

Chapter 25

REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY THROUGH PRIVATE OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore economic and social implications of educational activities taking place outside formal school education. Parallel to the marketization of all public services, private education has become an essential part of education systems across the world. As an important element of this transformation process, out-of-school education has also become prevalent worldwide. While education has traditionally been perceived as an equalizer in societies with different levels of income levels and social stratification, various forms of outside school learning have been creating opposite effects. Overwhelming scope of central examinations in the education system of Turkey has provided the grounds for the education institutions operating outside school such as private tutoring centers (PTCs), and other preparatory courses. Almost all students attend PTCs at some point during their education, at one level or another, for the hope in attending elite schools and universities. As expected, the ultimate purpose is to achieve a well-paid job and a comfortable position in life. However, only a limited number of PTC goers succeed in entering elite schools and universities as well as in getting well-paid jobs, due to high competition in both university entrance and labor market. This paper argues that, with the diversity it created, and disparity in access among different social classes, outside school education contributes immensely to the reproduction of inequalities in Turkey, and intends to shed light on the complexity of the issue, beyond the framework of economic supply and demand model.

Keywords: Out-of-school education, private tutoring, preparatory courses, social injustice, Turkey.

1. INTRODUCTION

A variety of educational activities, taking place outside school have increased enormously across the world in the last few decades. In some countries, these activities have become so competing with formal education that, a new concept called “shadow education system” has been added into the literature (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). The term was inspired by the research conducted in the beginning of 1990s regarding out-of-school education in Malaysia, Japan and Singapore (Bray, 2010).

Along with Greece, South Korea and Brazil, Turkey makes the top list of countries where a big proportion of school children attends private tutoring centers (PTCs) and/or takes private tutoring lessons. PTCs have become so crucial in the exam preparation that, according to the Turkish Higher Education Strategy Report of 2007, more than 70% of the students attend these centers, while about 17% of them take private tutoring lessons in addition to attending PTCs (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu [YÖK], 2007, p. 82).

Significant changes have been taking place in Turkey since the 1980s with the implementation of neoliberal politics as in many other corners of the world. Turkey’s education system has been one of the most affected areas in this process, which implies a paradigm shift from public to private not only in education but also all other public

services. Due to the nature of education as a social phenomenon, this shift has also become the source of many other changes in the society. Various forms of “paid education” have become widespread along with many other new consumption trends during this period leading to tremendous stress among children, the youth and their families.

As an important center of attraction in the current phase of capitalism, which needed new capital accumulating areas, education provided a useful ground. *General Agreement on Trade in Services* (GATS) which was signed in 1995 by all the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) brought about radical changes in the perceptions regarding public services including education systems in those countries. By signing this agreement in 1998, Turkey has accepted the binding rules of GATS, which meant marketization of the public services such as health and education. Following GATS, Ninth Development Plan (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 2006) and the First National Education Strategy Plan of Turkey both of which together cover the period between 2007 and 2014 opened the way to put GATS’ rules into practice (Keskin Demirer, 2012, pp. 54-55).

It is commonly agreed that, education plays an important role in transferring inequalities from generation to generation where quality public education is not prevalent. In Turkey, due to the efforts to establish a public education system since the founding of the Turkish Republic, upward social mobility had been somewhat possible, meaning the children of poor families would have the chance to climb up the socioeconomic scale, thus securing power and status in the society at one level or another. In fact, “[p]rior to 1980, the Ministry of National Education was hostile toward private education of all sorts, which it viewed as an attack on the foundational principles of the republic and the role of education in creating national culture by inculcating the duties of citizenship” (Rutz & Balkan, 2009, p. 5). However, various reflections of general policies along with certain practices within the Turkish education system, especially since the 1990s, have been reversing this process. Today, while lower class parents face the reality of not being able to push their children up the social class scale, middle class parents worry about not being able to retain their class position for their children. Outside school learning along with various practices of privatization within public schools provide substantial examples of this process.

2. METHOD

This paper is based on a study that considers the issues attached to the exams, PTCs and other courses as parts of a wider reality. In other words, social facts related to private outside school education are taken into account from the perspective of political economy, which requires relational analysis of social phenomena. Therefore, the study embraces the critical realist approach, which provides a third way to positivism on one extreme and relativism on the other (Sayer, 2000, pp. 2-3).

