

**ON THEORIES OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION: A GLANCE AT THE TURKISH
EDUCATION SYSTEM**
EĞİTİM SOSYOLOJİSİ TEORİLERİ ÜZERİNE: TÜRK EĞİTİM SİSTEMİNE BİR BAKIŞ

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ABSTRACT

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Education, in general, and schools are one of the most controversial issues of modern societies. The function of education as a social phenomenon is examined within the scope of the sociology of education. There are four different perspectives used as references to explain the role of education in society. In this paper, the following theories in the field of sociology of education are presented under two headings: functionalist perspectives and critical perspectives. Afterward, the Turkish education system was interpreted in light of these theories. As a result, it was concluded that the Turkish education system generally reflects functionalist perspectives considering the aspects such as the centralized education system, general aims of education, and the existence of different school types. Lastly, in light of the information presented in this paper, suggestions were made for further research and policy-making.

ÖZ

Genel olarak eğitim ve okullar, modern toplumların en tartışmalı konularından biridir. Toplumsal bir olgu olarak eğitimin işlevi, eğitim sosyolojisi kapsamında incelenmektedir. Eğitimin toplumdaki rolünü açıklamak için referans olarak kullanılan dört farklı bakış açısı mevcuttur. Bu çalışmada işlevselci ve eleştirel bakış açıları olmak üzere eğitim sosyolojisi alanındaki teoriler iki başlık altında sunulmuştur. Sonrasında, Türk eğitim sisteminin bu teoriler ışığında genel bir değerlendirmesi yapılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, merkezi eğitim sistemi, eğitimin genel amaçları ve farklı okul türlerinin yer alması gibi özellikleri dikkate alındığında Türk eğitim sisteminin genel olarak işlevselci bakış açılarını yansıttığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Son olarak, bu makalede sunulan bilgiler ışığında, ileride yapılacak olan araştırmalar ve politika üretimi için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

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Introduction

Education in general, and schools in particular, is one of the most contested issues of modern societies. Education mainly functions as a means to ensure social cohesion and maintain social order, as well as to build an egalitarian and just society (Karaboğa, 2018). On the other hand, education plays an important role in inculcating the spiritual and intellectual worlds of future generations and transmitting the culture. These critical roles of education urge us to consider scientific, sociological, and philosophical assets of education in consistent and long-term educational policy-making (Yıldız & Yıldız, 2019).

As a social phenomenon, the function of education is nested within the sociology of education. Sociology of education makes use of theoretical and methodological developments of sociology as a field. Therefore, the problems in the field of sociology regarding theoretical and methodological approaches have also affected the sociology of education. Four main camps are used as references to explain the role of education in society; namely, “functionalism, radical structuralism, interpretive theories, and radical-humanism” (Burrell & Morgan, 2017) [see Ballantine and Hammack (2015) for a different categorization as follows: i) functionalism, ii) conflict theory, iii) interaction and interpretive theories, and iv) recent theories in the sociology of education]. Today, two overarching perspectives dominate the field in the West (Eşgin, 2013). The first is the old sociology of education that pertains to the functionalist perspective of American sociology, and the second is the new sociology of education in Continental Europe. The former camp mainly relies on statistical data and micro-sociological analysis while the latter is rooted in a critical perspective to open new doors in the field by appraising practices and policies. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the sociology of education as a field is in crisis since:

Sociology of education, even when rested on theoretical traditions that are prevailing in sociology, has not attempted to evaluate theoretical relations and scientific practices altogether. Accordingly, the theoretical and methodological foundations on which the field rested have remained quite weak and superficial (Eşgin, 2013, p.146).

Henceforth, there is a need for theoretical and methodological discussions that would help the development of the sociology of education as a field.

Moreover, in the context of Turkey, it was the 1960s when the sociology of education was recognized as an independent discipline. Before, it was included as a unit of analysis of society as other social institutions. Ziya Gökalp's contributions mainly shaped the development of the field (Kasapoğlu, 2005). However, as an academic discipline, the sociology of education was first introduced with the foundation of Ankara University Faculty of Education. In those times, there was a transition from the Continental perspective to the functionalist perspective of American sociology which would dominate the field for decades. The long-term adherence to the American tradition prevented the development of an independent perspective of the sociology of education in Turkey that takes into consideration the historical, cultural, and social structure of Turkish society (Kayalı, 2002, cited in Eşgin, 2013).

Today, sociology of education in Turkey is still stagnant as it relies too much on problems and their solutions of Western society rather than building a field identity that deals with the problems of and presents solutions to those problems of Turkish society (Erkul, 2000). In this regard, there is a need for studies that consider current socio-political and economic developments (Eşgin, 2013) because the constant changes in educational policymaking and practices in Turkey are not based on a scientific approach (Karakaya, 2006). It is a critical problem in the Turkish education system since educational policies play a vital role in equipping individuals with the necessary qualifications so that they can participate in the transformation and development of their societies (Yıldız & Gültekin-Karakaş, 2019). Nonetheless, as an ideological apparatus of the states, the education system itself and policies do not necessarily ensure equal and just opportunities for all social classes making the role of education in reproducing class relations in society more visible. Accordingly, benefitting from theoretical and methodological assets of the sociology of education might help develop educational policies that narrow the gap between social classes and allow social mobility for different income groups. Moreover, considering the vital role of education in “cultivating individuals in line with their abilities and in the light of science, it is essential to reveal the extent to which the current education system in Turkey can fulfill its function” (Yıldız & Gültekin-Karakaş, 2019, p. 289).

Given a brief introduction to the status of the sociology of education, this paper aims to situate a theoretical look at theories of the sociology of education and interpret those theories in the Turkish education system. Specifically, the paper intends to address the role of education in Turkey, provide insights into educational policy-making and practice, and contribute to the development of the sociology of education in Turkey by using theoretical perspectives in the explanation of current issues of the Turkish education system. The focus of this paper is on the two overarching camps of the field: functionalist perspectives and critical perspectives. The flow of the article is as follows: First, the theoretical perspectives for each camp are presented, and then, the theories are interpreted considering the current education system in Turkey.

