

The Role and Functions of Local Governments in Education

Services: The Case of Türkiye

Eğitim Hizmetlerinde Yerel Yönetimlerin Rolü ve İşlevleri:

Türkiye Örneği

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Öz

Yerel yönetimlerin eğitimde üstlendikleri veya yasal düzenlemeler nedeniyle üstlenebilecekleri roller temel olarak devletlerin yönetim yaklaşımları ve organizasyonel yapılarıyla yakından ilgilidir. Merkeziyetçi yapıdaki ülkelerde eğitim politikalarının belirlenmesi, okulların yapımı ve fiziksel ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması, öğretmen ve okul yöneticilerinin görevlendirilmesi, öğretim programlarının belirlenmesi, eğitim materyalinin hazırlanması ve seçilmesi gibi birçok sorumluluk, görev ve faaliyet genel olarak merkezi bir kurum tarafından üstlenilmiştir. Bu durum özellikle nüfusu fazla olan, etnik ve kültürel çeşitliliğe sahip, coğrafi açıdan geniş ve çeşitli fiziki zorlukları olan ülkeler için belirgindir. Günümüzde, topluma sunulan eğitim hizmeti sadece merkezi hükümetlerin ve okulların veya öğretmenlerin sorumluluğu olarak görülmektedir. Eğitimde başarılı olarak kabul edilen ülkelerde farklı kurum ve kuruluşlar da doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak eğitimde önemli roller üstlenmektedir. Yerel yönetimler, sadece altyapı ve kaynak sağlamakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda eğitim politikalarının belirlenmesinden ve uygulanmasına kadar birçok konuda etkili bir konumda bulunmaktadır. Bu makalede, Türkiye’de yerel yönetimlerin öğrencilere sunulan eğitim hizmetinde üstlendikleri rolleri incelemekte ve geliştirmeye yönelik öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelime: Eğitim Politikaları, Yerel Yönetimler, Belediyeler, Merkeziyetçilik, Yerelleşme.

Abstract

Due to legal frameworks, the roles that local governments assume or could assume in education are intrinsically linked to the administrative approaches and organizational structures of states. In countries with a central framework, numerous responsibilities, tasks and activities, such as policy formulation, school construction and maintenance, the appointment of teachers and school administrators, curriculum design and the preparation and selection of educational materials are predominantly managed by central authorities. This scenario is particularly pronounced in countries with large populations, significant ethnic and cultural diversity, and extensive geographical areas with various physical challenges. In contemporary contexts, the provision of educational services is no longer regarded solely as the responsibility of central governments, schools and teachers. In countries acknowledged for their educational success, various institutions and organizations also play crucial roles, either directly or indirectly, in the educational sphere. Local governments, in addition to providing infrastructure and resources, are significantly involved in the formulation and implementation of educational policies. This study examines the role of local governments in providing educational services to students in Türkiye and offers recommendations for further enhancement.

Key Words: Education Policies, Local Governments, Municipalities, Centralization, Decentralization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Attendance to education remains a critical issue in Türkiye, despite all the legislation and incentives implemented by the state through central initiatives. However, on a global scale, local governments are widely recognized as central actors in providing services for children and youth. In European countries such as the United Kingdom, where localism in education has been effectively implemented, educational services are delivered through local governments and are considered municipal responsibility. Local governments play a pivotal role in addressing economic, social, and cultural challenges in urban settings. The ability of municipal services to be tailored to specific needs and delivered swiftly enhances the role of local governments in the provision of educational services. In Türkiye, the constitutional roles of municipalities in education are delineated, yet these roles are subject to ongoing legal debates. Education legislation permits municipalities to establish educational institutions; however, the laws and regulations impose constraints on the development of new educational services and concepts. The concept of localism is critically evaluated in the context of the centralized governance system prevalent in Türkiye. From an educational perspective, localism denotes that all administrative decisions related to the education system are controlled by local governments. While centralization is frequently criticized, some researchers have argued that delegating authority and responsibilities to local governments can mitigate bureaucratic inefficiencies and enhance the effectiveness of service delivery. Nevertheless, localism presents its own challenges. In countries that do not adhere to a centralized structure, local governments collaborate with school administrations and educators to formulate educational policies that address local needs. These policies aim to deliver more effective educational services by focusing on students' needs and local community expectations. Furthermore, in such countries, local governments devise strategies to ensure that schools can use their resources effectively. Local governments also play a significant role in providing the necessary resources for schools' physical infrastructure, including the construction of new buildings, maintenance of existing facilities, outfitting classrooms, and updating libraries (Fuente & Vives, 1995).