The study attempts to provide a socioeconomic and political analysis of outside school education using various data sets such as national statistics and reports made available by Turkish Statistical Institution (TUIK), Ministry of National Education (MEB), and Higher Education Council (YÖK) as well as other resources. In addition, individual experiences of people, who involved in out-of-school education, are taken into account as valuable resources of information and knowledge through semi-structured and informal interviews carried out in an extended period of time. The researcher’s own experience as participant observation is also, inevitably, included in the analysis, since the issue under investigation touches upon every single life in the country including the author herself.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. National Education

Education has been considered among the most important factors in the nation building process of Turkey, thus the right to education has been in the Constitution since the founding of the Turkish Republic as one of the basic principles. According to the latest constitution which came out in 1982, “[n]o one can be deprived of the right to education... The state provides support for successful students who do not have the necessary resources to continue their education through scholarships and other ways” (Article 42) according to Law No. 2709, November 7, 1982. In addition, the principal of “universality and equality” is considered to be the primary principal among the *Basic Principles of National Education* that are listed in the *Basic Law of National Education*. The same law claims that, “the service of national education is organized according to the demands and skills of the Turkish citizens and the needs of the Turkish society and individuals are directed to relevant programs or schools and trained parallel with their interest, capability and ability (Law No. 1739 of June 14, 1973; Article 5 and 6). The law has been expanded in 1997 to increase the state’s responsibility in organizing the education system to lead the students in such a way.

The basic principles of national education mentioned above have become almost totally irrelevant today due to radical changes in politics of education and in other related areas. Parallel with the general political environment of the post-1980, politics of education have been dominated by the gradual withdrawal of the state from education and providing new opportunities for the private sector. Education has become individualized and marketized in various forms during this process. As a result, principles of national education such as “primary education is free in public schools” and “everyone is provided with equal opportunity and possibility” became invalid. Similarly, neither “public service of national education is organized according to the demands and capabilities of the Turkish citizens and the needs of the Turkish society” nor “individuals are directed to relevant programs or schools and trained parallel with their interest, capability and ability”. Opposite practices of these principles became reality at various levels in both public and out-of-school education systems of Turkey. The state schools are no longer free of charge in the real sense because of ever-increasing expenses that parents have to face. In parallel with this, individuals’ change to continue their education does not depend on their interest, capability and ability, but on their economic resources.

3.2. Outside School Education

Outside school education has become prevalent under such circumstances. Private tutoring have been available in both Ottoman and Turkish history for a long time as supplementary education mainly for the Elite. However, PTCs, called *dershane* in Turkish, had been available only for a limited part of the population, until the 1990s, because they were opened only in cities, serving students mostly coming from urban, somewhat middle-upper middle class families. For example, the number of PTCs was only in 100s in the 1970s, and 1980s (157 and 174 respectively). However, these centers became available for lower income families after the 1990s, reaching over 1.000s by the mid-1990s, and then 2000s in the 2.000s. Today the number of PTCs reaches over 4.000, with about 50.000 teachers and 1.5 million students (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2014).

There are three basic types of private tutoring in terms of outside school learning in Turkey. The first one is the oldest form of one-to-one tutoring that takes place either in the tutor’s or the student’s home, involving only one tutor and one student. However, as outside

school learning became prevalent, various types of this form have been invented, such as tutoring more than one student at the same time (group tutoring), which would cost less to each student. This type of private tutoring would take place in the teacher's home or more commonly at a *private tutoring office* or a *study center* each of which constitutes an additional form of PTCs other than *dershanes*. Those centers are smaller in scale as opposed to *dershanes*, and are not subject to the liabilities of regular PTCs. In fact, their existence is somewhat vague; for example, private tutoring offices are usually opened as publication houses but function as small-scale PTCs usually involving one or a few teachers and subjects.

There is no official data available regarding the size of one-to-one private tutoring, however; some studies give an idea. According to a study, which was carried out on higher education students, the proportion of those who have only attended regular PTCs was 71.8%, while the proportion of those who attended a PTC and took private tutoring lessons additionally was 16.5% (YÖK, 2007, p. 82).

The second form of outside school education takes place in public schools on weekends (especially in primary schools), where students receive lessons in a regular classroom in return for extra payment to the school/teacher.

Dershane has been the most prevalent form of outside school education, which is defined as "a private institution that provides lessons to students outside the school" in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Association. Those PTCs prepare students for the exams to enter higher education and open education, as well as special, private and elite schools in primary and secondary levels.

The competition among PTCs ascended as the number of PTCs increased from the 1990s onward. As a result, many PTCs would close doors or change hands every year while new ones enter the market. For example, the number of closing PTCs came close to the number of new PTCs in 2006-2007 education year, 276 and 236 respectively (Türk Eğitim Derneği [TED], 2010, p. 26).

