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Address-Based School Enrollment System: A Socio-Economic Discrimination in Education

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ABSTRACT

This study critically analyzes how the Address-Based School Enrollment System, introduced in Türkiye in 2009, reproduces socio-economic inequalities in education. It shows how the discourse of equal opportunity in education creates as a class-based illusion and how school choice is constrained by spatial limitations. The study employed a phenomenological design and draws on semi-structured interviews with 27 parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Findings indicate that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds perceive the system as a source of inequality, injustice, and exclusion. In contrast, parents from higher socio-economic groups tend to view it positively in terms of safety, convenience, and access to services. The system is also frequently circumvented through informal practices such as false address registration and favoritism, resulting in ethically and socially problematic outcomes. Spatially based school enrollment restricts access to quality education along class lines and weakens cultural diversity. Overall, the Address-Based School Enrollment System functions less as a mechanism for ensuring equal opportunity than as a driver of deeper class divisions.

Keywords: Address-Based School Enrollment System, socio-economic inequality, education policy, spatial segregation, equal opportunity.

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Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental institutions that plays a key role in reproducting social structure. In this sense, it can be argued that cultural and class-based inequalities are legitimized through education. However, in the prevailing societal perception, schools are regarded as egalitarian institutions operating under a meritocratic framework. The meritocratic belief that individuals are rewarded solely on the basis of their abilities and achievements overlooks social inequalities and class positions. For instance, Bottomore (2000) points out that in stratified societies, the equal opportunities offered through education promise individuals from low-income backgrounds the chance for upward mobility and the attainment of privilege. Yet, it is necessary to question whether genuine equality can exist in contexts where privilege persists. From this perspective, equal opportunity can be seen as a liberal concept that offers not equality itself, but merely the possibility of it. Consequently, the widespread belief that education provides equal opportunities to all may impose the notion that the future failures of students who cannot benefit equally from these opportunities are due to their own deficiencies. Indeed, from the standpoint of the critical perspectives that form the theoretical background of this study, the education system functions as an argument that legitimizes the disadvantages of students who are unable to benefit from education on equal terms (Apple, 2012; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2015; Illich, 2013; Spring, 2014).

Both national and international empirical studies emphasize that individuals from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds do not have equal access to educational opportunities (Blanden et al., 2022; Bilgin & Erbuğ, 2022; Dolu, 2020; Kılıç, 2014; Ladd, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2005). These studies examine the manifestations of social stratification in education and reveal that the quality of schools attended by students from low-income groups is significantly lower than that of schools attended by students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, it can be argued that, both in Türkiye and internationally, class-based inequalities give rise to processes of social segregation within the education system, which in turn further reinforce class-based disparities.

Today, schools across Türkiye vary considerably in terms of educational quality, number of teachers, technological infrastructure, and overall resources. These disparities largely reflect the socio-economic characteristics of the neighborhoods in which schools are located (ERG, 2024). Schools situated in affluent areas, where socio-economically advantaged populations reside, are of significantly higher quality compared to those in low-income neighborhoods. Under such conditions, it is difficult to speak of equal opportunity or fairness in education. At this point, it is worth addressing the address-based primary school enrollment system, which constitutes the foundation of this study, and its relation to social inequalities. Implemented in Türkiye since the 2009–2010 academic year, the “Address-Based Enrollment System” in primary schools refers to the placement of students in schools based on their residential addresses. While the system is legitimized through justifications such as administrative convenience, transportation safety, and regional planning, it is argued to operate as a mechanism that exacerbates socio-economic inequalities. As a result of this policy, students from low-income families are confined to attending only the schools within their neighborhoods. In contrast, more prestigious neighborhood schools are accessible only to students from middle- and upper-income backgrounds who have the means to reside in those areas.

Through the Address-Based Enrollment System, the Ministry of Education seeks to restrict parental school choice and prevent overcrowding in prestigious neighborhood schools. However, under the slogan "The best school is the one closest to home," this policy effectively strips students living in disadvantaged neighborhoods of their right to receive a better education. Families with higher socio-economic status, on the other hand, retain the option of enrolling their children in private schools even if they are dissatisfied with the public schools in their area. Consequently, the claim that education offers equal opportunities to all social groups does not reflect reality. In other words, while children from low-income families are obliged to attend the schools assigned to them, children from affluent families enjoy the privilege of school choice. This inequality not only contradicts the promises of education but also constitutes a violation of human rights.

Furthermore, the Address-Based Enrollment System may be interpreted as an implicit acknowledgment by the Ministry of Education of the existing disparities in quality among public schools. Given that "prestigious neighborhood schools" are concentrated in high-income areas, it can be argued that the system restricts low-income students' access to quality education and further deepens socio-economic inequality. Against this backdrop, the primary aim of this study is to critically examine the political function of the Address-Based Enrollment System and to investigate how it reproduces socio-economic and spatial inequalities in education. Accordingly, the study is structured around the following research question:

"How does the Address-Based Enrollment System affect the educational opportunities of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds?"

The study examines how families from different social classes perceive and experience this system, as well as how it contributes to broader patterns of educational injustice. To achieve this aim, the research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. How do parents from lower-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic backgrounds perceive the Address-Based Enrollment System?
2. On what grounds and justifications do parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds explain this policy?
3. How do parents from lower-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic backgrounds evaluate the implications of the system for equal opportunity in society?
4. What strategies do parents from lower-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic backgrounds develop in response to the restrictions imposed by this policy?

Within the scope of these questions, the study seeks to fill a significant gap in the literature. Although there are various policy and structural analyses on how the Address-Based Enrollment System in Türkiye reinforces socio-spatial segregation, qualitative research exploring how this system is experienced in everyday life and interpreted by parents remains scarce. By centering the voices of parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, this study reveals how the policy is perceived and experienced in terms of social justice. It also sheds light on how spatial inequalities in education are internalized at the individual level and how strategies are developed in response. In doing so, it makes visible—through parental experiences—the ways in which education fails to function as an egalitarian instrument, while opening the ideological dimension of the policy to discussion from the perspective of social classes.

In this context, the theoretical framework of the study is grounded in critical theories that focus on uncovering the mechanisms through which educational inequalities are rendered invisible. This approach challenges the dominant discourse portraying the education system as

neutral and egalitarian, instead positing that education operates as an ideological apparatus that legitimizes and reproduces the existing social order (Althusser, 2014; Apple, 2012; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2015). In line with this perspective, the research demonstrates how class-based spatial segregation intersects with education policies, thereby exposing the ideological dimension of the Address-Based Enrollment System.