Functionalist Perspectives in Sociology of Education

As a macro-level theory, functionalism briefly postulates that society, as a system, consists of interrelated sub-systems: education, family, religion, politics, economics, and health care (Durkheim, 1956). One of the important concepts underlying the functionalist approach is that all social structures and units are functional for the social system. That is, all sub-systems of society function as they meet the needs of society to create harmony and order (Aslan, 2001). Durkheim uses the human body as an analogy with an organic approach. He argues that as human organs function and work interdependently in the human body, institutions in a society function to contribute to the maintenance of social order (Tan, 1990, p. 559). Nevertheless, different from organs that function in accordance with a biological process, individuals need to be forced or motivated. At this point, functionalists introduce the concepts of culture and socialization. Mutual relations among social institutions determine the place of individuals and groups in society and direct them to certain behavior patterns based on the expectations of social institutions. In this way, individuals internalize certain values and norms of society so that social order and cohesion are maintained (Ballantine & Hammack, 2015; Sadovnik, 2007) because “In order to survive, every society needs a consensus among its members with regards to basic ideas, values, and norms, as well as individuals’ specialization for the division of labor” (Tan, 1990, p. 561).

Among the sub-systems of society, education is critical in achieving social cohesion and social order by socializing students into appropriate values and roles (Durkheim, 1956). In doing so, students are taught basic cognitive skills and prepared for the labor force while learning social norms and values so that they can be part of a social system unified around social consensus (Cookson & Sadovnik, 2002). In this regard, Durkheim (1956) underlines social solidarity by claiming that: “Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands.” (p. 80)

Durkheim (1956) claims that we are individual beings but at the same time, we are part of a:

system of ideas, sentiments and practices which express in us, not our personality, but the group or different groups which we are part; these are religious beliefs, moral beliefs and practices, national or professional traditions, collective opinions of every kind, their totality forms the social being. To constitute this being in each of us is the end of education (p. 80)

Accordingly, one of the key roles of the States is to address the common norms and values of society through schools to ensure that each child encompasses those essential principles of society. The other role of education is to equip children with the knowledge and skills demanded in the labor market in accordance with their social class so that division of labor is ensured. As explained in Davis and Moore’s theory of social stratification, education functions as a screening mechanism that selects the most effective and decisive individuals for the highest positions in society (Tezcan, 2021, p. 16). Similarly, in his influential work, “The School Class as a Social System”, Talcott Parsons (1961) explicates how the school class functions as a social system that assigns individuals to their roles in society. He argues that schools have mainly two functions: socialization and selection. The first refers to the processes that help individuals develop their capacity and facilitate their adaptation to society by teaching children universal values and norms other than the ones acquired in the family as the first socialization agency. For the second function, he introduces the concept of meritocracy. According to Parsons (1961), “a person in a relatively humble occupation may be a ‘solid citizen’ in the sense of commitment to honest work in that occupation, without an intensive and sophisticated concern with the society’s higher-level values” (p. 131). Put differently, people are rewarded considering their efforts and merit.

Despite the prolific impact in the field of education, there are certain criticisms of functionalist theories. First, critical educators ask “Whose shared values are taught at schools?” and “Whose interests do the shared values serve?” They oppose the idea that norms and values reflect the structure of the whole society as modern societies are diverse and multicultural. Second, they argue that contemporary education might not be adequate in equipping children with merit to meet the needs of the labor market. On the other hand, such a perspective is criticized as it downgrades education into a technical role and diverges students from their roles as transformers of their societies.

Critical Perspectives in Sociology of Education

As opposed to functionalist theories, critical perspectives of schooling trace back to Marxist views. The aim is to question the sovereign powers and the status quo in society in order to transform societies (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). This perspective is grounded in the argument that, unlike functionalist perspectives that claim social cohesion and order, there is a constant conflict (or tension) in society among different social classes and this conflict mainly functions as the change mechanism in society (Tan, 1990). The arguments center around inequalities among social classes derived from the unequal distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital. Put differently, critical educators focus on three major concerns: “mapping injustices in education, tracing those injustices to their source, seeking and proposing remedies to those injustices” (Sever, 2012, p. 655). They further argue that education has a vital role in eliminating inequalities in society. Therefore, they suggest that decisive and long-term educational policies enable individuals to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge that are essential in creating just societies in which social stratification and income inequalities are prevented (Yıldız & Gültekin-Karakaş, 2019).

Classic Marxist views argue that there is an unequal distribution of material and goods between the “haves” and “have-nots” in society (Ballantine & Hammack, 2009, p.17). As a critical institution of societies, education, then, has become a system in which dominant culture is reproduced and social order is maintained. This system privileges the interests and needs of the power groups while preventing “outsiders” from failure. In their strident work “Schooling in Capitalist America”, which is referred to as “Correspondence Theory”, Bowles and Gintis (1976) reported that schools reproduce class inequalities by teaching low-class students discipline, respect for authority, and acceptance of hierarchy. In doing so, the authors add, division of labor is ensured in favor of powerful groups as students of the low class are assigned low-class jobs that eventually secure powerful groups’ privileged positions in society. It is further suggested that employers use education as a rationale when choosing employees for top positions from the upper elite classes or when monopolizing employers from the lower class (Bernstein, 1960; Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Adding to Classic Marxist views, Max Weber depicted that other than economic inequalities, there are also cultural inequalities in societies (Ballantine & Hammack, 2015, Tezcan, 2021). His views later called cultural reproduction theories which aim to address the role of culture as a key determinant of social inequalities (e.g. Collins, 2009; Persell & Cookson, 1985; Weis, 2009). Bourdieu (1977), the most influential representative of cultural reproduction theories, contends that schools mainly extoll the cultural capital of the dominant classes and marginalize the others. In addition, the hegemonic curricula are aligned with the dominant culture to marginalize low-status groups from certain types of knowledge that is available for and habituated by high-status groups (Bourdieu, 1973; Freire, 2005).