Increasing demand and competition led to new types of PTCs such as *boutique dershane* implying "small is better" concept which added new investors to the market. At the same time, the sector leaders increased their shares in the market through "diversification of products" to attract "clients" from different income levels thus investing in boutique PTCs, VIP PTCs, where the classes are consisted of a limited number of students, and/or the teachers are available for one-to-one tutoring.

In addition to the PTCs and such which prepare students for the exams in order to enter elite schools and universities, another type of outside school institution has also become prevalent in the last decade. These courses prepare graduates for various other exams in order to be appointed to certain public positions as well as acquiring particular certificates. These institutions had traditionally functioned in the areas of individual development and pastime activities such as music and art courses or increasing the employability of job seekers such as language and computer courses. However, the size and the content of these so called "various courses" have changed in recent years. The number of these courses increased over 4.000 by the end of 2000s from around 2.000 in the first half of the decade. These courses can be opened within a PTC or independently as long as they obtain the necessary license to operate.

Another important result of the increasing demand and competition in the PTC sector is the informal courses which reached 1500 in number and 600-750 million Turkish lira in revenues in 2011 according to the Association of Private Education Courses, PTCs and Private Study Centers. The association claims that these courses, opened by municipalities

and non-governmental foundations, operate wrongfully and cause unfair competition (Özel Öğretim Kurslar, Dershaneler ve Etüt Eğitim Merkezleri Birliği Derneği [OZ-KUR-DER], 2011).

4. THEORY AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Education as a Commodity

Once associated only with the high classes and elites, spending for outside school learning has become ordinary and legitimate as a result of marketization and individualization of educational practices even though education is still largely provided by the state in Turkey as in many other countries in the world. While employment opportunities fall behind the high number of young people within a large population, education gains more importance in terms of job opportunities and future life chances.

Parallel with the high size of the general population, the number of students in primary and secondary education have been over 15 million since 2010 reaching 16,5 million in 2014 (MEB, 2014). This means an attractive investment potential for the private sector even if most of these students come from low-income families. In fact, considering the importance of education in future life chances, and the competitive labor market, low-income families have also been spending on out-of-school education, since the sector has been offering varieties of PTCs for different income levels thus incorporating every segment of the society into the process. This creates a huge sector of outside school paid education utilizing all sections of society through various forms of products and prices. However, opposed to common claims, variety in products leads to different outcomes for the receivers of these products. Therefore, outside school education is not only the shadow of the formal education system but also a reflection of its inequalities, even in a more profound way. In other words, outside school education system becomes another realm to reflect and reproduce different levels of welfare and inequalities in the society. While the number of students who attend PTCs increases, educational expenses per student vary significantly. While some students benefit long term private tutoring at relatively better PTCs and take one to one tutoring additionally, the majority attend less expensive, crowded PTCs for short terms. Similarly, while first group of the students benefit from relatively well-paid and experienced teachers, the students of the second group are usually exposed to lowest paid and least experienced teachers. At the end, all of these students have to take the same exams, whether preparing for high schools or universities, in which case one cannot expect the same outcome from the two groups. Therefore, the gap between the children of families who can afford to spend more and those who have limited resources widens while climbing the educational ladders.

4.2. Exams in Creating (In)equality

Studies, which investigate the correlation between inequalities at the national level and using out-of-school education, reveal that children's participation in outside school learning goes up, as the inequalities at the national level increase. As the success becomes hard to achieve in a competitive environment, the use of out-of-school education becomes prevalent which reflects and/or supports inequalities in education (Silova, Budiene, & Bray, 2006; Southgate, 2009).

Competitive exams at all levels of the education system, starting from the primary school are the basic reason for the existence of outside school learning, at least at the practical level. However, these exams are almost ignored in the school system. Therefore, families are forced to spend on out-of-school education to keep up with the exams, making

it the biggest expense item on their household list of expenses. According to a survey, conducted by TUIK, one third (32.85%) of the total educational expenses were made by households in 2002. The ratio of private educational expenses to the GDP was 2.5% in the same year almost double the OECD average (1.3%). Furthermore, the amount of private expenses allocated from the GDP of Turkey is more than those of the countries such as the US and the UK (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TUIK], 2006, p. 148).