Socio-Spatial Segregation in Education: A Critical Review of Recent Literature

In contemporary contexts, cities have evolved beyond being mere geographic spaces where people live together; they have become sites where diverse economic, social, cultural, and educational processes unfold. Current neoliberal urbanization policies are largely designed to cater to the comforts of the upper segments of society, while presenting an exclusionary landscape for the lower strata. The distribution of public services is often carried out in parallel with the dynamics that produce spatial segregation. The quality of education, healthcare, security, and municipal services accessed by the poor is considerably lower than those available to individuals with higher socio-economic status (OECD, 2020). Consequently, social injustices in access to opportunities emerge, closely tied to residential areas. One of the most striking examples of this is reflected in the disparities among schools in Türkiye.

Spatial segregation among schools refers to the concentration of students from different socio-economic statuses in particular areas according to their material resources, ethnic and class backgrounds, and cultural characteristics, as well as their distancing from social groups outside their immediate environment (Boterman et al., 2019; Oberti & Savina, 2019). In the field of education, such segregation means that people from the lower strata of society are either deprived of, or underrepresented in, education of a certain standard. This condition, which restricts cultural interaction between people, also lays the groundwork for broader social fragmentation. Ünal et al. (2010) note that as a result of urban and social segregation, schools have become divided along class lines into “elite and reputable schools” located mostly in central areas and attended by children from upper-middle income families, and “ghetto or peripheral schools” attended by children from lower-income families. Within this framework, it can be argued that socio-economic and socio-cultural factors play a major role in determining the quality of education and shaping educational inequalities, and that these factors become particularly visible in residential areas.

As urban spatial segregation is reflected in schools, the opportunities for children from different social backgrounds to engage in cultural interaction within the same school environment and to benefit from education as a public service are increasingly restricted. Ünal (2005) demonstrates that, in Türkiye, as public education policies weakened after the 1970s, school zones became more affected by the socio-spatial segregation of their surroundings, resulting in pronounced disparities among schools. Polat (2008) similarly notes that, as a manifestation of spatial segregation in urban areas, students from low socio-economic neighborhoods generally perform at lower academic levels compared to affluent students attending schools in higher socio-economic areas. This disparity stems from the fact that students’ access to public education expenditures and available resources varies according to their social class and the educational environments in which they are situated (Arslan et al., 2011). Consequently, these differences shape students’ academic achievement and contribute to variations in educational outcomes.

Such findings are further supported by contemporary empirical research. For example, Ataç (2017), examining the geographical distribution of educational indicators in Türkiye, found that schools in high socio-economic regions hold significant advantages in terms of resources and performance, while disadvantages are spatially concentrated in low-income areas. Likewise, Ilgar

(2023) highlights the strong relationship between socio-economic status, residential location, and the physical/academic facilities of schools, emphasizing that these disparities particularly exacerbate quality gaps between schools in metropolitan areas. Studies by Işık and Bahat (2021) and Çam Tosun (2021) similarly find that lower-income groups are spatially excluded and marginalized in terms of access to technology and educational opportunities. Collectively, these findings indicate that, beyond socio-spatial segregation, there exists a broader social stratification in which individuals of different statuses are implicitly prepared for their roles in the future division of labor.

As the literature demonstrates, factors such as one's residential environment, socio-economic status, and neighborhood location are key determinants of which school a student attends, the quality of education they receive, and the extent to which they can benefit from it. Considering the mutually constitutive relationship between place and school—and between school and the individual's future— it becomes clear how crucial school choice is for a student's life trajectory. Therefore, the elimination of parental choice and the determination of school assignments based on socio-spatial divisions reinforce the mechanisms that reproduce social categorization (Greaves, 2024; Kuyvenhoven & Boterman, 2020). In this respect, it can be argued that the Address-Based Enrollment System, which is mandatory for primary education institutions, functions—contrary to the principle of social justice—as a legal mechanism that legitimizes social segregation. Given the reality that school facilities and educational services are not equally provided across all schools, the Address-Based Enrollment System is considered to contribute negatively to both the reproduction of socio-spatial segregation and the maintenance of qualitative disparities between schools.

Accordingly, this study adopts a critical perspective to examine the role of the Address-Based Enrollment System in educational inequality, focusing on how spatial and social segregation—shaped by socio-economic differences—affects education. It seeks to understand, within the framework of social justice, what this system signifies for different social groups and how it influences educational processes.

Method

Research Design

This study examines how socio-cultural and economic inequalities, as well as spatial differentiations emerging in urban contexts, are reflected in schools, and the role of the Address-Based Enrollment System within these dynamics. In line with the qualitative research paradigm, the study was designed using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to reveal how a social phenomenon is interpreted by individuals who directly experience it and under what contextual conditions these experiences are shaped (Patton, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The primary focus is to uncover both the structural and experiential dimensions of the phenomenon by analyzing individuals' subjective constructions of meaning.

In this context, the Address-Based Enrollment System was examined through the experiences and perceptions of parents from different socio-economic backgrounds. The main aim of the study is to uncover how participants make sense of and interpret this structural arrangement, which directly shapes their access to the right to education. Accordingly, the phenomenological design provides an appropriate methodological framework for exploring how the phenomenon is

experienced at the individual level and how these experiences acquire meaning within specific contextual conditions.

In addition to describing individual experiences, the study is grounded in a critical research perspective that aims to interrogate the structural inequalities underlying these experiences. The critical research approach seeks to uncover the power relations embedded within social structures, the mechanisms of ideological domination, and the ways in which these relations are reproduced through education policies (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Carspecken, 1996). Even ostensibly neutral educational policies can function to legitimize and exacerbate class- and space-based inequalities (Giroux, 1983). Accordingly, this study critically examines how the address-based structuring of school enrollments contributes to the reproduction of educational inequality. Therefore, the research design can be defined as a critical phenomenological inquiry that integrates an in-depth analysis of participant experiences with a critical theoretical framework on structural inequalities in education.

Study Group

The study group consisted of a total of 27 parents whose children were currently enrolled in public primary schools and who represented different socio-economic positions. Participants were selected using the criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling strategies. The criteria included social class indicators such as household income level, educational background, number of children in the family, and the socio-spatial profile of the neighborhood of residence. Income groups were categorized as “low,” “middle,” and “high” based on the 2022 data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) and the Socio-Economic Development Ranking of Districts (SEGE, 2022) published by the Mersin Metropolitan Municipality in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and Technology, General Directorate of Development Agencies.