Moreover, as part of the culture, bearing on the relationship between language codes and social class, Bernstein (1971) notes “Forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize and reinforce special types of relationship with the environment and thus create for the individual particular forms of significance” (p.76). He introduces two types of language codes: the restricted code and the elaborated code. The first is observed in well-defined and structured socializing agencies. It is less formal; includes shorter phrases; is consisted of the use of gestures and facial expressions more often. On the other hand, the latter is observed in flexible agencies. In this type of language use, one might observe longer and more complicated sentence structures, as well as, well-elaborated descriptions. Bernstein (1971) explains two major factors affecting the use of these codes: the form of the social relation and the quality of the social structure. He asserts that the working class mainly uses the restricted codes whereas the middle class might use both the restricted and elaborated codes as a result of the socializing agencies they are exposed. Applied to a school environment, it is concluded

that low-class students have restricted use of language; nevertheless, schools are built on the elites' language codes.

Accordingly, in "Class and Pedagogies: Visible and Invisible", Bernstein (1975) attempts to provide a thorough depiction of the relationship between classroom practices and social class differences. The author argues that visible and invisible pedagogical practices govern classroom relations. He notes that there are two approaches to the determination of pedagogical practices: the market-oriented approach and the autonomous knowledge approach which are dependent on the relationship between three rules. First, the hierarchical rule, also called regulative rules, refers to a pedagogical practice that prioritizes the existence of a transmitter and an acquirer who act based on their assigned roles. When stated explicitly, these rules set clear boundaries between subordinate and superordinate. In contrast, if it is implicit, hidden forms of power relations are observed. Second, sequencing rules, or discursive rules, are set to identify the sequence of the pedagogical practices. This causes learners' alienation from his/her own practices. Third is the criterial rules that determine the forms of evaluation to reach conclusions on the competence of the learner. Explicit criteria enable the acquirer to know what to accomplish or how to perform certain modes of behavior. Implicit criteria, in contrast, inform the acquirer only about general criteria. Bearing on these pedagogical practice rules, Bernstein (2003) asserts that "The fundamental proposition is that the same distribution of power may be reproduced by apparently opposing modalities of control" (p. 203). That is both visible and invisible practices are aligned with social class. Because, he argues, the school and the home together play a critical role in one's school learning. Put differently, "...children's consciousness is differentially and invidiously regulated according to their social class origin and their families' official pedagogic practice." (p. 206).

The aforementioned theories bring a critical perspective of schooling at the macro-level and primarily focus on society in general, instead of the individual. Recent theories in the sociology of education (as used by Ballantine and Hammack, 2015, p. 21), in contrast, put the individual at the center and examine how power groups control individual consciousness that causes self-alienation of the individual. As social scientists started to use different methods in their studies during the early twentieth century, Critical Theory emerged as one of the recent theories in the field of sociology of education (Wiggan, 2011). Influenced by mainly interpretive and radical-humanist paradigms, Critical Theory is rooted in the Marxist and neo-Marxist views in opposition to doctrines of the functionalist perspective (Sever, 2012). As a thought of Frankfurt Schools, Critical Theory was first introduced by Horkheimer during the 1920s. The theory postulates that just societies might be achieved only through emancipating citizens from oppression. In other words, it is a school of thought that highlights how different social institutions reproduce inequalities in terms of the distribution of wealth, status, or production. On the other hand, it emphasizes the crucial role that self-emancipation and social change play in eradicating all forms of inequality in societies (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003).

Since the 1970s, the theory is often used by educators in the explanation of educational inequalities derived from power relations in societies. Educators who are skeptical about who benefits from education apply Critical Theory to their arguments (Apple, 1971, 2004). These educators dispute that schools are attributed three main roles in society (Giroux, 1983). First, cultural inequalities (class, race, gender, etc.) are reproduced through the control and amount of knowledge at schools. Second, schools are designed to canonize the dominant culture's knowledge, values, and language. Third, schools are the places where the status quo is maintained in favor of the political power of the states. Against these aims, critical educators assert that the transformation of societies will occur by means of "conscientizing education" which refers to education that emancipates students, teachers, and educators from oppression groups (Freire, 2005). Freire (2005) further argues that standardized tests and market-oriented educational policies diverge students and teachers from their role as agencies who actively participate in the revolution. Traditional curriculum approach, he adds, neglects the individual needs of students and cultural differences; however, Critical Pedagogy puts the stakeholders of education, particularly students, at the center of educational processes and aims to help students to develop a critical consciousness through accepting knowledge and power as questionable and approachable phenomena (Giroux, 1992).

Michael Apple (2013), one of the strident contributors to Critical Pedagogy, exclaims that current educational systems are restructured mainly by neo-conservatives and neo-liberals. He explicates that neo-liberals intend to create schools that meet the needs of the free market by enforcing various educational policies such as privatization of education. Neo-conservatives, on the other hand, prioritize the reproduction of dominant

culture by leaning on a teacher-centered traditional approach that extolls high-level knowledge, centralized education systems, and intensive curricula that demand high standards. He further argues that top-down policies of these groups overlook the voices of minority groups (poor, blacks, and other oppressed groups).

