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Gender and Socio-Economic Background Aspect of Inclusion: A Perspective from Turkey

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the opinions of teachers about the inclusive education policies and practices regarding the gender and socio-economic backgrounds of students. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method was used in this study and eighteen teachers selected by criterion sampling technique constituted the sample of this study. The data of the study were collected with semi-structured interview forms and analyzed with content analysis method. As a result of the study, it was identified that although there have been tremendous improvements in ensuring the access of female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the education system, it is revealed that educational inequalities and injustices continue to exist and several female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are excluded from education system due to several reasons in Turkey. In that regard, it is suggested that the policies and practices towards inclusive education should shift towards an improvement in education system with the aim of increasing inclusion, justice, equity and diversity in all spheres of educational life.

Keywords: Gender, Socio-Economic Background, Inclusion, Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

It is already known that education has been one of the most important determinants of the social life and maintained its role to affect one's social position for a long time. Accordingly, demands for access to quality education, as a universal right, have been claimed by millions of people all around the world. It is fortunate that there has been a significant progress in that respect and the number of students who are excluded from the education system has decreased to some extent recently. With the initiatives of various international agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the education was reaffirmed as a fundamental right and regarded as "one of the key

strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion” (Peters 2003: 1) Nevertheless, the data of UIS (2019) indicate that there has been a deceleration in the inclusion of students recently and around 258 million students were excluded from the education system in 2018. While around 121 million of these students were at the primary and secondary school age; 138 million of them were at high school age. In that respect, it is important to note that the number of students who are excluded from the education system increases as they progress towards higher education levels and this constitutes one of the most important barrier to equality and justice in education. According to Ergün and Arık (2020:9), some social groups may experience various challenges in their access to education or in their full and effective participation in education processes. Of these groups, female students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds have been identified as two important vulnerable groups. In fact, it is revealed that two thirds of one billion people worldwide who have had no schooling or left school after less than four years are women and girls (Unterhalter, 2010: 2) Similarly, it is found that the students from higher socioeconomic status are more likely to attend and progress higher education compared to their peers from lower socio-economic status (Bellibaş, 2015; Perry and McConney, 2010). Accordingly, the inclusion of female students and students from lower socio-economic status and inclusive education policies and practices towards these two groups have been a global concern all around the world.

Regarding the researches carried out in the literature regarding the inclusion of female students and students from disadvantaged socioeconomic condition in Turkey, it reveals that in parallel to the general tendency to associate inclusion with the concept of integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schooling, most of the researches on inclusion focused on the integration of students with certain disabilities (Acarlar, 2013; Erkılıç and Durak, 2013; Kutay, 2018). However, it must be noted that the number of studies related to inclusion of other disadvantaged groups (Demirel Kaya 2019; ERI 2017; Şimşek 2019) and examining the curriculum and textbooks within the perspective of inclusion (Çayır 2015; Ergün 2017; İnce 2012; Şimşek, Dağistan, Şahin, Koçyiğit, Dağistan Yalçinkaya, Kart and Dağdelen 2019; Koçyiğit and Şimşek 2019) has increased to some extent recently. Nevertheless, it is found that female students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, as two vulnerable groups in education system, are mostly examined within the perspective of equality of opportunity and access to education (Çolak, 2020; Şahin, 2019; Yaşar, 2014;) and are not taken into consideration within the perspective of inclusion.

With all these in mind, I aimed to identify the opinions of teachers about the inclusive education policies and practices towards the female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in this study. In that regard, I attempted to bring the issue of inclusion of these two vulnerable groups into question with a focus on the issues of social justice, equality and human rights as these are also the mission of Education for All (EFA) and of inclusive education (Polat, 2011). Accordingly, this research is expected to make a valuable contribution to the literature about both the theory and the practice of inclusive education in Turkey.