In terms of district distribution, diversity was ensured to reflect socio-economic inequalities within a spatial context. Accordingly, most participants in the low-income group resided in disadvantaged districts of Mersin, such as Toroslar and Akdeniz, while participants in the middle- and high-income groups were selected from individuals living in the districts of Mezitli and Yenişehir. This approach aimed to achieve both class-based and spatial representation in the study. During the recruitment process, public schools in the selected districts were visited, and after preliminary meetings with school administrators and teachers, contact was established with parents meeting the defined criteria.

The number of participants was determined in accordance with the principle of data saturation. In line with Guetterman’s (2015) discussion on sampling practices across qualitative research approaches, data saturation was taken as the point at which additional interviews no longer yielded new themes or insights. In the low-income group, thematic repetition occurred at an early stage, making eight participants sufficient. Considering the broader variation and narrative diversity in the middle-income group, 14 participants were interviewed. Although accessing the high-income group proved relatively more challenging, thematic saturation was also reached in this group, with five participants completing the data collection process.

The majority of participants were women. During the interviews, it was observed that mothers were more closely involved in their children’s educational processes and more willing to participate in the interviews, reflecting prevailing gender roles in the field. Demographic information on the study group is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study group

Participant no.	Gender	Income group	Education level	Number of children	Type of area
P1	Female	Lower	Middle school	3	Halkkent/Toroslar
P2	Female	Middle	Bachelor's degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P3	Female	Lower	Some high school	2	Çay/Akdeniz
P4	Female	Lower	Middle school	3	Halkkent/Toroslar
P5	Male	Lower	Primary school	3	Çay/Akdeniz
P6	Female	Middle	High school	3	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P7	Male	Upper	Bachelor's degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P8	Male	Upper	Bachelor's degree	1	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P9	Female	Lower	High school	2	Halkkent/Toroslar
P10	Female	Lower	Associate degree	2	Çay/Akdeniz
P11	Female	Middle	Bachelor's degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P12	Male	Middle	Bachelor's degree	2	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P13	Female	Middle	Bachelor's degree	3	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P14	Female	Middle	Bachelor's degree	1	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P15	Female	Middle	Associate degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P16	Female	Upper	Bachelor's degree	1	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P17	Female	Upper	Bachelor's degree	2	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P18	Male	Middle	Bachelor's degree	3	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P19	Female	Middle	High school	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P20	Male	Lower	Primary school	4	Halkkent/Toroslar
P21	Male	Middle	High school	3	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P22	Female	Middle	High school	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P23	Male	Middle	Bachelor's degree	3	Güvenevler/Yenişehir
P24	Female	Middle	Bachelor's degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P25	Female	Lower	Middle school	3	Çay/Akdeniz
P26	Female	Upper	Bachelor's degree	2	Viranşehir/Mezitli
P27	Male	Middle	High school	3	Güvenevler/Yenişehir

Data Collection Tool and Procedure

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview form developed by the authors in line with the aims and theoretical framework of the study. The open-ended questions in the form were designed to elicit participants' perceptions, experiences, and the meanings they attribute to the Address-Based Enrollment System in greater depth. The content validity of the interview form was evaluated by two subject-matter experts, and based on their feedback, the clarity of the questions, their conceptual coherence, and their alignment with the sub-research questions were revised accordingly.

Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the fact that interviews would be audio-recorded, that their data would be anonymized, and that the data would be used solely for academic purposes. The interviews were conducted at times arranged in advance and in settings where participants felt comfortable. Each interview, lasting 30–45 minutes, was audio-recorded with participant consent. All recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author and stored securely in digital format.

To illustrate the nature of the data collection tool, several sample questions from the interview form are provided. For example, participants were asked questions such as "What do you think about the requirement that, in the primary school enrollment system, students must be registered in the school closest to their residential address?", "Why do you think this system was introduced and what do you see as its purpose?", "Considering that some schools differ in terms

of physical facilities, teacher quality, and academic performance, how do you think these differences influence the effects of the system on students?", and "Are you satisfied with the school your child is currently attending, and if you had the chance, would you consider transferring your child to another school?". The collected data were analyzed to capture each participant's experience within their own context. The following section provides detailed information on how this analysis was conducted and how the thematic structure was developed.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. The aim of this approach is to systematically organize the data collected in line with the predetermined theoretical framework and sub-research questions and to present them as meaningful themes. In this regard, the themes used were structured in advance, based on the content of the semi-structured interview form and the research questions. Thus, rather than adopting an inductive approach, the study employed a deductive orientation, analyzing the data under predefined categories.

The analysis process consisted of six main stages:

1. Transcribing the interview recordings verbatim and transferring them to digital format,
2. Reading the transcripts repeatedly to ensure content integrity,
3. Developing an analytical framework aligned with the research questions,
4. Systematically coding meaning units according to the predefined themes,
5. Interpreting the themes within their broader social context, and
6. Supporting the findings with direct quotations from participants.

The coding process was structured based on Yıldırım and Şimşek's (2013) descriptive analysis approach, and the data were organized under thematic headings corresponding to the research questions. In addition, following the recommendations of Miles et al. (2020) for qualitative data analysis, careful attention was paid to coding meaning units according to their content and consistently transforming codes into themes. Structural coherence between codes and themes was established, thereby ensuring analytical clarity and methodological consistency in the study.

During this process, each participant was assigned a symbolic identifier consisting of participant number, gender, and socio-economic group (e.g., P7, Male, Upper). Quotations used in the analysis were presented with these identifiers. In this way, both the traceability of the narratives was ensured and participant confidentiality was maintained.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, scientific validity and methodological rigor are ensured through the principles of trustworthiness. In this study, trustworthiness was structured on the basis of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the research process, the methods employed, strategies for accessing the field, participant selection criteria, and data analysis procedures were explicitly defined, thereby ensuring methodological integrity.

The interviews were conducted in environments where participants felt free to express themselves, and they were structured in a way that revealed the richness of participants' narratives.

Coding and theme development processes were systematically carried out in line with the research questions, and the strength of descriptive analysis was reinforced through direct quotations from participants. In this respect, each participant was assigned a symbolic identifier (e.g., P19, Female, Middle), which ensured both the traceability of quotations and the protection of participant confidentiality.