Education extends beyond classroom instruction. Local governments organize various activities and programs to support students' social and cultural development. Initiatives such as art activities, sports tournaments, cultural festivals, and community service projects contribute to students' academic, social, and emotional growth. Additionally, local governments support efforts to reduce educational inequities. Scholarship programs, supportive educational initiatives, and measures to enhance accessibility for economically disadvantaged students represent local governments' endeavors to promote equity in education. Local governments not only manage urban environments but also play crucial roles in shaping future leaders.



Educational success hinges on the capacity of local governments to implement effective planning, resource management, and community collaboration.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Municipalities and local governments play a pivotal role in providing essential services that ensure the effective functioning of daily life for residents within their jurisdictions. The scope of local government responsibilities varies depending on national policies and local governance structures, but typically encompasses core roles and functions (Andrews et al., 2009; Denters & Rose, 2005). These functions are critical to sustainable development and community well-being. While varying significantly based on national policies and local governance structures, local government responsibilities typically encompass a broad range of core services crucial for sustainable development and community well-being. These include essential infrastructure services like roads, water, and electricity (Ahmad, 2021; Ivanova & Masarova, 2013), environmental protection initiatives such as waste management and green space preservation (Nalau et al., 2015; Çinkır, 2002), and critical roles in urban planning and construction oversight (American Planning Association, 2006; Adams, 2012). Furthermore, they often manage public transportation, provide health and social services (Anell et al., 2012; Emiroğlu, 2000), organize security and fire services (Caruson & MacManus, 2007), handle waste collection, maintain public order, foster economic development (Indarti, 2020), and promote local participation and democracy (Grant & Devas, 2002; Akyıldız, 2000). Effective municipal governance ensures these diverse services are delivered efficiently and equitably, addressing the needs of all residents and contributing to the overall quality of life (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2014). Additionally, municipalities often act as intermediaries between national governments and local communities, implementing policies and programs tailored to local needs and circumstances (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

Effective municipal governance ensures that these services are delivered efficiently and equitably, addressing the needs of all residents and contributing to the overall quality of life (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2014). Additionally, municipalities often act as intermediaries between national governments and local communities, implementing policies and programs tailored to local needs and circumstances (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The roles and responsibilities of local governments in education services are directly linked to a country's adopted governance structure, particularly whether it is a unitary or federal state. In unitary states, the supremacy of the central government is paramount, and core powers such as education policies, curriculum, teacher appointments, and budgeting are typically concentrated in a single central ministry. While this structure aims to ensure national standardization and equality, it can also impose limitations on responsiveness to local needs

and flexibility (Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Denters & Rose, 2005). In contrast, in federal states, educational powers are more distinctly shared between the central government and state or regional governments, granting sub-national units greater autonomy in shaping education policies according to their own contexts (Watts, 2008; OECD, 2011). These distinctions can be better understood within the framework of centralization and decentralization concepts. Centralization refers to the concentration of decision-making processes and powers within a central authority, whereas decentralization encompasses the transfer of these powers to non-centralized entities, namely local governments (Rondinelli, 1981; Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). In education, decentralization can occur at different levels, primarily as deconcentration and devolution. Deconcentration involves the central authority delegating tasks and responsibilities to its own representatives at the local level, while devolution implies granting local governments more autonomy to make their own decisions and manage their resources (World Bank, 2000). Education decentralization efforts in unitary states tend to remain at the deconcentration level, whereas devolution is more common in federal states. This conceptual framework provides a critical foundation for explaining how our study analyzes decentralization dynamics within Türkiye's unitary state structure.

Within this framework, the role of municipalities in education is particularly significant. Local governments are often responsible for managing and funding public schools, providing educational resources and ensuring access to quality education for all children (OECD, 2016). This includes the maintenance of school infrastructure, the recruitment and training of teachers and the implementation of educational policies and curricula that align with national standards yet reflect local priorities and contexts (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Understanding the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of municipalities is essential for comprehensively addressing challenges and opportunities in local governance. Effective delivery of these services, particularly in education, is crucial for fostering sustainable development, enhancing community well-being, and preparing for future challenges (Pierre, 2000). By incorporating principles of green transformational leadership, municipalities can further advance their commitment to sustainability and resilience.