1.2 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a global movement emerging as a response to the exclusion of students who are considered different due to their disabilities, colors, ethnic origins, genders, low socio-economic backgrounds by educational systems (Waitoller and Artiles 2013). Accordingly, what the inclusive education is and who it covers have been an important matter of debate from 1970s to onwards. The inclusion and the literature around inclusive education were initially associated with the concept of integration, desegregation of students with disabilities, their educational rights and aimed to integrate children with special education needs to mainstream schooling (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson 2006; Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou 2011; Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden 2000; Coombs-Richardson and Mead 2001; Erkılıç and Durak 2003; Vislie 2003; UNESCO 2009; Westwood 2013). Although there is still a large agreement upon inclusion’s being related to special educational needs, it must be noted that inclusion is not just limited with students with disabilities, it has a multidimensional structure and limiting the context of it poses a challenge for the development of inclusive practices in schools (Booth and Ainscow 2002). In this regard, the concept has started to be considered from a larger perspective and been linked to the concepts of social justice, cultural diversity, democracy, diversity, pluralism and power since 1990s (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006; Gudjonsdottir and Oskarsdottir 2016; Haug 2017;

Stubbs 2008; Taylor and Sidhu 2012; Waitoller and Artiles 2013). Thus it widened in a way to include all disadvantaged groups such as ethnic/religious minorities, refugees, females, low income families, the disabled, gifted children in society, etc. (Acedo, Ferrer and Pamies 2009; Çelik 2017; ERI 2016; Florian and Rouse 2009; Stubbs 2008; Taylor and Sidhu 2012). Nevertheless, the policies and practices regarding inclusive education and inclusion in education differ all around the world and in spite of all the improvements in the inclusion of all students regardless of their differences, there are still several students who experience enormous challenges regarding access to education, success and continuity in education. One of the determinants of the success of inclusive education policies and practices is the development level of the countries. In fact it is already revealed that while inclusive education policies adopt a broader perspective and target to include all disadvantaged groups such as ethnic/religious minorities, refugees, females, low-income families, the disabled, etc. in developed countries (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014), they adopt a narrow perspective and focus on students who have special educational needs and increasing the schooling rates of these students in developing countries (Westwood 2013). Thus it is an expected situation that a large proportion of the students living in developing countries may drop out of the school for various reasons such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, refugee etc. For example, while countries in the North adopt the concept of inclusion within the perspective of social justice and democracy and develop policies and practices to provide 'optimal opportunities for all students (Arduin, 2015); the countries in Southeast Asia seem to still seem to have not come to terms on the exact scope of the concept and inclusion practices and experience challenges in that regard (Raguindin, Ping, Duereh and Lising, 2020).

1.3 Inclusive Education in Turkey

Although there have been remarkable improvements regarding inclusive education in both theory and practice in Turkey as a developing country, it must be noted that the policies and reforms in that regard involve a limited form of inclusion. In fact it is already known that inclusive education policies and practices has tended to focus on the integration of students with disabilities for a long time and the concepts of special education and inclusive education are used interchangeably in the MoNE regulations (Erkılıç and Durak 2013; MoNE, 2008). Although the issues such as toleration towards the differences and inclusion of all students regardless of their differences have been referred in education reforms, these differences have not had a real inclusiveness and remained limited with mental and physical differences that can cause learning disabilities (Altan, 2021). In fact, Inclusive Education Projects focusing on the in-service trainings of teachers were organized between the years of 2016 and 2018; however, these trainings were mostly towards the adaptation and inclusion of students who have special educational needs and Syrian migrants who are exposed to immigration, violence and terrorism (MoNE 2018). Accordingly, it is difficult to argue that inclusive education policies and practices in Turkey are comprehensive enough in terms of gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, religion, etc (Sarı, Nayir and Kahraman, 2020). In fact, female students and students from low socio-economic background are among the most disadvantaged groups in terms of inclusion in the education. In fact it is found that only 20 percent of low income countries have achieved gender parity at the secondary level and just 10 percent at the secondary level (McCleary-Sills, Hanmer, Parsons and Klugman, 2015). In a similar vein, students from lower socio-economic background experience more challenges in terms of academic competence, relationship with their peers and teachers and adapting to the school culture (Veland, Midthassel and Idsoe, 2009) . The situation is not different in Turkey either. Although the right to education is guaranteed by the Constitution and generality and equality of education for all students regardless of their genders and socioeconomic backgrounds is emphasized in the Basic Law of National Education numbered 1739, it is revealed that the reforms and arrangements with regard to the education of female students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds are not inclusive and comprehensive enough. In fact, it is already known that the number of female students in both special education schools/subclasses and non-dominant groups like refugees are fewer than their male peers (ERI 2019; Go Prince 2017; MoNE 2018) Although significant steps such as prohibition of discrimination based on gender in the Constitution, the compulsory education and many other regulations, have been taken regarding the ensuring the access of female students into education, it is a common knowledge that girls have more disadvantages in terms of accessing to schooling and this disadvantageous status increase as they get older. This situation is valid for the students with low socio-economic background as well. It was revealed that Turkey has the most socio-economically disadvantaged students with a rate of 64% among OECD countries (Yaşar and Amaç 2018). Also,

it was found in various researches that there are a large number of students who feel obliged to work to contribute to the family budget and do not complete their education due to financial difficulties in Turkey (Beltekin and Radmard 2015; Köseoğlu, Üçkardeşler and Dinçer 2014; Özbaş 2018; Yılmaz 2014).