Despite the firm accounts it provides about power relations and inequalities in societies, Critical Theory also has copious criticisms which only a few of which are discussed in this paper. First, some are cautious about whether it is possible to achieve complete emancipation of the individual from the sociopolitical context they habituated (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In other words, it is claimed that critical educators approach the issues they study (i.e. justice) as abstract terms and fail to capture the complexity of cultural-political issues in the real world (Pinar & Bowers, 1992). Linked to this criticism, others question the way critical theorists are often so tied to their truth rather than highlighting the oppression of the marginalized groups they are trying to voice (Ellsworth, 1989). Put differently, “arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate ‘others’” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p.289) might result in false consciousness and be a form of domination rather than emancipation. Gibson (1986) similarly alleges that critical theories suffer from “cliquishness, conformity, elitism, immodesty, anti-individualism, contradictoriness, uncriticalness, and naivety” (p. 164). That is, the jargon-driven theoretical premises of Critical Theory is criticized by many (Goodman, 1992). “Terms like ... hermeneutics get tossed around as though everybody but a fool is intimately familiar with their meaning” (Jackson, 1980, p. 379). Therefore, it is noted that Critical Theory should be revised considering the meaning-making of the oppressed people so that they can also contribute to their own liberation.

Given the fundamental principles of functionalist and critical perspectives of schooling, this paper will continue with an intricate analysis of the Turkish education system in light of the aforementioned perspectives.

The Education System in Turkey and Its Interpretation in the Light of Functionalist and Critical Perspectives

“How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits, and evaluates educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control within that society” (Bernstein, 1977, p. 85).

The Turkish education system includes both formal and non-formal education. Formal education is highly centralized. All levels of K-12 education are controlled by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and regulated by the Basic Law of Turkish National Education, Law No 1739. The general aims of education in Turkey are listed below:

- “to inculcate all individuals with a consciousness of their responsibilities to their country, and to encourage individuals to internalize Atatürk’s nationalism, as well as his principles, values, and reforms;
- to foster creativity, constructiveness, individuality, entrepreneurship, and productivity in all individuals; to encourage them to develop a broader understanding of the world, to be respectful of human rights, to raise awareness of social responsibility, to cultivate a sound and balanced character, and to help them develop independent and rational reasoning;
- to prepare citizens for life while helping them become aware of their interests, abilities, and capabilities, and to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for a profession that results in both their own welfare and the welfare of society.”

When the Basic Law of Turkish National Education is examined it is seen that the primary aim of the State is to educate students as good and successful citizens (Yıldız & Yıldız, 2016) as in each society, education is attributed a political role in order for maintaining social order and educating leaders who contribute to the development of the society as a system (Kaya, 1974, cited in Yıldız & Yıldız, 2016). Nevertheless, it is difficult to talk about sustainable educational policy-making in Turkey. With each change of ruling party and Minister, along with military coups, one can observe a change in the aim of education. To clarify, the first years of the Republic included attempts to secularize and democratize the education system. The enactment of the Law on Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) in 1924 incorporated all schools under the centralized control of the Ministry of National Education of the time (Maarif Bakanlığı). This attempt is perceived as the first step to the secularization and democratization of the education system in Turkey (Akyüz, 1999). As Yıldız and Yıldız cite the publishing of the MoNE (1993), the aim was to educate students, who embraced the principles of the Republic, in accordance with the need of society with an emphasis on Turkishness till the midst of the 1940s. Then, the end of the 1940s was the first time educational equality became an issue of educational

policies. Later, at the beginning of the 1960s, the Minister of the time urged for reorganization in the Ministry to uphold education from its stagnant functioning. Following, dramatic changes were observed during the early 1970s to integrate vocational education into the education system in order to contribute to the economic development of the country. Atatürk nationalism was observed as the focal point of education during the early 1980s. Since the late 1980s, neoliberal policies have become the key determinant of educational policies that paved the way for commercialization and commodification of education (Yıldız & Gültekin-Karataş, 2019).

Bearing these arguments, it is safe to conclude that the Turkish education system mainly reflects the functionalist view of schooling (Turan et al., 2015). Foremost, the centralized education system reflects the functionalist perspectives of schooling since social order and consensus take precedence over individual needs in such a system. Ramirez and Boli (1987) contend that states invested, funded, and authorized mass schooling in order to achieve national unity. This unity aims to construct an identity for each individual while it serves to empower the state. In other words: “state interest in mass education was shaped by the political construction of mass education, that is, by its perceived institutional character rather than by the actual effects of compulsory mass education on nation-state structures” (Ramirez & Boli, 1987, p. 3).

Moreover, the general aims are also woven with the functionalist perspective. That is individuals, as part of a larger system –society-, should be “responsible citizens” who internalize the values and norms of society and productively contribute to the development of their society. Furthermore, as part of a centralized education system, through the control of the type and amount of knowledge surveillance of society is ensured (Foucault, 1980). The dominant ideology is transmitted through the formal curricula so that class inequalities are reproduced (Apple, 1990; Freire, 2005; İnal, 2004). As a result, students who internalize common values and social norms become citizens who are gatekeepers of social order.

In Turkey, the 1982 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (Articles 10, 24, 42, 62, 130, 131, and 132) governs the responsibilities of the State regarding education. Education is free and for all and this right is secured in Article 42 as follows:

- “No one shall be deprived of the right to education.
- The scope of the right to education shall be defined and regulated by law.
- Education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, based on contemporary scientific and educational principles, under the supervision and control of the State. Educational institutions contravening these principles shall not be established.
- The freedom of education does not relieve the individual from loyalty to the Constitution.
- Primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools.
- The principles governing the functioning of private primary and secondary schools shall be regulated by law in keeping with the standards set for the state schools.
- (Paragraph added on February 2, 2008; Act No. 5735, and annulled by the decision of the Constitutional Court dated June 5, 2008, numbered E. 2008/16, K. 2008/116) The State shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education.
- The State shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special education so as to render such people useful to society.
- Training, education, research, and study are the only activities that shall be pursued at institutions of education. These activities shall not be obstructed in any way.
- No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution of education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting education in a foreign language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserved” (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p. 23)

As described above, functionalist theorists accept education as a critical institution of society. Functioning well within itself and operating in harmony with other institutions (i.e. family, religion, etc.), education is an indispensable wheel of society as a system since maintaining social order and creating consensus among citizens are mainly achieved through education systems. In this regard, a myriad of efforts have been made to ensure equality of educational opportunities at the policy level such as “compulsory basic education, transportation

system (transported education/school buses), free education (free public schools), scholarship education/student scholarships (student loans), distance education, multi-purpose education, organization/opening of training and supplementary classes and courses, establishment of regional schools, providing education to children in need of special education, free textbooks and conditional education aids” (İnan & Demir, 2018). All these efforts are claimed to aim at constructing barriers for disadvantaged groups’ skill development and educational progress (Atmaca, 2021) so that social stratification and social cohesion are ensured.