Municipalities and local governments execute their duties based on local needs and available resources, which results in variations in the responsibilities and services offered by municipalities. Local governments significantly contribute to the effectiveness of educational activities by addressing schools' specific needs, promoting community engagement, and addressing local educational challenges. Despite the differences arising from the administrative structure and organization, the contributions of local governments to education services are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Contributions of local governments to education services

Education services provided by the local government	Authors, Sources, Legal Bases, and Regulations
School Management and Physical Infrastructure: Ensuring that schools have the necessary management and physical resources	Fuente & Vives, 1995 Ivanova & Masarova, 2013 Sahoo & Dash, 2012 Açıkalın, 1998
Curriculum Implementation: Facilitating the application of the curriculum	Heikkilä, 2021 Gürel & Gül, 2024
Resource allocation: Effective distribution of educational resources	Roza, 2008 Levin & Naylor, 2007 Gates, 1999
Teacher Employment and Training: Hiring and training educators	Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003 DeFeo & Tran, 2019. Duman, 1998b
Community involvement: promoting community participation in education	Çınkır, 2002 Burke et al., 1986
Development and Implementation of Special Education Programs: Creating programs that cater to special educational needs.	Yap & Adorio, 2008 Bursalioglu, 1999
Provision of after-school programs: providing supplementary educational activities outside school hours	Dryfoos, 1999 Fashola, 1998 Başçobanlar, 2000
Addressing educational inequality: Implementing measures to mitigate educational disparities	Walker et al., 2019 García & Weiss, 2017 Köksal, 1999
Partnerships with NGOs and Local Businesses: Collaborating with various stakeholders to enhance educational opportunities.	Smillie, 2013 Dahan, 2010 DPT, 1996
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: Establish systems to assess and improve educational programs.	Govender & Reddy, 2014 Duman, 1998b

In certain countries, local governments are responsible for the management and maintenance of state schools within their jurisdictions. These responsibilities include providing adequate infrastructure and facilities to ensure a conducive learning environment. Additionally, local authorities may oversee construction and renovation projects for educational institutions (Fuente & Vives, 1995; Akyıldız, 2000). In federal systems, while national or regional governments set framework curricula, local governments play a role in adapting these curricula to meet local needs and priorities. In some instances, local governments collaborate with schools to enhance the integration of education with community needs (Gürel & Gül, 2024).

Local governments may also allocate resources for education, including funding for schools, teachers, and educational materials. They must balance budget constraints with the educational needs of the community (Gates, 1999; Levin & Naylor, 2007; Roza, 2008; Bıçak, 2001). Local governments play significant roles in the employment and training of teachers and school administrators. In addition to employment functions, local authorities offer continuous professional development and training opportunities for educators to enhance teaching quality (Duman, 1998b). Acting as intermediaries between schools and the community, local governments organize school-family associations, community meetings and other forums to encourage active participation in education. Improving community involvement fosters a sense of ownership and support for schools (Çinkır, 2002). Local governments providing inclusive education and support services for students with special needs may collaborate with schools to implement programs that address diverse student needs. They may also establish or support after-school programs, extracurricular activities, and community centers to offer additional educational opportunities (Başçobanlar, 2000).

Local governments undertake initiatives to address educational inequalities in their jurisdictions. These initiatives involve implementing policies that ensure equal access to quality education, regardless of socioeconomic background (Köksal, 1999). Partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) and local businesses help diversify and enhance educational opportunities. Local governments facilitate collaborations with third parties to provide students with resources, mentorship programs, and internship opportunities (DPT, 1996). Local authorities involved in monitoring school performance may implement evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of educational programs and identify areas for improvement (Duman, 1998b).

In Türkiye, the role of municipalities in education can be categorized under two main headings: formal education and non-formal education. In formal education, municipalities' duties are limited by law to providing physical infrastructure support for educational activities. According to Law No. 5216 of Metropolitan Municipalities, municipalities may provide services such as school construction, maintenance, and repair when necessary. However, the term "when necessary" allows municipalities to opt out of these services due to budget constraints. Similarly, Law No. 5393 provides municipalities with flexibility regarding the construction, maintenance, and repair of school buildings. These responsibilities are optional and not mandatory. Additionally, municipalities may allocate land for school construction by philanthropists (Altınok, 1997).