To diversify data sources, interviews were conducted with participants from different socio-economic groups, thereby ensuring triangulation and enhancing content diversity based on class representation. The analysis process was independently evaluated through an external audit conducted by a field expert. The expert reviewed the established themes and their related codes, assessing their consistency with the data and providing feedback on the validity of the findings. The academic expertise of this reviewer in qualitative research methods was considered a factor that strengthened the trustworthiness of the analysis process.

In addition, to ensure consistency between interview transcripts and themes, coding was elaborated in line with the principle of thick description, maintaining a sufficient level of detail to allow readers to evaluate the context. All stages of the research were conducted in accordance with ethical principles, and official approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Mersin University (Decision No. 55, dated March 5, 2024). Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were verbally informed about the purpose of the study, the audio recording of interviews, the confidentiality of their identities, and the exclusive use of the data for academic purposes.

Findings

The findings of the study were categorized into four overarching themes that reflect participants' perceptions, evaluations, and lived experiences regarding the Address-Based School Enrollment System. These themes emerged through a systematic descriptive analysis of interview data and provide a comprehensive understanding of how the policy is interpreted across different socio-economic contexts. The first theme, "*Opinions on the Implementation*", captures participants' general attitudes toward the functioning of the system, including both supportive and critical perspectives. The second theme, "*Opinions on the Justification of the Policy*", focuses on the rationales attributed to the policy, such as managing school overcrowding, minimizing transportation costs, and simplifying enrollment processes. The third theme, "*Reflections of the Policy on Society*", reveals how the system influences broader social dynamics, particularly in relation to educational equity, cultural segregation, and the roles of families and teachers. Lastly, the fourth theme, "*Personal Experiences Related to the Implementation*" includes participants' individual encounters with the policy, including attempts to circumvent it through unofficial means and the moral reasoning behind such actions. The figure below illustrates the thematic structure derived from the data analysis, summarizing the four main themes identified in the study.

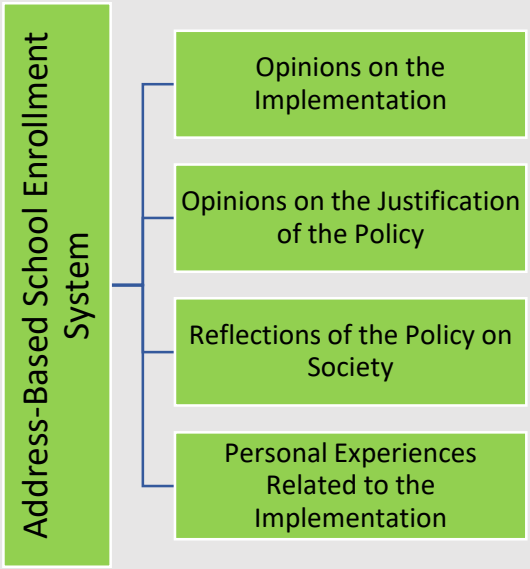

Figure 1. Address-Based school enrollment system

Opinions on the Implementation

According to the findings, the Address-Based School Enrollment System is viewed critically by some parents while others perceive it as a correct and beneficial policy. Participant responses are divided into positive and negative opinions. Of the responses, 48.2% were negative, while 51.8% reflected positive opinions. However, when analyzed in relation to the participants' socio-economic status, striking differences emerge. All participants from the lower socio-economic group (100%) expressed negative views about the system, while all participants from the upper socio-economic group (100%) shared positive views. Among the middle socio-economic group**,** 35.7% expressed negative and 64.3% positive opinions. These findings reveal that socio-economic status plays a significant role in shaping perspectives on the policy. In particular, the stark contrast between the lower and upper groups suggests that the system does not impact all segments of society equally and reveals a socio-spatial segregation in school education.

According to the study, the main concern among participants from the lower socio-economic group who expressed negative opinions was academic success. Many believed that their children would fail academically if required to attend schools in their own neighborhoods.

"I don't think the idea of sending children to the closest school is right at all. It's a terrible policy. Maybe I want to send my child to a better school. But because of this obligation, my child might fail."
(P3-Female-Lower)

"The failure to ensure equality in education brings to mind the saying 'geography is destiny.' It is commonly accepted that schools in rural or poor urban neighborhoods lack educational quality. The gap between these schools and those in elite neighborhoods is growing. I believe a good education is a right for everyone."
(P5-Male-Lower)

Participants from the middle socio-economic group who expressed negative opinions stated:

"I have a negative opinion about the obligation to enroll students in the nearest school. Parents should be free to send their children to the school of their choice. Families should have the right to choose."
(P2-Female-Middle)

"I don't agree with the compulsory enrollment in the nearest school. Every parent wants to choose the most suitable school for themselves and their child. Not every student can adapt to every school in terms of peers or teachers, and they might not establish proper communication. In such cases, forcing the student to attend a school where they are unhappy for years benefits no one."
(P12-Male-Middle)

As shown in the examples above, some middle-income participants emphasized that the policy removes the right to choose schools and leads to unfairness. Others stated that they were not negatively affected by the implementation:

"I'm satisfied because the school near my address is a highly preferred primary school. Otherwise, we would have chosen a private school."
(P11-Female-Middle)

"If I lived in a neighborhood with a low parental education profile, I would be uncomfortable with my child attending the assigned school. But since I live in an area where income and education levels are high, and my child is successful, I can send them to the nearest school with peace of mind."
(P13-Female-Middle)

In contrast to the critical voices from the lower and some middle-income participants, upper-income participants predominantly framed the policy as a functional and rational solution to practical challenges such as overcrowding in popular schools. They perceived the policy as a preventive measure against systemic chaos rather than a source of inequality:

"I think it's a good policy. There are too many students in schools that are known to be good."
(P17-Female-Upper)

"This obligation was introduced to prevent certain problems. Everyone wants to send their child to the most popular schools, and that creates confusion. It's a good policy to prevent that."
(P26-Female-Upper)

These expressions demonstrate that upper-income participants assessed the policy mainly in light of their own socio-spatial advantage and did not problematize its implications for social equity. Their satisfaction appeared to derive from the assumption that their residential location already guaranteed access to high-quality schools. Consequently, their views, while positive, lacked a broader critical perspective on how the policy may exacerbate educational stratification across different social groups. Similar patterns were also reflected in their opinions on the justification of the policy, which will be discussed in the next section.

Opinions on the Justification of the Policy

Participant views on the justification of the Address-Based School Enrollment System touched on issues such as overcrowding in certain schools, transportation and service costs, and confusion during the enrollment process. According to the percentage distribution of the data, 53.9% of statements under this theme referred to preventing overcrowding in high-demand schools**,** 34.6% addressed transportation and service costs**,** and 11.5% related to ease of enrollment.