In his account of equality of educational opportunities in Turkey, Tabak (2019) reports that as part of equality of educational opportunities, in recent years, a larger share of national income is allocated to education and expenditures on education have been increasing. He further notes that Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Program can also be accepted as part of equalizing educational opportunities among different social classes. Another attempt includes FATİH Project (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology Project). The project was designed to provide students with equal opportunities to access to digital learning opportunities. In this regard, almost half a million tablet computers were distributed to the students. The classes were equipped with smart boards and e-books were provided for classes. On the other hand, during Covid-19 pandemic, more than half million disadvantaged students were provided with tablet computers. Also, as Polat and Boydak-Özdan (2020) examine teachers’ views on educational equality in the Turkish education system, the authors report that the State’s providing students with free-textbooks, scholarships, and transported education are perceived as equal educational opportunities. Bearing these notions in mind, it is concluded that education’s being a right protected by the State in Turkey overlaps with the functionalist perspectives. Also, as mentioned above, recent public policies in Turkey aim to ensure equality of educational opportunities since the State is perceived as the critical provider of education in society.

Nonetheless, from a critical perspective, providing free education and securing education as a human right by law do not necessarily ensure educational equity. Demographic factors such as individual spending on education, gender, and region affect child’s position in the education system. Despite the recent aforementioned attempts, it is claimed that the Turkish education system does not provide equality of educational opportunities since socioeconomic status of families is still a key to access to quality education (Polat & Boydak-Özan, 2020). Accordingly, cultural capital, one of the four forms of capital introduced by Bourdieu (1986), is accepted as one of the critical incidents of educational inequalities. A growing body of literature has used Bourdieu’s conceptualization to explain those inequalities (e.g. Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wells, 2008). These studies mainly indicate that mainstream schools are built to secure and maintain the cultural capital of the middle class while stigmatizing ‘others’. Providing another evidence for those assertions, in their study with 788 high school students from different cities of Turkey, Arastaman and Özdemir (2019) report significant relationship among cultural capital, academic self-efficacy beliefs and academic aspiration. Accordingly, in their analysis of inequalities in the Turkish education system, Yıldız and Gültekin-Karakaş (2019) remark that despite the increase in enrollment rates, there are still problems with educational quality to enabling students competent at the global level. The authors remark on regional differences by comparing İstanbul and the Southeastern Anatolia region. The comparison reveals that the Southeastern Anatolia region could reach educational equality indicators in 2016 which İstanbul reached in 2008.

Moreover, household expenditures are asserted as another detriment of educational equity. As demonstrated in the Turkish Statistical Institute Report (TURKSTAT) (2017), households in the lowest economic range (1st 20%) share 6.2% of total income while this percentage raises up to 47.2% for the household in the highest range (5th 20%). In addition, the former group allocates only 0.6% of the average income to education expenditures while the latter does 4.1%. These statistics indicate that educational inequalities are reproduced through expenditures spent on education because the amount of individual spending on education is a sparkle incident of education quality. What is critical is that regional and economic inequalities together trigger more nefarious results. To exemplify, the lowest rate of household education expenditures (1.8%) is in the Southeastern Anatolia region (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). From a different viewpoint, geographical and school-based inequalities are reported as critical incidents of access to higher education (Ataç, 2017). Supporting these arguments, Yolcu (2011) contends that differences among education expenditures of social classes transform

education into a market and yield increased share of investment in private education while depriving social mobility of lower-classes.

All these inequalities are augmented by gender. Girls experience barriers derived from the cultural and social structure of society (perceiving girls' education as unnecessary, marriages at an early age, concerns about school safety, education level of parents, religious factors, etc.). It is further argued that the social roles attributed to girls, the different treatment of girls in schools, and stereotypes about social roles in curricula cause gender inequality (Mercan Küçükakın & Engin Demir, 2022). In a recent report by Education Reform Institute (ERI) (2022), it is reported that gender inequalities have become more visible with the Covid-19 pandemic. Most recently, the earthquake that hit 11 cities in Turkey has brought major problems for girls such as access to education, as well as enrollment and attendance in schools (Tüzün, 2023).

Other than the aforementioned groups, children with special needs, children in rural, working students, and refugee students are also listed as vulnerable to educational inequalities (Tunca et al., 2022). The recent Education Tracking Report 2022 by ERI presents that there is a significant gap between enrollment rates of students with special needs at primary and high school levels. The gap becomes more detrimental for girls with special needs. Similar findings are reported for students in rural. Despite the increased number of village schools, enrollment rates are not at the expected level. Again, being a girl in a rural amplifies disadvantages at all school levels. On the other hand, based on TSI 2019 data, it is noted that 16.4% of 15-17 aged children are in labor force. The rate of working boys (22.9%) is higher than girls (9.5%). However, other statistical calculations indicate that there are girls who are not represented in the official labor force record. Lastly, refugee students have become one of the controversial issues in the education system. There are almost 1.5 million refugees at the school age. More than half of them (65%) are enrolled in schools. Despite the relatively high rates at primary (75.1%) and middle (80%) school levels, the enrollment rates are lower at early childhood education (34.3%) and high school levels (42.7%).