2. Methodology

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method was used in this study. A phenomenological design can be described as an approach aiming to identify and illuminate the essence of a certain phenomenon through the experiences of participants (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, Varpio 2015). Phenomenology allows people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives and perceptions about a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience that phenomenon (Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995: 1124). Accordingly, the participants of a phenomenological research should have either lived experiences or observations about the experiences of these people (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). The most prominent criterion in a phenomenological research is the participant's experience with the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, the teachers' experiences, observations and ideas about the inclusion of female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic background constitute the most prominent criterion of this research.

2.1 Participants

According to Creswell (2007), the participants of a phenomenological study should be selected among the people who have the required experience about the phenomenon in question. Hence, a criteria-based strategy in which the researchers set some common criteria for all participants can be used to select the group of participants with shared experiences. Therefore criterion sampling which is "a kind of purposeful sampling of cases on preconceived criteria" (Sandelowski 2000: 248) was used in this research. Within this context, following criteria were decided to select the participants: (1) working at schools including only female students (2) working at schools which have students from low socio-economic backgrounds (3) working at these schools for more than 3 years (4) being volunteer to participate in the study. In that regard, two girls' vocational high schools which students from low socio-economic background attend and two industry vocational high schools including mostly male students from low socio-economic backgrounds, two secondary schools located in the suburbs of Turgutlu, a district of Manisa, and three primary schools located in suburbs and include mostly migrant and refugee student with low socio-economic backgrounds constituted the research context of the study. As for the personal characteristics of participants, it is revealed that while 6 of them are females, 12 of them are males. 8 of them work in primary schools, 5 of them work in secondary schools and 5 of them work in high schools. Lastly, while 8 of these teachers are class teachers; 10 of them teach such subjects as math's, English, Turkish literature, science, P.E, history and vocational subjects. The criterion sampling method used in this study and detailed descriptions about both the methodology and the participants are expected to contribute to increase the external validity and reliability of this study.

2.2 Data Collection Instrument

In phenomenological studies, data collection is usually done using in-depth and multiple interviews as the primary source of data are the experiences of the participants (Creswell 2007). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews and semi-structured interview forms are frequently used in phenomenological studies. In that research, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used. While developing the form, the literature was reviewed in a detailed way using the key words such as "inclusion, exclusion, inclusive education, gender, socio-economic background" and an influential conceptual framework was organized. This detailed literature review is thought to promote the internal validity of the study. In addition, the advices and opinions of experts were sought. Finally pilot scheme was carried out with four teachers to identify the possible problems about the clarity of questions, time, etc. The practices of pilot scheme and the opinions of experts ensured the compatibility and clarity of the questions and that contributed to the validity of the research. The final draft of the interview form included a first part including questions about the characteristics of the participants and a second part consisting four questions. The questions were as follows: 1. What are your opinions regarding the inclusion of female and male students? 2. What are your opinions about the policies and

practices to include female and male students in the education system in Turkey? 3. What are your opinions about the inclusion of students from different socio-economic levels in the education system in Turkey? 4. What are your opinions about the policies and practices to include students from different socio-economic levels in the education system in Turkey?

2.3 Data collection process

It is determined that interviewing participants individually creates a more positive climate and enables the participants to feel more relaxed (Boyce and Neale 2006) contributing the researcher to reveal personal and social issues in a detailed way (Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Accordingly, the data of this study were collected through face-to-face individual interviews at the schools which the participants worked. Before starting data collection, required permission was obtained from both the school principals and the participants themselves and the volunteer teachers participated in the study. The participants were assured that their opinions will not be used for any other purposes apart from the research and their identities will not be revealed at any time. The interviews were recorded by a tape recorder and as written notes and they lasted about 20-25 minutes.