Another study, which aimed to find out whether private tutoring is beneficial, and how it affects equality in education and income mobility between generations, supports the argument mentioned above. The study used the results of a survey conducted by the Turkish Higher Council of Education in 2002 with the 10% of 1.2 million students who took the university entrance exam. The study's sample was consisted of 90.410 students who took the exam for the first time. Entering into a university was regarded as a measure of success in the study which found out that, relatively less expensive and short-term private tutoring did not have any impact on success in the best case scenario, while it decreased the chance to enter into a university in the worst case. On the other hand, the minority of students who can purchase relatively more expensive private tutoring in a more intensive way increase their chances of entering universities (Gurun & Millimet, 2008, p. 10). As this study shows, families with high income level and resources provide their children with more quality/expensive private tutoring for a longer time, and get ahead in the race. However, parallel to their limited resources, the majority of families use out-of-school learning in the later time of their children's education, usually as the exam times approach. In other words, only long term, high amount expenses in shadow education seem pay back, while all sections of society invest in this paid education parallel to their resources.

Educational indicators put forward by international studies prove that exam and test oriented education in general and common use of out-of-school education in particular does not result in success among Turkish students. Combining regular school and outside school hours together, students in Turkey seem to spend too much time for education. However, high quantity does not seem to bring quality, as international indicators show. Students from Turkey fall well behind international, European Union (EU) and OECD averages as shown in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) in 1999 and 2007, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001, as well as in OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012 (MEB, 2003a; MEB, 2003b; MEB, 2005; MEB, 2010a; MEB, 2010b; MEB, 2011; MEB, 2013).

New types of PTCs with fancy names and more to offer are obviously chosen by families with higher income levels and resources since these upscale PTCs charge up to ten times more than a regular PTC. This type of stratification in private tutoring increases inequalities in education and helps create more elitism in the society through education. In other words, out-of-school education deepens class differences and supports the reproduction of inequalities.

These inequalities are experienced even in the area of scholarships provided by PTCs. According to the study conducted by the Turkish Education Association, during the 11th and 12th grades when PTCs are used most intensively, successful students who attend PTCs free of charge are those mostly coming from high-income households. Fourteen percent of students coming from the highest income households (with the monthly income of over 5.000 Turkish Lira) benefit from PTCs without any payment while lower income households (with the income level of under 2.000 Turkish Lira) are provided with the same benefit on an average of 7%. The same study reveals that, higher income households

benefit more from PTC discounts as opposed to lower income households (TED, 2010, p. 245). This means, higher income families do not only provide their children with more quality and long term private tutoring but also pay relatively less for what they purchase. In other words, part of PTC expenses of higher income level families is financed by lower income groups of the society who can afford only less quality outside school learning for a short time thus not being able to benefit from it in the real sense.

4.3. The Role of Family Capitals

A number of studies show that, private tutoring expenses increase parallel to the levels of education and income of the families (Kim & Lee, 2004; Smyth, 2008). The Turkish case proves this argument. Tansel and Bircan (2004) found out that 73% of private education expenses were made by the wealthiest 20% of the Turkish society in 2002. According to the same survey mentioned above, 39% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24, who left the education system early, stated that they left the school due to economic reasons. Adding another 4% who claimed that they left the school to enter the workforce, a significant percentage of young people leave school for economic reasons (TUIK, 2006, p. 148).

Various ways of parents' involvement in their children's education can support their success. Sociologist Coleman mentions three types of capitals in terms of the impact of families on children's education. Financial capital reflects the level of wealth and income of the family, while human capital represents the education of parents. On the other hand, he also uses social capital in terms of the adults' involvement and support for the children within family. Additionally, he also draws attention to the social capital outside the family, which consists of social networks among parents, and parents' relations to the institutions within these networks (Coleman, 1988, p. 113).

Criticizing Coleman's neoclassical use of the concept, French sociologist Bourdieu draws attention to the exploitative character of social capital within economic capital (Fine, 2001, pp. 137-157). Bourdieu considers capital as accumulated labor in its materialized form or its 'incorporated' embodied form, while he believes that social world is accumulated history (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). Bourdieu emphasizes the relations between economic, social and cultural capitals. From his perspective, cultural capital supplements the wealth of a class or class fraction thus helping the social reproduction of class, power and status. To put it differently, cultural capital that one obtains is reproduced by economic capital and then turns into social capital which would lead to more economic capital all of which transfer from parents to children or from generation to generation.