Municipalities have a broader authority over non-formal education. According to Laws No. 5216 and 5393, municipalities can establish and operate vocational training centers, youth and social service centers, libraries, and kindergartens. These services fall under municipalities' social and cultural activities (Akyıldız, 2000).

Other Education-Related Services by Municipalities:

- School Construction, Maintenance, and Repair: Municipalities can undertake the construction, maintenance, and repair of school buildings.
- Support for Cleaning and Hygiene Supplies: Provision of cleaning and hygiene supplies to schools.
- Technical and physical support: providing technical infrastructure and physical support to schools.
- Construction of dormitories: Municipalities may be responsible for constructing dormitories.
- Canteen and Transportation Inspections: Inspectors inspect school canteens and transportation services.
- Scholarships and Assistance: The provision of scholarships and other forms of assistance to students.
- Pre-School Education: Establishment and operation of pre-school education institutions.

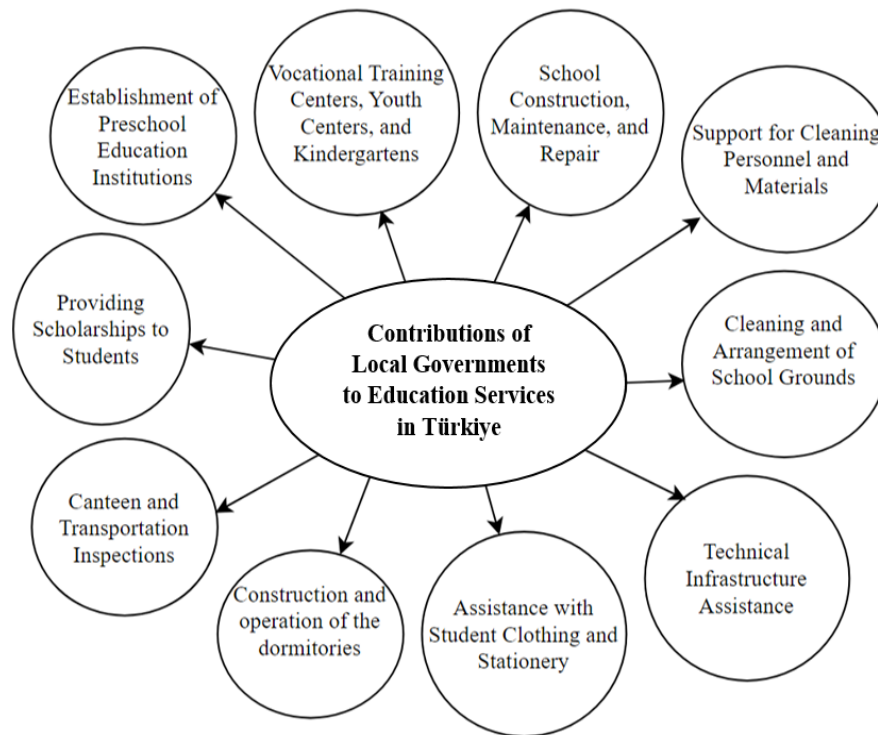


Figure 1. Educational Activities Supported by Municipalities in Türkiye

The Union of Turkish Municipalities also plays an active role in education services, similar to individual municipalities. For instance, under the Türkiye-Macedonia Local Government Cooperation Project, various

educational facilities were renovated. Additionally, the "Schools Are Life" project has transformed schools into centers serving the community outside formal educational hours. In summary, the local government in Türkiye contributes to educational services in the following areas.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically content analysis and interview techniques. In the initial phase of the study, the activity reports of metropolitan municipalities, classified as open-source data, were examined. In the subsequent phase, interviews were conducted with representatives from local governments and the Ministry of National Education to enrich the findings obtained from the activity reports. The research encompasses an analysis of the "Annual activity reports" prepared by 30 metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye for 2023, which are considered "institutional documents" in qualitative research. Within the scope of the study, interviews were conducted with 6 representatives working in the field of education and training from local governments and 3 representatives from the Ministry of National Education. Content analysis requires a closer examination of the obtained data and the identification of concepts and themes that elucidate these data. Document examination refers to obtaining data by analyzing written documents containing information related to the phenomena and events surrounding the research topic. A substantial amount of information relevant to the research field can be acquired through document analysis without the need for interviews and observations. This approach allows researchers to save time and resources. The importance of a document and its potential use as a data source should be determined based on the research topic. For example, in a juvenile delinquency study, reviewing judicial statistics, police data, and social service records would be appropriate. Documents such as reports, books, archive files, video and audio recordings, and photographs related to the research topic should be systematically analyzed after verification of authenticity.