2.4 Data analysis

For the data analysis of the interviews, content analysis was used. In that respect, firstly written texts were transcribed and then the interview forms were examined in a detailed way in order to obtain general information about the content. Secondly, the data were classified considering the aim of the study and the research questions. While developing and organizing categories, firstly initial codes were determined and then the main themes were established and the data were organized under these codes and themes. Then, themes emerging as a result of the analysis were given in related tables and the expressions that could be used as direct citations were identified and conferred in associated parts in findings. While giving direct citations, each participant was coded like: T1, T2, etc. Lastly, the data were analyzed by two independent researchers and the interpretations were discussed in order to ensure the compromise and conformity.

3. Results

The results of this research are organized into two categories as inclusion of male and female students, inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

3.1 Inclusion of male and female students

Considering the participants' opinions on the inclusion of male and female students in the education system, it is revealed that majority of the participants (f:13) are of the opinion that male and female students are included in the education system equally. The participants' opinions on the inclusion of male and female students in the education system in Turkey are given in the following table:

Table 1: Inclusion of female and male students in the education system

Policies and practices to include female and male students	f
Compulsory education	7
Campaign and projects developed by non-governmental organizations	5
Legal sanction and penalty	4
Adult education courses	3
Bussed education	2
Open high school	2
Positive discrimination towards girls	2
Wage incentive provided by the state	1
Challenges regarding the inclusion female and male students	
Regional differences	12
Attitudes of families	5

Low socio-economic status	5
Early marriages of girls	4
Imam Hatip and open high schools	3

As seen in the table, the participants argued that such policies and practices as compulsory education, campaigns and projects developed by non-governmental organizations (Come on Girls to School, Kardelen), legal sanctions and penalty, adult education courses, bussed education, open high schools, positive discrimination towards girls and wage incentives provided by the state have been effective in the inclusion of all children, especially girls. Nevertheless, most of the participants drew attention to regional differences especially in the enrollment of girls and stated that there are differences between the east and the west of the country. Within this context, the participants made such statements as:

“As far as I have observed, it may be better than before, but it cannot be said that a complete success has been achieved. While I was working in Van (a city in the East of Turkey), the families were not in favor of the girls' schooling, they approached it negatively. For example, I had a student, she was very successful, but since that girl's family was not supportive of her schooling, that girl got married immediately after school and she is pregnant now. (T1)”

The participants referred to such challenges regarding the inclusion of students, especially female students: attitudes of parents, low socio-economic status of families, early marriages of girls, Imam Hatip and open high schools. The participants' opinions regarding these obstacles are as follows:

“It still continues in rural areas, in the villages. There is still a sense and fear that something bad will happen to girls. In other words, I was not sent to school because I was smart, I was sent to school because I was a man. My sister is one year younger than me, she was better than me, but our father said that our economic conditions do not allow this, we are a farmer family, we need workers, we need girls. One of you will go to school, the others will not” (T18).

“The girls do not go to open high schools either. Early marriages are very common especially in the eastern part of Turkey. Some of the girls find jobs outside, they quit school as they have financial problems and want to have a job as soon as possible.” (T6)

In parallel to the opinions of some participants, it was revealed that gender equality was achieved within the context of schooling and access to education especially in the last decade (MoNE, 2018; KOÇKAM, 2019). In this regard it is noteworthy to state such policy and practices as compulsory education, campaign and projects developed by non-governmental organizations, wage incentives provided by the state, bussed education contributed to the schooling of girls who are more disadvantageous in terms of schooling than boys, to a large extent (Eğitim-Sen 2018; ERI 2019; Gumus and Gumus, 2013; Polat 2008; Yılmaz and Altinkurt 2011). Nevertheless, as it is also stated by majority of researches, schooling rates of girls are lower than boys and the girls do not have equal opportunities to further their education due to various reasons such as regional differences, low socio-economic status of families, negative attitudes and anxieties of families towards schooling, early marriages of girls, etc (Adıgüzel 2013; Çal and Karaboğa 2017; ERG 2016; Gökşen, Cemalcılar and Gürlesel 2005; Siyez and Beycioglu, 2019; Yavuz, Özkara and Yıldız 2016; Yıldırım, Beltekin and Oral 2018).