A considerable portion of participants stated that the policy was implemented to manage demand for highly preferred schools and to prevent overconcentration in these institutions. However, when examined across socio-economic groups, more nuanced patterns emerge. Specifically, 50% of the participants from the lower socio-economic group, 57.2% from the middle group, and 62.5% from the upper group mentioned that the system was needed to prevent overcrowding. The distribution of responses appears to follow a hierarchical pattern based on social class, suggesting that socio-spatial differences are reflected in how individuals perceive the educational process. Selected participant quotes are as follows:

"I think it might have been introduced to prevent overcrowding in schools and classrooms."
(P13-Female-Middle)

"If everyone tries to enroll in the same school, there would be congestion and disorder. I believe this policy was developed to prevent that."
(P7-Male-Upper)

According to the findings, many middle- and upper-income participants emphasized that the number of students in so-called "qualified" schools should remain low. Considering that access to high-quality schools is often determined by economic and social capital, these views indicate a process of social stratification in which quality education becomes a privilege of an elite minority. Interestingly, even some participants from the lower socio-economic group accepted the view that the policy was justified by the need to prevent overcrowding, which may suggest that these individuals have internalized their disadvantaged position regarding access to quality education.

Another portion of the responses emphasized ease of access to nearby schools and the financial relief the policy brings by eliminating transportation costs. When analyzed by socio-economic status, 37.5% of responses from the lower group, 28.5% from the middle group, and 25% from the upper group addressed transportation and service-related concerns.

"It may have been introduced to reduce transportation problems. But I think it actually causes much bigger issues."
(P5-Male-Lower)

"It's important that children can safely reach nearby schools. It's also an advantage for families to live close by. Not needing a school bus is a benefit for me."
(P22-Female-Middle)

"I think it's a beneficial obligation. It supports parents both financially and emotionally. I don't think they'll struggle with dropping off and picking up their children."
(P16-Female-Upper)

The findings show that parents from the middle and upper socio-economic groups expressed more pronounced views regarding transportation and service costs than those from the lower group. This may be due to the more frequent use of school transportation services in higher-

income communities. Thus, awareness around transportation-related issues is more prominent among these groups. Additionally, some participants stated that enrolling in a nearby school could help families respond more quickly to problems during the school year.

A small number of participants also indicated that automatic enrollment made the registration process easier and helped prevent confusion during peak periods. When categorized by socio-economic level, 12.5% of lower-income participants, 14.3% of middle-income participants, and 12.5% of upper-income participants expressed positive views about the convenience of automatic enrollment.

"Maybe it was introduced to prevent confusion or bribery during enrollment. Supposedly we're sending them to public schools, yet everyone's paying bribes."
(P1-Female-Lower)

"I think it's about fairness. So that there's no chaos during enrollment. Because there's always tension between parents during that time. I think it's good that the state intervened."
(P6-Female-Middle)

"I think automatic registration is a good thing. It saves people from having to deal with paperwork. It made things easier for everyone without waiting in line."
(P7-Male-Upper)

Overall, it can be said that middle- and upper-class participants expressed stronger and more distinct opinions regarding issues such as overcrowding, transportation, and registration than those from the lower class. In contrast, participants from the lower socio-economic group evaluated the policy with a more critical perspective. This could be because, for them, the opportunity to access quality schools is a more pressing issue than transportation or registration processes. In other words, the spatial restriction introduced by the policy outweighs other concerns such as crowding, enrollment, or access issues for lower-income families.

Reflections of the Policy on Society

The Address-Based School Enrollment System has produced varying outcomes across different segments of society. Participant responses under this theme focused on issues such as violations of equal opportunity**,** socio-cultural segregation, and the importance of family and teacher involvement. According to the percentage breakdown of responses: 58.8% referred to violations of equal opportunity, 8.8% to socio-cultural segregation, and 32.4% to the role of family and teacher involvement.

A significant portion of participants stated that the The Address-Based School Enrollment System deepens social inequalities and contradicts the principle of equal opportunity. When broken down by socio-economic groups, 77.7% of participants from the lower group, 50% from the middle group, and 57.1% from the upper group emphasized that the system is incompatible with educational equity. Sample quotations are as follows:

"In this system, the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. There's no such thing as equal opportunity. The rich can send their kids to any school they want. The poor always lose out. There's no quality education in poor neighborhoods, the schools are in bad condition, freezing cold in winter. The teachers and families are disengaged; everyone just gives up. I think it's unfair. It violates equal opportunity."
(P3-Female-Lower)

"This brings to mind the saying 'geography is destiny.' Everyone knows that schools in rural areas or low-income neighborhoods lack quality. People living in poor and rich neighborhoods do not receive the same education. They may appear to have equal rights, but they don't. The level of education in elite neighborhoods is much better. I believe good education is everyone's right. I hope necessary reforms are made."
(P5-Male-Lower)

Negative opinions about school quality were particularly pronounced among participants from the lower socio-economic group. Many reported that schools in their neighborhoods lack resources, and thus mandatory enrollment based on address results in a strong sense of injustice. Likewise, several participants from the middle-income group argued that the policy violates public rights:

"Education is a public service, and all citizens have the right to access it equally across the country. Forcing parents and students into schools based on address is outright discrimination. The government is basically saying: 'I won't fix these schools or improve them. The people around them will have to accept it and deal with it themselves.'"
(P12-Male-Middle)

Concepts such as equal opportunity**,** right to education, and social stratification appeared frequently in the responses of participants from lower and middle socio-economic groups. In contrast, participants from the upper-income group mentioned equal opportunity only sparingly, indicating that the system has asymmetrical effects across social classes, and reinforces the disadvantage of lower groups.