The primary aim of content analysis is to identify concepts and relationships that help explain the collected data. Data summarized and interpreted through descriptive analysis undergoes in-depth processing through content analysis, leading to the discovery of new concepts. The fundamental task in content analysis is to group similar data under specific concepts and themes and to organize and interpret the data in a manner that is comprehensible to the reader. Before examining the content analysis stages, it is essential to define the terms used. The social contexts and processes that emerge during the research process must be described. The conceptual framework and assumptions used in the analysis of the obtained data should be clearly defined. Detailed explanations regarding data collection and analysis methods should be explained in detail. The study requires selecting a sufficiently large sample, addressing the topic with multiple researchers, consulting

multiple sources and perspectives, properly storing the obtained data, clearly specifying the context of the study and the position of the researcher, and conducting the study impartially.

Within the scope of the study, a total of 9 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives working in the field of education and training. These participants comprised 6 representatives from various local governments (including municipality and metropolitan municipality officials) and 3 representatives from the Ministry of National Education. To ensure anonymity while providing context, participants' demographic profiles were generally diverse: their professional experience in education-related roles ranged from 15 to over 30 years, and roles included heads of education departments in municipalities, project coordinators, and various managerial positions within the Ministry of National Education. The participants' age range was primarily between 39 and 59, with a relatively balanced gender representation among those interviewed. Detailed information regarding the demographic characteristics of the participating representatives is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Institution	Gender	Age	Role/Title	Unit/Department	Professional Experience (Years)
Local Government Representatives					
Participant 1	Male	48	Deputy Mayor	Metropolitan/District Municipality (Responsible for Social Services/Education)	18
Participant 2	Female	39	Head of Department	Department of Education, Culture, and Social Affairs	12
Participant 3	Male	58	Center Manager	Public Education Center / Vocational Training Courses Coordination	25
Participant 4	Female	41	Branch Manager	Directorate of Youth and Sports Services / Directorate of Libraries and Museums	9
Participant 5	Male	52	Project Coordinator	Private Secretary's Office / Directorate of European Union and External Relations (Education Projects)	15
Participant 6	Male	47	Specialist/Authority	Directorate of Zoning and Urban Planning / Directorate of Science Affairs (School Building/Land Procedures)	7
Ministry of National Education Representatives					
Participant 7	Male	56	Head of Department	Ministry of National Education (General Directorate of Support Services)	22
Participant 8	Female	43	Branch Manager	Provincial Directorate of National Education (Private Education Institutions Branch)	14
Participant 9	Male	59	Deputy Director	Provincial Deputy Director of National Education (Responsible for Secondary Education)	19

4. FINDINGS

The initial phase of this study involved a comprehensive content analysis of the 2023 Annual Activity Reports from all 30 metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye. This document analysis aimed to systematically identify the reported educational activities, allocated resources, and strategic priorities of these local governments concerning education services. The findings from this analysis revealed significant patterns and common areas of engagement, complementing the qualitative insights gained from interviews. Overall, the analysis showed that while direct responsibility for formal education resides with the Ministry of National Education, metropolitan municipalities are actively involved in supplementary and supportive educational services. A substantial portion of municipalities' education-related activities involves physical infrastructure support, including the construction, maintenance, and repair of school buildings, sports halls, and libraries. Beyond infrastructure, municipalities extensively engage in non-formal education and lifelong learning, operating a wide array of vocational training courses, art and craft workshops, and foreign language programs that cater to diverse age groups and skill development needs. Many municipalities also provide various forms of social and cultural support to students, such as scholarship programs and assistance to financially disadvantaged learners. The establishment of youth centers and the operation of libraries were frequently cited as important indirect educational contributions. Furthermore, several municipalities integrate environmental education and urban awareness programs into their local initiatives, fostering community engagement through workshops and campaigns in schools. While specific budget figures varied, the reports consistently indicated that education-related expenditures, particularly for infrastructure and non-formal programs, constituted a discernible portion of municipal budgets, underlining their commitment to enhancing the overall educational ecosystem in Türkiye.