3.2 Inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds

Considering the opinions of participants about the inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, it was revealed that some participants (f:4) argued that all students are included in the education system and benefit from educational opportunities equally. The participants' detailed opinions regarding the inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the education system in Turkey are given in the following table:

Table 1: Inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds

Policies and practices to include students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds	f
Financial aid collected by teachers and school management	13

Financial aid distributed by local government units	7
Clothing, stationery and cash aids from various organizations charity organizations	7
Supports provided by the ministry such as bussed education, free school meal, free book distribution, social aid, etc.	6
Support courses and social activities	4
Scholarships	3
Compulsory education	2
Various institutions and organizations, such as Darüşşafaka, science and arts centers, etc.	2
Challenges regarding inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds	
Inequality between public and private schools	6
Exclusion and discrimination	5
Lack of social activities	4
Families	3
Regional inequalities	1
Child labour	1
Inequality in income distribution, lack of job opportunities	1

As for the policies and practices to include students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, the participants remarked that the students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are attempted to be included in the education system through such policy and practices as: compulsory education; supports provided by the ministry such as bussed education, free school meal, free book distribution, social aid, etc.; scholarships; various institutions and organizations, such as Darüşşafaka, science and arts centers and apprenticeship training centers where students who are successful but have poor financial status can receive education; financial aid which are collected by teachers and school management, distributed by local government units; clothing, stationery and cash aids from various organizations and charity organizations; support courses and social activities organized within the schools. One participant's opinions in this context are as follows:

"We, as a school, support the disadvantaged students with the aids of the people around. As teachers, we apply to various institutions and attempt to cover up their needs" (T17)

Nevertheless, the majority of the participants (f: 14) emphasized that students who have disadvantageous socio-economic status were not included equally. Two participants asserted their opinions like this:

Socio-economically disadvantaged groups absolutely miss out some educational opportunities. As the family's financial situation is not in a good shape, they cannot give importance to their children's education and meet their needs adequately. Financial situation has a great importance in education (T12). "Most of the students in this district work in barber, butcher, or greengrocer shops after school. Some of them take care animals. In other words, these students are economically disadvantaged. Some of them come to school with the same shoes in both summer and winter during the whole year. Their trousers are worn. The fathers of some students have two-wives and the whole family stays in just one room" (T15)

The participants explained the inability to include students from disadvantaged socio-economic status in the education system with such challenges as inequality between public and private schools, exclusion by other students, lack of social activities, families, regional inequalities and inequality in income distribution, lack of job opportunities. The participants' opinions in this context are as following:

"I do not think the students going to private school and those going to public school are equal. I think those who go to private schools are more advantageous in terms of private lessons and social activities. I ask my students what they do at the weekend. The greatest social activity they do is to have a picnic. The number of those who go to cinema or theatre is very few. They are not equal in terms of socialization. (T11)

"In terms of socio-economic status, serious differences can be observed in the same region, province even in the same district. All of these students can benefit from the education system within the scope of compulsory education but, school facilities, teacher qualities may change according to the regions where they live. For example, while the student studying in the city center benefits from all kinds of opportunities, the student who is in the village cannot benefit from many of these opportunities.(T3)"

Regarding the inclusion of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, the participants argued that these students are attempted to be included in the education system through some policies and practices. In fact, it can be inferred that compulsory and free education and supports provided by the ministry such as bussed education, free school meal, free book distribution, conditional educational aid, support courses have contributed to the inclusion of these students in the education system to some extent (Bayrakdar and Karataş 2016; ERI 2016; Nartgün and Dilekçi 2016; Özcan, Balyer and Yıldız 2018). Nevertheless as it was emphasized by the most of the participants, the students from low socio-economic status were more disadvantageous in terms of inclusion in the education system than the others. In parallel to the findings, it was also revealed in various researches such challenges as public/private division, regional differences, differences in income distribution and unemployment, lack of social activities and discrimination towards these students cause inequalities in education system (Ataç 2017; Karaman and Özçalık 2007; Şahin, 2006; Yıldız and Karakaş 2019). In this sense, it can be deduced that socio-economic inequalities also manifest themselves as exclusion from education and being devoid of the opportunity to include in quality education and continue to it.