Considering different approaches, the theories of forms of capital provide useful tools to understand the relations of education and its social reflections in the Turkish society especially for the last few decades. Along with economic capital, the impact of social capital in the area of education has been increasing in Turkey, especially due to the growing number of private schools. Social networks that are established around these private schools are much different than the traditional "school-family union" of public schools where teachers and parents would get together every once in a while to discuss general performance and manners of students. By the formation and growing number of private schools, parents, usually the mothers, who send their children to the same private school, would establish social networks, through which they organize all sorts of educational and social activities. Along with deciding what PTC they would send their children, which teacher they would hire for one-to-one tutoring, and what kind of study programs they should follow for certain exams, they also organize social activities for children such as going on vacations together. Each of these activities whether it is educational or social,

would usually have positive impact on the success of children. In other words, those parents and their children benefit from additional advantages of social networks, which support the social reproduction mechanism of education in the out-of-school education system as well as the formal one.

5. CONCLUSION

Outside school paid education supports upper classes more than lower ones even though the impression given to the masses claims equality in access. In addition, since upper class families are involved more actively in their children's education, they are more familiar with the language and culture of outside school learning as well as exams thus providing them with class advantage in educational attainment. Social networks become quite useful in this process.

Out-of-school education along with privatization of expenses in the public education system provides a mechanism in legitimization of paid education making it an individual matter as opposed to a social issue. Thus, education transforms into a commodity that serves individual interests rather than social ones.

The state becomes one of the leading actors in this process, by providing the ideological ground as well as the necessary legal and physical conditions. While they are presented as part of the equality rhetoric, exams function as a tool to legitimize competition. Furthermore, this competition culture is not limited to students or to education, as teachers and parents become part of it in various ways. Combining a high number of students with their parents, the majority of the population lives in this culture at any given time in Turkey.

Inequalities in education have been in the social and political agenda for a long time, and it most certainly will be so in the future, as well. Across the world, public education has historically been thought as a political tool in reducing inequalities. In this context, it is usually believed that, making public education prevalent would mean reducing the inequalities even if not removing them completely. Turkey has experienced such periods, when education was made accessible for lower classes other than the elite, and there were no selective entrance exams. However, this function of education is increasingly becoming ineffective due to the current practices in the education system and within its shadow. In fact, outside school paid education has been providing a suitable ground for this discussion. Even though it has become widespread, it did not lead to the prevalence of success in exams, and thus improving positions in life afterwards for the majority of people. In this context, ever-growing examples prove that success in education depends on financial resources first and then social networks, which are established through the help of these resources. In this context, along with formal education systems, out-of-school education provides another significant ground to strengthen these relations and thus the reproduction of inequalities in the neoliberal phase of capitalism.

Closing down PTCs: What would that mean?

A new development that took place while writing this paper has to be mentioned before concluding. The governing Justice and Development Party in Turkey, which has been holding the power since 2002, changed the Private Education Law recently in order to close down all PTCs. According to this change in the law, all PTCs should be either apply to the Ministry of National Education in order to transform themselves into another type of private education institution such as a private pre-school, primary school or high school or be prepared for the invalidation of their license. The Ministry will accept the applications

for the transformation until September 2015. Those that are found suitable for the transformation according to certain conditions will be added to the transformation program. Then these institutions are expected to complete the specified terms and conditions by the end of the 2018-2019 education year in order to function as a private school. The government will provide incentives for the PTCs that are transforming themselves into private schools.

There have been numerous discussions about this change in the law. Even those who had been critical about the existence of PTCs have been criticizing this change in the law including the author of this article for one basic reason that it is not a permanent solution to a problem that is rooted in the education system rather a temporary make up led by a current conflict between certain political/economic interest groups¹. As mentioned above, the importance that has been historically ascribed to education for future job possibilities in particular and better life chances in general, along with competitive labor market and high unemployment rates will stay in the picture. Thus the race for the better schools and universities and related competitive exams will continue to dominate the scene which will lead to the creation of other kinds of outside school institutions, while the former types will take new forms that would somewhat fit to the new law. There will be at least some kind of private tutoring whether in its institutional or individual forms. Besides, profit-seeking establishments, regardless of their area of investment would always find ways to go around the laws as they have always done. In fact, the government might even make it easy for them once the political conflict is removed and pressures from different sides become insistent. In the end, the change in progress does not seem to be a real positive change for the education system in general and for students and their families in particular. Parents will continue to spend money for out-of-formal school education in one form or another, thus the shadow will survive. The change is only about adapting to the new rules of the old system, while confusion remains among students and parents as well as educators.

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¹ It is commonly agreed that the new law to close down PTCs is the result of a recent political clash between two former allies, the governing Justice and development Party (JDP) and Fethullah Gülen's Islamic Movement. The law is considered to be a part of a revenge plan to impair The Gülen Movement that has a considerable number of PTCs as well as private schools.

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