The findings obtained from the interviews conducted to understand the role of local governments in educational and training activities are presented below. Interviews were held with municipal officials and representatives from the Ministry of National Education. The data obtained from the interviews were categorized into five themes:

- Role of local governments in education
- Infrastructure development
- Improving education quality
- Community participation
- Successful practices and challenges encountered



4.1. Role and Responsibilities of Local Governments in Education

Local Government Representative (LGR_1) stated that while conducting educational activities is not among the primary duties of municipalities, they engage in such activities within the framework of legal authority provided by law. LGR_1 emphasized, "Although conducting educational activities is not our primary duty, we do engage in them. What we do is not a primary duty but an authority granted by law. Our activities are supplementary services."

4.2. Development of Educational Infrastructure

Local Government Representative (LGR_2) expressed that municipalities are able to act flexibly and swiftly in improving educational infrastructure. LGR_2 remarked, "As a municipality, we open study centers. We work with the teachers we choose. We can act quickly and flexibly when purchasing educational materials and equipment." These findings indicate that local governments play a significant role in the development of educational infrastructure.

Local Government Representative (LGR_5) highlighted the need for representatives from the Ministry of National Education to be involved in the planning of land designated for educational facilities. LGR_5 stated, "The lands designated for educational facilities by local governments need to be problem-free. It would be appropriate to involve representatives from the Ministry of Education in the process of identifying and planning such lands." This statement underscores the importance of stakeholder participation.

4.3. Improvement of Education Quality

Local Government Representative (LGR_3) stressed that the resources of local governments should be used more effectively and efficiently in organizing vocational courses. LGR_3 noted, "The resources and capabilities of local governments need to be used more effectively and efficiently in organizing vocational courses," pointing to the need for optimizing existing resources.

4.4. Community Participation and Educational Programs

Local Government Representative (LGR_5) emphasized the critical importance of stakeholder participation in urban planning studies. LGR_5 stated, "Stakeholder participation in urban planning studies is of great importance. The Spatial Planning Regulation includes provisions that emphasize participatory planning." This highlights the significance of participatory planning processes.

4.5. Successful Practices and Success Stories

Local Government Representative (LGR_6) conveyed that municipalities have various expectations when constructing schools. LGR_6 remarked, "We want to build schools as a municipality. At this point, we also have expectations, such as exemptions from taxes, social security premiums, and adjustments for certain items, which need to be considered." This indicates the need for local governments to support educational investments.

4.6. Challenges and Obstacles

Ministry of National Education Representative (MoNE_1) indicated that requests for adjustments from municipalities are forwarded to the Ministry of Finance. MoNE_1 noted, "Requests for adjustments from municipalities come to our ministry. Since it falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, we forward it there," reflecting the need for coordination between different ministries.

Ministry of National Education Representative (MoNE_2) pointed out a legislative gap in the planning of lands allocated for educational facilities and the need to account for regional differences. MoNE_2 stated, "There is a legislative gap in the planning of lands allocated for educational facilities. Significant physical and geographical differences between regions. Legislation should be adapted to allow for flexibility." This highlights the need for flexible legislation.

Ministry of National Education Representative (MoNE_3) noted that tasks related to land, construction, and repairs consumed a significant portion of the ministry's energy. MoNE_3 remarked, "Our primary mission should be education. Tasks related to land, construction, and repairs take up a large portion of our energy," emphasizing the burden of non-educational tasks on the ministry. A summary of the key findings obtained from both the content analysis of activity reports and the in-depth interviews is presented in Table 3

Table 3. Summary of Key Research Findings

Theme / Category	Findings from Activity Reports (Content Analysis)	Insights from Interviews (Participants)
Physical Infrastructure & Logistics	• Extensive support for construction, maintenance, and repair of school buildings, sports halls, and libraries. • Provision of cleaning materials, hygiene supplies, and landscaping services for school grounds.	• Municipalities act more flexibly and swiftly than central agencies in infrastructure projects (LGR_2). • Legislative gaps exist in planning lands for educational facilities, requiring better coordination (MoNE_2). • Construction and repair tasks burden the Ministry of National Education, distracting from core educational missions (MoNE_3).
Non-Formal Education & Student Support	• Widespread operation of vocational training courses (arts, languages, skills) for diverse age groups. • Provision of scholarships, clothing, and stationery aid to financially disadvantaged students. • Establishment of youth centers and study halls.	• Educational activities are viewed as "supplementary services" rather than a primary duty (LGR_1). • There is a need for more effective and efficient use of resources in organizing vocational courses (LGR_3).
Governance, Legislation & Finance	• Education-related expenditures constitute a visible portion of municipal budgets. • Integration of urban awareness and environmental projects into schools.	• Municipalities seek financial incentives (tax/premium exemptions) for school construction projects (LGR_6). • Coordination challenges exist between municipalities, MoNE, and the Ministry of Finance regarding resource allocation (MoNE_1). • Stakeholder participation is crucial for effective urban and educational planning (LGR_5).