Another significant finding is that the The Address-Based School Enrollment System leads to socio-cultural segregation. All of the responses addressing this theme came from middle-income participants; no such views were reported by lower or upper groups. In 16.6% of the responses from the middle group, participants emphasized values such as cultural diversity, social unity, tolerance, and intercultural interaction:

"With address-based enrollment, people will remain stuck within their own socio-economic and socio-cultural environments. They won't be able to observe or engage with different cultures, different groups, or the diversity in our country."
(P2-Female-Middle)

A teacher-parent summarized the class- and culture-based outcomes of spatial school segregation as follows:

"Schools have been financially abandoned. Each school now has to survive on the resources of its own socio-cultural environment. So poor schools in poor areas remain poor. Any attempt to organize cultural, educational, or artistic events is blocked by parents' financial limitations. Even basic operating costs are hard to meet. As a result, students feel marginalized, neglected, and excluded. They're painfully aware of the socio-economic gap between themselves and their peers in better schools. They internalize this gap and continue their education believing they cannot compete. Many brilliant minds are lost this way. Meanwhile, in wealthy neighborhoods, the situation is the opposite. The schools are better in every way. Students there are also aware of this gap and sometimes act arrogant, selfish, or intolerant. This contradicts our cultural values. In both groups, students develop negative character traits in different ways."
(P12-Male-Middle)

According to the data, The Address-Based School Enrollment System worsens the socio-cultural and economic gap between schools. Participants clearly stated that spatial segregation among schools has adverse cultural consequences for low-income students. No participant from the upper socio-economic group expressed a view indicating disadvantage in this regard, further supporting this conclusion.

Another finding is that family and teacher involvement can mitigate disparities in school quality. Many participants stated that parental support and qualified teachers matter more than the school's overall status. According to the data, 22.3% of responses from the lower group, 33.4% from the middle group, and 42.9% from the upper group mentioned the significance of family and teacher involvement. Sample quotes include:

"That's how I see it too. It's also about how children are raised and educated. If a family raises the child well, then it doesn't matter where they go to school."
(P6-Female-Middle)

"This isn't about rich or poor. If families pay attention and raise their children properly, there won't be any school problems. Parents who neglect their kids just send them off to school and relax. It's those kids who tarnish the school's name."
(P7-Male-Upper)

In these responses, parental involvement is emphasized, and it is argued that student success is independent of neighborhood or school quality. Some participants also claimed that since all teachers receive similar training, differences in school quality are negligible:

"I don't distinguish between schools. A teacher can make that distinction disappear. Whether they work in rich or poor neighborhoods, they all receive the same education and graduate from the same programs. The school doesn't matter; the teacher does."
(P18-Male-Middle)

These responses suggest that some participants attribute inequalities and quality differences to families and teachers, rather than structural issues. That many of these responses come from middle- and upper-income participants is noteworthy. It suggests that some within these groups may overlook the connection between social class and access to educational opportunities. However, across the broader set of findings, most participants clearly linked socio-economic status with access to quality education.

Personal Experiences Related to the Implementation

Participants' personal observations and experiences regarding the Address-Based School Enrollment System were grouped under two subthemes: Informal and Strategic Enrollment Practices and Moral Justifications. According to the percentage distribution, 64.7% of responses pertained to informal strategies, while 35.3% addressed moral norms and values.

A significant portion of participants reported that either they or parents in their surroundings resorted to unlawful methods—such as providing false address information or offering bribes under the guise of donations—in order to avoid enrolling their children in neighborhood schools. When analyzed by socio-economic group, 72.7% of responses from the lower group, 62.5% from the middle group, and 57.1% from the upper group included references to illegal enrollment attempts. Selected quotes are as follows:

"I personally experienced this. I didn't change my address, but I made a donation to the school. I know many people in the same situation, stretching their finances just to get their children into better schools. School administrations are aware of this and turn it into an opportunity. They treat students from outside the catchment area as sources of income. I've heard of negotiations in some schools involving very high amounts."
(P12-Male-Middle)

"Money plays a role here too. I know people who got into their preferred schools by paying. Children are our future, so anyone with means will try anything."
(P5-Male-Lower)

As seen in these examples, parents may pay school administrators or falsify address information in official institutions such as municipal offices or local registries to enroll their children in higher-quality schools:

"Yes, I've seen this happen. A friend of mine pretended to live near a better school just to enroll their child there. They don't actually live there, but it looks that way on paper. There are also those who pay bribes. People with resources will do whatever it takes to get their kids into a good school."
(P4-Female-Lower)

"Many parents use the addresses of relatives to get their kids into good schools. When they find a good teacher, they use an address near that school—and even then, sometimes they still have to donate to the school."
(P16-Female-Upper)

These statements suggest that parents often seek to bypass the Address-Based School Enrollment System requirement using unlawful methods in order to gain access to better schools. Notably, address manipulation and financial contributions presented as school donations are more frequently reported among middle- and upper-income participants, suggesting not only a reinforcement of class-based inequalities but also a troubling trend in terms of public ethics.

Another major finding is the moral dimension of these unlawful practices. A considerable number of participants indicated that such actions should be considered reasonable, particularly when done in pursuit of better education. According to the data, 27.3% of responses from the lower-income group, 37.5% from the middle-income group, and 42.9% from the upper-income group stated that resorting to illegal means does not necessarily violate moral norms:

"People naturally take such steps so their children can receive a better education. The government should take necessary precautions so that families are not put in this position."
(P25-Female-Lower)

"I don't think this causes moral degradation in society. Even though these acts are considered illegal by current laws, the real culprit isn't the parents—it's the system that pushes them to do it. It's not enough to question whether people comply with the law; we must also question the fairness of the law itself. If laws aren't fair, and if people can't overcome injustice through legitimate means, such actions become inevitable."
(P23-Male-Middle)

These views suggest that many participants regard such practices as understandable responses to a flawed system. The use of false address declarations or shifting residence to neighborhoods with "better" schools are seen as coping strategies rather than moral failings.

Furthermore, several participants argued that the focus should not be on blaming individual parents but rather on questioning the structural inequalities that force them into these positions.

The findings were structured through a thematic framework that enabled a comparative analysis of the experiences across lower, middle, and upper socio-economic groups. This framework is designed to reflect both the interpretive depth of each theme and the proportional significance of each category within the dataset. Instead of dispersing the numerical distribution across separate sections, all categories and their frequency percentages are presented in an integrated format in Table 2. This approach allows the reader to interpret the relationships, overlaps, and intensity differences among the themes within a unified structure, thereby improving the analytical visibility and structural coherence of the qualitative data.