Moreover, education quality has been a matter of study in the field of sociology of education. The quality issues direct our attention to the different school types in Turkey. In Turkey, since the 30th of March 2012, with the amendment in Law No 6287, compulsory education has increased to 12 years provided at three levels of education. Primary schools serve students from the 1st to the 4th grade. Middle school education (from the 5th to the 8th grade) is provided in middle schools and religious middle schools (İmam Hatip Ortaokulları). Secondary school education (from the 9th to the 12th grade) is given at different types of schools including Science High Schools, Social Science High Schools, Anatolian High Schools, Fine Arts High Schools, Sports High Schools, Religious High Schools (İmam Hatip Liseleri), and Vocational High Schools. Private education is available at all education levels. The quality of education shows significant differences across the school types. Besides, access to quality education is highly dependent on one's social class. According to functionalist perspectives, it is necessary for ensuring the division of labor force in society. In this way, class differences are protected and at a broader level, the social order is maintained. In contrast, according to the critical perspectives, opportunities such as better school facilities, more qualified teachers, and technology integration are likely to facilitate getting an education at prestigious universities as a passport to higher-status professions.

Besides, in regard to private schools, functionalists argue that the States are responsible for providing education for all classes as the needs and expectations of social classes from education might vary. These theorists also claim that families who are able to effort private school fees should be given the opportunity to make a school choice. Additionally, they assert that privatization of public institutions leads to increased standards and high-stakes accountability, the same applies to education systems (Brathwaite, 2017). This is accepted as part of social order and cohesion in society. Counterarguments are grounded on critical perspectives. Advocates of this perspective depict that private schools transform education into a thing that can be sold and bought (Gök, 2004). Supporting critical perspectives, in Turkey, the share of private education institutions has escalated in the last decades (İnal, 2012; Özden et al., 2017). According to the MoNE National Education Statistics (2022), more than 1.5 million students are enrolled at private education institutions while this number was 335 thousand 939 in 2007. In addition, the share of private education institutions has reached almost 20% in 2022. From a critical perspective, these statistics indicate that educational inequality gap between social classes has widened with the increased share of private schools in Turkey.

With efforts at accountability and standardization, high-stakes tests also mirror the functionalist perspective. In Turkey, the transition to upper education levels is regulated through standardized tests. The examination system is built on the concept of meritocracy, which explains differences among individual scores with one's ability and effort. Among those tests, the university entrance examination has the highest stakes. It is a two-staged exam: Basic Proficiency Test (Temel Yetenek Testi), then, Area Qualification Test (Alan Yeterlik Sınavı). Applicants are sequenced and selected considering their scores on those tests so that students are positioned into their appropriate social roles (Davies & Moore, 1945). From a critical perspective, in contrast, neglecting students' individual differences and needs, students are perceived as competitive beings who put in their best efforts for the greatest benefits, i.e. highest pay. Education, then, becomes a critical determinant of having social and economic privileges in society (Ataç, 2017; Ünal, 1988). According to the functionalist view, this is essential for the maintenance of society. In a system of meritocracy, failures are attributed to individuals so that inequalities are legitimized. Critical educators espouse that high-stakes tests deprive of teacher autonomy, fragmentize knowledge, overestimate students' development as a whole, and transform education into a technical process (Apple 2001; Au, 2009; Giroux, 2001).

Conclusion and Suggestions

Education systems are not a neutral phenomenon in societies. It is hard to locate education as an independent gear of society (Dinçer, 2003). In Turkey, schools mainly function to maintain social order and cohesion by adopting a centralized education system that is built on a set of shared values and norms. Socio-political and economic conditions in which education systems function shape educational policy-making processes and practices. Therefore, even the classes are, in fact, 'haunted by ghosts – the architecture of the school building, the curriculum developers, and the authors of the textbooks-' and not run by autonomous teachers (Meighan, 1981). These ghosts are more visible for subordinated groups. Inequalities among genders, races, and social classes have become more apparent. Those inequalities are legitimized through low-level and compartmentalized knowledge (Bernstein, 2003).

Moreover, a child's home background and demographic characteristics are critical in determining his/her likelihood of enjoying quality education in an equal and just education system. In other words, as a key factor, family background causes inequality at the starting gate (Lee & Burkham, 2002). These inequalities become more visible and detrimental in low-income countries (Heyneman & Loxley, 1983). Accordingly, Bernstein (2003) remarks that the school and the home together play a critical role in the effective implementation of curricula. Considering the poor home environment (i.e. lack of a silent place to study, restricted time spent on homework, etc.), the failure of the poor children becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy since: "...children's consciousness is differentially and invidiously regulated according to their social class origin and their families' official pedagogic practice." (Bernstein, 2003, p. 206). Similar to these arguments, this paper report educational inequalities derived from many individual and home background factors such as gender, individual spending on education, and region.

The literature shows that private schools add to the existing inequalities as they equip their elite students with market-based knowledge and skills (Lewis & Wanner, 1979). Besides, private schools are the places where the privileged culture (i.e. manner, language use, etc.) of the dominant class is transmitted and reproduced (Warner & Lunt, 1941; Domhoff, 1967 as cited in Lewis & Wanner, 1979). On the other side of the coin, children of low-class families are destined to acquire low-level practical knowledge that yields low-status professions so the downward mobility of upper classes is prevented (Lewis & Waller, 1979). In Turkey, different school types and standardized tests together serve as gatekeepers of the division of labor. Put differently, students are mainly directed to professions in line with their social class as part of social stratification. The existence of private and public schools is evidence of stratification among students (Polat & Boydak Özdan, 2020; Karakaya, 2006). That is, the educational and social opportunities of students with high socioeconomic status enable them to succeed both at and outside the school while destining lower-class students to accept the social hierarchy as the cause of the reproduction of social stratification. Therefore, it is concluded that the education system in Turkey is nested within the tenets of functionalist perspectives of education.