5. DISCUSSION

Educational services vary by country, with significant differences observed between centralized and decentralized systems. While developed countries often showcase collaborative models between central and local governments, developing and unitary states, including Türkiye, typically assign primary responsibility to central governments, with local governments often limited to providing physical infrastructure. This study's findings, derived from an analysis of metropolitan municipality activity reports and in-depth interviews, shed light on the nuances of this dynamic within the Turkish context.

Our research indicates that while the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye holds primary responsibility for educational policies, curricula, inspections, and teacher appointments, it frequently faces challenges in providing adequate physical infrastructure and operational support to schools. This necessitates the crucial, albeit often supplemental, involvement of local governments. This finding resonates with existing literature on public service delivery in unitary states, which highlights the central government's capacity limitations and the potential for local governments to bridge service gaps (e.g., Andrews et al., 2009; Denters & Rose, 2005).

However, Türkiye's unique unitary state structure introduces specific complexities and concerns regarding the decentralization of education services. Unlike federal systems where educational autonomy is more deeply embedded at sub-national levels, Türkiye's centralized tradition, stemming from historical and political imperatives, often prioritizes uniformity and equality across all regions. This central control, while aiming to prevent disparities and maintain national curriculum standards, also raises concerns about local responsiveness, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the effective utilization of local resources. As echoed by MoNE representatives in our interviews, managing basic infrastructure and repair tasks consumes a significant portion of the Ministry's energy, detracting from its core mission of education. This is consistent with arguments made by Turkish scholars like Duman (1998a, 1998b) and Akyıldız (2000), who have long pointed to the administrative burden on the central ministry in a highly centralized system.

Furthermore, the contributions of local governments, as explored in this study, are intrinsically linked to the concepts of financial decentralization and subsidiarity. While laws enacted in Türkiye in 2004 and 2005 (such as Law No. 6360) assigned certain mandatory and optional responsibilities to local governments concerning educational services (e.g., school maintenance, vocational training, youth centers), the actual implementation faces hurdles stemming from this centralized structure. Our findings suggest that despite legal frameworks allowing local government involvement, the 'optional' nature of many responsibilities and existing bureaucratic processes often limit their full potential. This aligns with Köksal (1999) and Çınkır (2002)'s observations on the inherent tensions and limitations of educational decentralization within Türkiye's highly centralized administrative culture. The need for clear legislative definitions and coordination, as highlighted by our interviewees, directly reflects these underlying concerns in the Turkish context.

The flexibility and swiftness municipalities can offer in infrastructure development, as noted by Local Government Representative (LGR_2), underscores their potential. Yet, the legislative gaps in planning educational lands (MoNE_2) and the need for tax exemptions (LGR_6) demonstrate how central regulations

can impede local initiatives, a persistent challenge in Türkiye's unitary governance where local autonomy is often constrained by central authority (Eryılmaz, 1995). The differing expectations between local governments and the central ministry, requiring coordination across ministries, further illustrates the intricate nature of education decentralization within Türkiye's administrative framework.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the evolving roles and functions of local governments in education services in Türkiye, set against the backdrop of its centralized unitary state structure. Through a comprehensive qualitative approach, the research revealed that while the central government primarily holds responsibility, local governments play an indispensable, albeit often supplemental, role, particularly in providing physical infrastructure support and delivering non-formal education services. The findings highlight a persistent tension between central control and the need for local responsiveness within Türkiye's education system, evidenced by legislative ambiguities and coordination challenges that limit the full potential of local initiatives. This research contributes to the understanding of decentralization dynamics in unitary states by offering an empirical examination of Türkiye's specific context and the complex interplay between legal frameworks, administrative structures, and practical implementation. Despite the inherent limitations of a qualitative study based on specific interviews and documents, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of education service delivery through greater local government involvement. Future research could explore quantitative impacts of local government involvement or conduct comparative studies with other unitary states to further generalize these findings. Based on the research findings and the specific context of Türkiye's unitary structure, the strategic recommendations for enhancing the role of local governments are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Local Government Roles in Education