Table 2. Proportional distribution of themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Lower income group (%)	Middle income group (%)	Upper income group (%)
Opinions on the implementation	Positive	0.0	64.3	100.0
	Negative	100.0	35.7	0.0
Opinions on the justification of the policy	Prevention of overcrowding in qualified schools	50.0	57.2	62.5
	Transportation and service expenses	37.5	28.5	25.0
	Ease of school enrollment	12.5	14.3	12.5
Reflections of the policy on society	Violation of equal opportunity	77.7	50.0	57.1
	Socio-cultural segregation	0.0	16.6	0.0
	Importance of family and teacher involvement	22.3	33.4	42.9
Personal experiences related to the policy	Informal and strategic enrollment practices	72.7	62.5	57.1
	Moral justification	27.3	37.5	42.9

When the participants' perspectives are considered in aggregate, it becomes apparent that the effects of the Address-Based School Enrollment System are stratified along socio-economic lines. While a few participants acknowledged administrative intentions such as reducing overcrowding or facilitating access, the predominant view emphasized the system's role in perpetuating social injustice. The most recurrent concerns included disparities in school quality, the systemic disadvantages faced by schools in low-income neighborhoods, and violations of the principle of equal opportunity. The narratives also revealed that families—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds—are often forced to develop informal strategies to secure better educational futures for their children. Thus, the central conclusion of this study is that the Address-Based School Enrollment System not only reproduces but also intensifies educational inequalities, especially for children residing in socio-economically marginalized areas.

Discussion

In this study, the implications of the Address-Based Enrollment System for social classes were evaluated based on the perspectives of parents from lower-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic backgrounds. Perceptions of the system are largely shaped by socio-economic position. In the discussion, these findings are analyzed in light of recent empirical research and theoretical perspectives, highlighting the study's original contributions to the understanding of spatial and class-based inequalities in education within the Turkish context.

Participants' "general evaluations of the Address-Based Enrollment System" reveal a picture in which supportive and critical approaches are intertwined, predominantly shaped by class-based awareness. While some parents in the middle- and upper-income groups expressed favorable opinions, emphasizing the system's technical benefits, parents from the lower-income group articulated negative views, stressing that the system deepens spatial inequalities, eliminates the right to choose schools, and confines children in disadvantaged areas to low-quality schools. This reflects findings in the literature that demonstrate the class-based implications of address-based enrollment practices in Türkiye.

For instance, Gegekoğlu (2023) argues that although access to public schools may appear physically equal, in practice it is structured by socio-economic conditions, which structurally disadvantage lower-class families. Similarly, Buyruk (2020) shows that the enrollment system contradicts the principle of "spatial justice" and turns access to quality schools into a matter of privilege, particularly for families from lower-income backgrounds. Erdem (2020), in his analysis of urbanization dynamics in Ankara, demonstrates that school quality is distributed in parallel with the socio-economic profiles of neighborhoods, and that there is a strong correlation between residential location and school performance. Collectively, these studies illustrate how the Address-Based Enrollment System exacerbates spatial inequalities and reinforces the reflection of socio-economic differences within the field of education.

However, the existing literature has predominantly focused on the structural effects of the system, with limited attention to how individuals construct meaning around these structures and the extent of their experiential awareness. This study, by comparatively analyzing the perceptions, attitudes, and strategic approaches of parents from different socio-economic groups, demonstrates how class positions shape ways of thinking about the system. In doing so, it adds a layer of critical and contextual depth to the literature by revealing the extent to which enrollment policies are questioned in terms of both spatial justice and educational equity.

When participants' views on the *"rationales of the Address-Based Enrollment System"* are examined, it becomes evident that justifications such as preventing overcrowding in quality schools or reducing transportation costs are interpreted differently depending on social class. Although the system is presented to society as a technical regulation, the findings of this research reveal that parents' acceptance of these rationales is closely tied to their class positions. This underscores the ideological functions of education policies and the ways they are differently experienced across social groups.

The study's findings also resonate with insights from the literature, both theoretical and empirical, that reflect historical realities. For example, Arendt (1961) argues that the presentation of education policies with rational justifications often serves as a strategy to render existing structures of inequality invisible. Consistent with this, the present findings show that, particularly among the lower socio-economic group, the system's so-called rationales do not align with the

lived realities of the lower classes and, in fact, reinforce existing inequalities. Looking at more recent work, Ball (2003) demonstrates that market-oriented regulations in education are disproportionately advantageous to the middle and upper classes, transforming school choice into an arena where class positions are reproduced. Similarly, Schakel and Van Der Pas (2021) point out that education policies may reinforce social and economic divisions, systematically reproducing class-based differences.

In this regard, the rationale of preventing overcrowding evolves into a class-based protection mechanism that legitimizes the perception of quality schools as a right of the elite. The contribution of this study lies in its empirical demonstration of how such technical justifications are legitimized differently according to class positions. The fact that lower-class families more clearly recognize the inequalities embedded in the system, while the discourse of legitimacy resonates more strongly among the middle and upper classes, provides a striking illustration of how education functions as an ideological apparatus. In this sense, the study offers an original theoretical insight by showing that the rationales of current policies are deeply contested within class-based contexts.

On the other hand, when the *"social implications of the system"* are considered, it becomes clear that the Address-Based Enrollment System does not promote equal educational opportunity but rather deepens existing class- and space-based inequalities. Parents from lower- and middle-income backgrounds, in particular, expressed that the system directs children from disadvantaged groups into under-resourced schools, thereby reinforcing feelings of injustice. This finding aligns with numerous national and international studies indicating that education policies produce unequal outcomes along spatial and class-based lines.

For example, Owens (2018) shows that income-based residential segregation across school zones generates disparities in both achievement and opportunity, with schools in affluent neighborhoods enjoying advantages in resources and quality. Similarly, Boterman (2019) argues that the interaction between housing dynamics and school choice channels high-income families into better schools while confining low-income families to disadvantaged ones. Florida and Mellander (2014), in their comparative analysis of U.S. cities, demonstrate that spatial segregation not only widens academic achievement gaps but also limits access to fundamental resources—such as education, transportation, and public services—in disadvantaged areas, thereby negatively shaping the socio-spatial fabric of cities.

Within the national literature, Nerse (2020) identifies how rural-urban divides and socio-economic differences affect student achievement, with indirect consequences for social stratification. Likewise, Oktay, Koçak, and Kandemir (2018) argue that the disparity between well-resourced and poorly resourced schools undermines the principle of equal opportunity. Yenice (2013), in a study examining the spatial adequacy of primary schools, found that physical characteristics of schools are unevenly distributed across urban areas, with many institutions—particularly in certain districts—falling short in terms of building standards and environmental facilities, thereby fueling social segregation. Collectively, these studies highlight the existence of class-based categorization among schools.

Yet while most of the literature discusses spatial and class inequalities in terms of structural indicators or school facilities, this study adds a different dimension by comparatively analyzing the experiences and perceptions of parents from diverse socio-economic groups. In doing so, it demonstrates how such inequalities shape perceptions of social justice and are reproduced through

class positions. The study thus contributes both empirical and contextual depth to ongoing discussions on the social implications of the Address-Based Enrollment System.