On the other hand, from a critical perspective, all those aspects neglect individual and cultural differences and perpetuate educational inequalities among students. Despite the recent firm efforts to ensure equality of educational opportunities (increased public education expenditures, free textbooks provided by the State, giving

tablets to students, providing students with scholarships, etc.), there are still educational inequalities across regions, genders, and school types. The centralized education system, high-stakes testing, and the growing number of private schools appear to exacerbate existing inequalities.

Succinctly, in Turkey, the sociology of education has been influenced by theoretical developments in the field. Although attempts have been made to construct just education systems, there are still problems regarding achieving educational equality. Further research might focus on the role of high-stakes testing in Turkey considering two aspects. First, researchers might examine the social stratification mechanisms high-stakes testing generates and its consequences from the theories of educational sociology. The other aspect might include how high-stakes testing influences teacher autonomy and teachers' curricular practices.

Furthermore, the analysis of the Turkish education system yielded the existence of different forms of educational inequalities. In order to achieve sustainable and inclusive educational policy-making, current policies should be examined in detail through the lenses of theories in the field of sociology of education. Such an analysis would enable policy-makers and educators to understand the role of education in society while determining the sources of educational problems. Regional differences, as one of the critical sources of inequities, should be considered in efforts to increase enrollment rates in disadvantaged regions. On the other hand, in order to achieve gender equality, attempts such as revising curricula and textbooks to ensure gender equality, allocating extra budget for girls' education, particularly for girls with disadvantaged home backgrounds, and supporting girls' studies in male-dominated fields might be considered. These attempts might also contribute to preventing discrimination and violence against women and girls in different areas of life. Lastly, policy-makers might analyze the theoretical perspectives described in this paper in rationalizing their decisions in order to secure the interest of society while taking individual needs (i.e. cultural differences) into consideration. So that the mutual relationship between education and society might meet the needs of both citizens and society.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Genel olarak eğitim ve okullar, modern toplumların en tartışmalı konularından biridir. Toplumsal bir olgu olarak eğitimin işlevi, eğitim sosyolojisi kapsamında incelenmektedir. Eğitimin toplumdaki rolünü açıklamak için referans olarak kullanılan dört farklı bakış açısı mevcuttur: işlevselcilik, radikalizm, yorumlayıcı teoriler ve radikal-hümanizm (Burrell & Morgan, 2017) [farklı bir sınıflandırma için bkz. Ballantine ve Hammack (2015): i) işlevselcilik, ii) çatışma teorisi, iii) etkileşimci ve yorumlayıcı teoriler ve iv) eğitim sosyolojisindeki yeni teoriler].

Bu makale, eğitim sosyolojisi teorilerine teorik bir bakış açısı getirmeyi ve bu teorileri Türk eğitim sistemi bağlamında yorumlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu makalenin odak noktası, alanın iki kapsayıcı kampı üzerinedir: işlevselci bakış açıları ve eleştirel bakış açıları. Makalenin akışı şu şekildedir: Önce her kamp için teorik bakış açıları, ardından teoriler Türkiye'deki mevcut eğitim sistemi dikkate alınarak yorumlanıyor.

Makro düzeyde bir teori olarak, işlevselciliğe Fransız sosyolog Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1956) öncülük etmiştir. Teori, toplumu birbiriyle ilişkili şu alt sistemlerden oluşan bir sistem olarak tanımlar: eğitim, aile, din, politika, ekonomi ve sağlık hizmetleri. Bu alt sistemlerin, bir dizi sosyal norm, kural ve değer tanımlayarak (Tan, 1990, s. 560) toplumun devamlılığını ve vatandaşlar arasında fikir birliğini sağlamak için birlikte çalıştığını savunur (Ballantine ve Hammack, 2015; Sadovnik, 2007). Toplumsal bir sistem olarak eğitim, öğrencileri uygun değerler ve rollerle sosyalleştirerek sosyal uyum ve sosyal düzenin sağlanmasında kritik öneme sahiptir (Durkheim, 1956). Bunu yaparken, bir yandan öğrencilere temel bilişsel beceriler ile ortak bir sosyal amaç etrafında birleşmiş toplumsal bir sistemin parçası olabilmeleri için toplumsal normlar ve değerler öğretilirken bir yandan da bu öğrenciler işgücü için hazırlanırlar (Cookson ve Sadovnik, 2002).

Böylelikle, Devletlerin kilit rollerinden biri, her çocuğun toplumun bu temel ilkelerini benimsemesini sağlamak için okullar aracılığıyla toplumun ortak norm ve değerlerini ele almaktır. Diğeri ise öğrencileri, içinde bulunduğu sosyal sınıfa uygun olarak işgücü piyasasında talep edilen bilgi ve becerilerle donatarak toplumda işbölümünü sağlamaktır. Davis ve Moore'un sosyal tabakalaşma teorisinde açıklandığı gibi eğitim, toplumdaki en yüksek konumlar için en etkili ve kararlı bireyleri seçen bir tarama mekanizması işlevi görür (Tezcan, 2021, s. 16). Burada Talcott Parsons liyakat kavramını öne sürmektedir. Bu kavram Devletlerin, en yetenekli ve bilgin bireylerin, toplumun üst-düzyer mesleklerine erişiminin olduğundan emin olmalarını meşrulaştıran bir mekanizma olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Marksist görüşlere dayanan eleştirel bakış açıları, eğitim sosyolojisi teorileri arasında İşlevselci Kuramların tam karşısında yer alır. Bu bakış açısı, toplumları dönüştürmek için egemen güçleri ve toplumdaki statükoyu sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). Klasik Marksist görüşler, toplumda “sahip olanlar” ve “sahip olmayanlar” arasında eşit olmayan bir sermaye dağılımı olduğunu savunur (Ballantine ve Hammack, 2009, s.17). Toplamların kritik bir kurumu olan eğitim, böylece egemen kültürün yeniden üretildiği ve toplumsal düzenin egemen güçlerin lehine korunduğu bir sistem halini almıştır. Bu sistem, “dışarıdakileri” başarısızlığa mahkum ederken, güç gruplarının çıkarlarını ve ihtiyaçlarını önceler.