Strategic Area	Proposed Actions for Policymakers & Practitioners
Strengthening Legal Frameworks	• Define Mandates: Explicitly define mandatory educational responsibilities in legislation, moving beyond optional clauses. • Clarify Roles: Clearly delineate duties between central and local governments to prevent bureaucratic overlaps. • Ensure Participation: Create legal mechanisms for local governments to participate in national education policy formulation.

Enhancing Cooperation & Coordination	• Joint Platforms: Establish coordination units at district/provincial levels involving MoNE and municipal representatives. • Shared Facilities: Promote the co-management and shared use of school sports halls and libraries. • Transport Logistics: Coordinate student transportation services, especially for rural and special education needs.
Optimizing Resources & Capacity	• Leverage Assets: Strategically use municipal resources for school construction and maintenance through defined funding models. • Target Inequalities: Direct municipal investments specifically towards disadvantaged areas to ensure equity. • Streamline Processes: Reduce bureaucratic hurdles for establishing vocational training and non-formal education centers.
Promoting Local Responsiveness	• Integrated Planning: Mandatory inclusion of educational facility needs in urban zoning and planning processes. • Community Focus: Support scholarship programs and local cultural centers that address specific community needs. • Tailored Departments: Encourage municipalities to operate specialized education departments based on local strategic plans.

Based on the findings of this study, and considering the unique challenges and opportunities within Türkiye's unitary state structure, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the role and functions of local governments in education services for decision-makers, policymakers, field experts, and practitioners:

Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Role Delineation:

- Explicitly define the mandatory educational responsibilities of municipalities in legislation, moving beyond optional provisions where necessary, while considering their financial and human resource capacities.
- Clearly delineate the educational responsibilities between central and local governments to prevent overlaps, gaps, and bureaucratic obstacles, fostering a more collaborative governance model.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure active and meaningful participation of local governments in the formulation of national educational policies and legislative processes, allowing local needs and perspectives to be integrated.



Enhancing Inter-institutional Cooperation and Coordination:

- Establish formal coordination units/platforms at district, provincial, and ministerial levels involving representatives from both the Ministry of National Education and municipalities to facilitate efficient resource use, shared planning, and problem-solving.
- Encourage shared use and co-management of school facilities (e.g., sports halls, libraries) by the Ministry of National Education and municipalities to increase efficiency and integrate schools more deeply with community life.
- Improve coordination for student and staff transportation, especially for rural areas and special education, leveraging municipal resources and expertise more systematically.

Optimizing Resource Utilization and Local Capacity Building:

- The Ministry of National Education should strategically leverage municipal resources for school construction, maintenance, and operational support, potentially through clearly defined funding mechanisms and shared project management.
- Encourage municipalities to direct educational investments towards disadvantaged areas to mitigate educational inequalities, aligning with national equity goals.
- Streamline bureaucratic processes to facilitate municipalities' establishment of vocational training centers and other non-formal education initiatives that are responsive to local market needs.
- Promote the implementation of location-specific special projects in schools, allowing municipalities to tailor educational and extracurricular activities to the unique cultural and social fabric of their communities.

Promoting Local Responsiveness and Community Engagement:

- Encourage municipalities to develop and operate education and culture departments based on specific local plans and shared objectives, moving beyond ad-hoc activities.
- Integrate educational considerations into urban planning processes, ensuring adequate and problem-free land allocation for educational facilities in zoning plans.
- Support initiatives such as scholarship programs for financially disadvantaged students and the establishment of local culture preservation centers, directly addressing community needs

Ultimately, transforming the potential of local governments into tangible educational benefits requires a paradigm shift from a purely centralized model to a collaborative governance approach. By strengthening legal frameworks, fostering inter-institutional coordination, and empowering municipalities to respond to local needs, Türkiye can create a more resilient and equitable education system. Implementing these strategic recommendations will not only alleviate the administrative burden on the central government but also ensure that educational services are delivered more efficiently and effectively, directly contributing to the holistic development of students and the broader community.

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