Beyond the spatial and class-based segregation effects generated by the Address-Based Enrollment System at the societal level, it is also noteworthy how these divisions are reflected in individuals' everyday practices and behaviors during enrollment processes. Findings related to participants' personal experiences reveal that the policy has created a context in which unlawful and ethically contentious practices have become normalized among parents. Strategies such as submitting false address information, appearing to reside outside one's designated school zone, or making donations to facilitate easier enrollment are perceived as ways to circumvent structural barriers to accessing quality schools.

This phenomenon has also been observed in international contexts. For instance, Bjerre-Nielsen et al. (2023), in their study conducted in Denmark, found that attempts to manipulate residential addresses became increasingly widespread among higher socio-economic groups and negatively affected other students' access to schools. Similarly, Karcher (2024), in her research on Seattle, highlights that address changes and attempts to circumvent enrollment policies are sometimes viewed by parents as legitimate strategies in the face of rising housing costs and structural inequalities. In the Turkish context, Sincar and Özbek (2011) report that, from the perspective of school administrators, irregular address changes constitute a significant problem in the functioning of the system, with advantaged groups being more capable of implementing such strategies.

These findings suggest that illegal enrollment practices should not be understood merely as matters of individual ethics, but rather as consequences of structural inequalities. Moreover, such practices erode perceptions of fairness by undermining the social legitimacy of education policies. On this theme, the existing literature largely limits itself to describing illegal enrollment such strategies, whereas this study contributes a unique contextual insight by examining how parents from different socio-economic groups interpret these practices and how they relate them to broader perceptions of social morality. In doing so, the study foregrounds the ethical and legitimacy dimensions of the Address-Based Enrollment System.

This discussion, developed around the four themes, demonstrates that the Address-Based Enrollment System is more than a technical mechanism of school registration and placement. It constitutes a multi-layered sphere of influence encompassing educational equity, spatial justice, social morality, and individual strategies. The findings show that the system is experienced differently by socio-economic groups, and that these experiences are shaped both by structural conditions and by class-based perceptions and attitudes.

When considered alongside evidence from national and international literature, the study offers an original contextual contribution by addressing the Address-Based Enrollment System's potential to reproduce spatial and class inequalities in relation to parents' strategic approaches and the implications of these strategies for social legitimacy. In this respect, the research emphasizes that focusing solely on technical procedures in the design and implementation of education policies is insufficient; dimensions of social justice, equality, and ethics must also be taken into account.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings of this study reveal that, despite its stated aim of ensuring equal educational opportunities, the Address-Based Enrollment System has the potential to reinforce existing socio-economic and spatial divisions. Participants' perspectives indicate that the system particularly

directs children from disadvantaged neighborhoods to lower-quality schools, which negatively affects both their academic achievement and perceptions of social justice.

Moreover, the results show that parents frequently resort to unlawful and ethically problematic practices—such as submitting false address information, obtaining enrollment through donations, or registering address changes via different institutions—in order to overcome the restrictive structure of the system. The fact that such strategies are more effectively employed by families with greater socio-economic resources further contributes to the deepening of structural inequalities.

When the findings are evaluated across the four sub-research questions: (1) In the *General Evaluation of the Policy*, socio-economic status was found to significantly differentiate perceptions of the system, with lower-income groups expressing negative attitudes and upper-income groups adopting more favorable ones. (2) In the *Rationales of the Policy* sub-question, participants frequently mentioned reasons such as "preventing overcrowding in prestigious neighborhood schools" and "facilitating registration," yet these rationales were found to obscure the dimension of equity. (3) In the *Social Implications of the Policy* sub-question, the system was observed to undermine the principle of equal opportunity and reinforce socio-cultural segregation. (4) Finally, in the *Personal Experiences with the Policy* sub-question, practices such as address manipulation and school donations emerged as widespread, further entrenching structural inequalities.

At the policy level, it is imperative to prioritize reducing the quality disparities among public schools and strengthening schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. In this regard, measures such as the equitable distribution of qualified teachers, addressing deficiencies in physical infrastructure, and ensuring equal access to educational materials will play a critical role in achieving spatial justice in education. Redesigning enrollment policies also emerges as a pressing necessity. The current rigid address-based structure restricts the mobility of families living in low-income areas and reduces social diversity in education. Therefore, alternative models could be considered, such as priority criteria that account for socio-economic disadvantage, weighted lottery systems, or flexible school catchment zones.

To prevent unlawful and unethical practices undermining the social legitimacy of the system, transparency and accountability mechanisms in the enrollment process must be strengthened. Oversight systems capable of detecting and deterring practices such as falsified address declarations and favoritism would enhance both public trust and the principle of fairness in education. In addition, policies that promote cultural diversity and social integration can facilitate the inclusion of students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds within the same educational environments. In this regard, establishing mixed catchment areas may foster social interaction and mutual understanding.

Parents and school administrators should also be made more aware of enrollment procedures and rights. Awareness-raising campaigns could ensure families have access to accurate information about their rights and responsibilities, thereby reducing the tendency to resort to unlawful methods. Furthermore, supporting both qualitative and quantitative research in different regions is essential for understanding the long-term effects of the inequality dynamics revealed by this study. In particular, longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into how enrollment policies affect students' academic achievement, social mobility, and perceptions of justice over time.

This study offers a contextual contribution to the literature by focusing on participants' perceptions and experiences. Nevertheless, its limitations should also be acknowledged. The research was conducted in the central districts of Mersin, with lower-, middle-, and upper-socioeconomic regions defined based on data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) and municipal reports. Participants were reached through references provided by school administrators and teachers working in these districts. Therefore, the geographic and socio-economic scope of the sample is limited, and the generalizability of the findings should be considered within this context. Furthermore, since the data are based on participants' accounts, they may have been influenced by subjective perceptions and interpretations. Future studies conducted in different provinces with larger samples would contribute to a clearer understanding of both regional differences and national-level trends.

In conclusion, for the Address-Based Enrollment System to evolve into a structure that strengthens equal educational opportunity, it is necessary to evaluate not only technical regulations but also socio-economic, cultural, and ethical dimensions in conjunction. The findings highlight the importance of centering principles of social justice and equality in education policies, while prioritizing transparency and accountability during their implementation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of Mersin University, Social Sciences Division (Decision No: 55, Date: 05.03.2024).

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