Bu bağlamda, Bowles ve Gintis (1976), “Kapitalist Amerika’da Eğitim” adlı titiz çalışmalarında, okulların alt sınıf öğrencilerine disiplin, otoriteye saygı ve hiyerarşiyi kabul etmeyi öğreterek sınıf eşitsizliklerini yeniden ürettiğini öne sürmektedir. Yazarlar, bunu yaparken, güçlü grupların lehine işbölümünün sağlandığını ve alt sınıftaki öğrencilerin, güçlü grupların toplumdaki ayrıcalıklı konumlarını güvence altına alacak alt sınıf meslek gruplarına yönlendirildiğini belirtmektedir.

Öte yandan, Max Weber, Klasik Marksist görüşlere ek olarak, toplumlarda ekonomik eşitsizliklerin yanı sıra kültürel eşitsizliklerin de olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir (Ballantine ve Hammack, 2015, Tezcan, 2021). Weber’in görüşleri daha sonra, kültürün sosyal eşitsizliklerin kilit belirleyicisi olarak rolünü ele almayı amaçlayan kültürel yeniden üretim teorileri olarak adlandırılmıştır (örn. Collins, 2009; Persell ve Cookson, 1985; Weis, 2009). Kültürel yeniden üretim teorilerinin en etkili temsilcisi olan Bourdieu (1977), okulların ağırlıklı olarak egemen sınıfların kültürel sermayesini yücelttiğini ve diğerlerini ötekileştirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Ek olarak, hegemonik müfredat, alt sınıf grupların, üst sınıf gruplar için erişilebilir olan belirli bilgi türlerine erişiminin önünde engel teşkil etmektedir ve baskın kültürün yeniden üretimine sebep olmaktadır (Bourdieu, 1973; Freire, 2005).

Yirminci yüzyılın başlarında sosyal bilimciler çalışmalarında farklı yöntemler kullanmaya başlayınca, Eleştirel Kuram, eğitim sosyolojisi alanındaki yeni kuramlardan biri olarak ortaya çıktı (Wiggan, 2011). Esas olarak yorumlayıcı ve radikal-hümanist paradigmatlardan etkilenen Eleştirel Teori, Marksist ve yeni-Marksist görüşlere

dayanır (Sever, 2012). Eğitimden kimin yararlanacağı konusunda şüpheli olan eğitimciler, açıklamalarının teorik arka planında Eleştirel Teoriyi uygularlar. Bu eğitimciler, toplumların dönüşümünün öğrencileri, öğretmenleri ve eğitimcileri baskı gruplarından özgürleştiren eğitim anlamına gelen “bilinçleştirici eğitim” yoluyla gerçekleşeceğini iddia etmektedirler (Freire, 2005). Freire (2005) ayrıca, standart testlerin ve piyasaya yönelik eğitim politikalarının, öğrencileri ve öğretmenleri, toplumların dönüşümüne aktif olarak katılmalarının önünde bir engel olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, geleneksel müfredat yaklaşımı, öğrencilerin bireysel ihtiyaçlarını ve kültürel farklılıkları göz ardı etmektedir. Buna karşın, Eleştirel Pedagoji, eğitimin paydaşlarının, özellikle de öğrencilerin eğitim süreçlerinin merkezinde olup eleştirel bir bilinç geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmayı amaçlamaktadır (Giroux, 1992).

Bu teorik bilgiler ışığında Türk eğitim sistemi değerlendirildiğinde, eğitim sistemimizin genel olarak işlevselci bakış açısına uygun düştüğü görülmektedir (Turan et al., 2015). Merkezi eğitim sistemi ve merkezi sınavlar ile Türk eğitim sisteminin genel amaçları işlevselci paradigmanın temellerini yansıtmaktadır. Farklı okul türlerinin olması ve Türk eğitim sisteminde payı giderek artan özel okulların varlığı da işlevselci teorilerde vurgulanan sosyal düzen ve iş gücünün bölünmesi kavramlarıyla örtüşmektedir. Tüm bunlar, eleştirel bakış açısına sahip eğitim sosyolojisi teorilerince eleştirilmektedir. Eleştirel eğitimciler, hane halkı eğitim harcamalarındaki farklılıkları, bölgeler arası ve okul türleri arasındaki farklılıkları (merkezi sınavlardaki başarı, olanaklar, vs. bakımından) ve eğitim programlarında ele alınan bilgi ve becerilerdeki farklılaşmaları toplumdaki eğitim eşitsizliklerini açıklamak üzere kullanmaktadırlar.

Bu bilgiler ışığında, son yıllarda Türkiye’de eğitimde fırsat eşitliğinin sağlanmasına yönelik pek çok adımın görülmektedir. Ancak, tam olarak sorunun çözüldüğünü söylemek mümkün değildir. Bu sebeple, eğitim sosyolojisi teorileri temel alınarak mevcut eğitim politikalarının ayrıntılı olarak inceleyecek çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır. Öte yandan, bu makalede açıklanan teorik bakış açılarının, politika yapıcılarının, politika üretim süreçlerinde dikkate alarak bireysel ihtiyaçların (örn., kültürel farklılıkların) göz önüne alındığı bir yanda da toplumun çıkarlarının güvence altına alındığı bir yaklaşımı benimseyerek yeni politikalar üretmelerine öncülük etmesi beklenmektedir.