 4, Issue. 2, 2015, pp. 136-164, <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/164060> (Accessed 1.11. 2015).

in Turkey. A great majority of their graduates continue their education abroad, live there and are involved in successful professions. Not only abroad but also in Turkey, there are many well-known and successful people like theater actors and actresses, sportspeople, politicians, academicians, poets, authors, senior public servants, attaches, diplomats, ambassadors, consuls, industrialists and businessmen who are alums of these schools.⁷¹ As I have found out in the archives, modern Turkish schools other than Mekteb-i Sultani which can also be considered as the schools where the elite people have been graduated from are TED Ankara College, Şişli Terakki High School, Vefa High School, Feyziye School, Kabataş High School for boys and İzmir Turkish College. When we look at the foreign schools of the same quality, we can include English High School, Tarsus and İzmir American Colleges, Sankt Georg Austrian High School, the German High School, Notre Dame de Sion, St. Benoit etc. The number of student transfers between these schools and the two example schools we have analyzed are quite numerous.⁷² Graduating from these two schools (Robert College and the Mekteb-i Sultani) can also be regarded as a tradition in certain families. If one of the parents have been graduated from one of these schools, then the family tries hard to send their children to the same school. When the student files in the archives are studied, it is very usual to see that many members of the same family have registered to the same school. Actually when a student applies for registration to these schools, they are asked if there is a member of the family who had graduated from the same school.⁷³ Today, we can see the same tradition in aforesaid modern Turkish Schools.

In conclusion, several observations can be made as the result of any study carried on the educational reforms that took place in the late Ottoman era: The developments in the world, directed the Empire in 18th century to novelties in the field of education as in other fields. For novelties in this field, the role models were foreign schools and western style education system had a positive impact on the education policies of the Ottomans. Modern Turkish educational institutions which were opened in the same period with foreign schools and applied the western style education, also had an important place on the education and development of the Ottoman society during the late

71 For famous writers of Robert College see, Semih Gümüş, "Büyük Bir Dünya, Robert Kolej Yazarları", *The Anatomy of a Tradition: 150 Years of Robert College*, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 310-335. For actors and actresses see, Özdemir Ültay Nutku, "Robert Kolej Oyuncuları ve Yetişen Ünlü Tiyatrocular", *The Anatomy of a Tradition: 150 Years of Robert College*, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 276-309. For famous actors and writers of Mekteb-i Sultani, see, Düzenli, *ibid*, pp. 39-40. For distinction and famous graduates see, Elif Evrim Şencan Gürtunca, *Robert Kolej'de Öğrenim Gören Türk Öğrenciler Üzerine Prosopografik Bir Çalışma (1863-1971)*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, 2017, pp. 376-401.

72 See, "Student Reports" and "School Transfer Papers" in Robert College Archive, Arnavutköy Campus.

73 See, Robert College Archive, Arnavutköy Campus, İzzet Reşat Mahmut Tarzi's document, named *Candidate Student Application Form*, in his own student file; Şencan Gürtunca, *ibid*, pp. 402-412.

imperial era. Shortly, we can resume the gains, provided to Turkish schools by the western style education included: addition of positive sciences to the curriculums, placing importance on physical improvement, provision of language instruction, the transition to passing a grade level instead of passing a course, conditions of the granting of diplomas, hiring qualified teachers, prepare yearbook and homecoming days for alums, continuation of post-school training, giving importance to the education of Muslim girls and graduating from the same school becomes a family tradition.

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