4. Discussion

Although there have been tremendous improvements in ensuring the access of students into schooling, it is revealed that educational inequalities regarding to gender, socio-economic background, disability, refugee, religious and ethnic backgrounds, etc. continue to exist and several students are excluded from education system due to several reasons all around the world. As a developing country, Turkey has pursued a similar course and significant steps were taken regarding the increasing the attendance rates of students into schooling in the last decade through the policies and practices which were also stated by the participants of this research and these steps brought positive results especially in favor of female students. In fact, the statistics published by MoNE (2022) indicate that the schooling rates of female and male students are close to each other and gender disparities have been reduced to large extent. However, it is important to note that the schooling rates of student do not always reflect the truth exactly (Acedo, et all. 2009) and ensuring the access of female students into schooling alone does not mean inclusiveness. As it is already known, female students have experienced various challenges regarding inclusion in education for ages and have not been included in the educational processes equally compared to their male peers. This can be related to the fact that “the main concern of Turkey in relation to gender equality has been gender parity and to increase the number of girls at secondary and primary schools and to achieve numerical equality in education. In this sense, it can be thought that such issues as ‘educational quality, gendered structures, relations or pedagogies within the school, or of the social relations outside the school which prevent equal participation in social life, girls’ schooling experiences within and outside the schools, gender and social relations within and around the school, the quality of education girls receive” (Cin, 2017: 8-11) have hardly ever been taken into consideration in Turkey. Then it is possible to argue that what is intended with gender inclusion and equality in Turkey is far from the goals of gender inclusion which guarantees equality and justice in all processes of education between male and female students. In fact, the existence of such challenges stated by the participants as child marriage, regional inequalities, low socio-economic status, discriminatory gender norms which still remain valid continue being a drawback to the inclusion and representation of females in the education system may be a solid proof of that situation. Considering the challenges stated by the participants above, it worths noting that socio-economic status is a significant determinant of gender disparity and achievement gap between students of different socio-economic status in Turkey (Bellibaş, 2016) and in order to reduce gender gap, it is necessary to reduce social class gap. In fact it is already known that low socio-economic background and poverty leads to multiple disadvantages (ERI 2016; Mavi Kalem 2019) and children who are excluded from the process are mostly the ones with low socio-economic status. In this regard, it can be argued that individuals’ benefitting from education is based on their socio-economic status in Turkey and students from disadvantaged socio-economic background cannot properly take advantage of even the educational opportunities of compulsory education (Özbaş 2015; Sal 2015). Similarly, while this is the case in Turkey, similar problems are experienced in many developed countries of the world as well. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012), students from low socio-economic background are twice as likely to be low performers and 20% of young adults on average drop out before finalizing upper secondary education. In addition to the impact of socioeconomic

status on the aspect of achievement, the socio—economic condition of the family has a significant effect on social inclusion of the students as well. In that respect, Veland, Midthassel and Idsoe (2009) argue that students from low socio-economic status may have difficulties in establishing relationships with their friends and teachers as a result of such challenges as limited type and amount of social activities they can participate, lack of material resources like books, educational toys and linguistic background, discrimination against students from lower social classes and having less motivation for school. In fact the findings of this research regarding such challenges the students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as inequality between public and private school and regions, exclusion and discrimination towards these students, lack of social activities for socio-economically disadvantaged students indicate this situation clearly.

Considering current policies and practices regarding the inclusion of both female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, it reveals that the participants mostly refer to such short term recipes as fundraising among teachers, charity organizations, local government units, campaign and projects developed by non-governmental organizations, supports provided by the ministry such as bussed education, free school meal, free book distribution, social aid, support courses, wage incentives, etc. Although these policies may have a role in enabling female students and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to include in the system, unfortunately they are far from providing sustainable solutions and focusing on the issues of human rights, social justice and educational equity which are sine qua non of inclusive education. Accordingly, the policies and practices towards inclusive education should prioritize social justice, equity, diversity and address the issue from a macro and holistic perspective rather than a micro perspective reducing inclusion to just achieving parity with quantitative indicators. Education policies should shift towards a qualitative improvement in education system with the aim of increasing inclusion, justice, equity and diversity in all spheres of both educational life and later lives of students and this is only possible with adopting an equity and justice based approach towards education.

The greatest limitation of this study is its limited sample. Thus, it is suggested that the same research is carried out with a larger sample and different research methods in different regions. Also, in order to reflect the status of inclusion in education in Turkey, more comprehensive studies including other disadvantageous groups such as students with different sexual orientations, refugee students, students from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, street children, disabled children, gifted children, etc. may be carried out.

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