A School Choice Experience at the Age of "Parentocracy": Impressions from a Public Primary School in Turkey

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Abstract

This article investigates the school choice practices of middle-class[1] parents. It aims to find out what kind of strategies and practices parents have in the school choice process. For this aim, data were obtained through interviews with parents of students attending a primary school in an affluent area in Ankara. The results of the study show that parents with adequate economic, social and cultural capital are influential in their children's educational processes and develop various strategies for school choice. They strive to choose the best school they think will contribute to their children in gaining a better position in the labour market in the future. It is noteworthy that the most important factor in primary school choice is teacher quality. This is followed by features such as the location of the school, teacher-student relationship, security and the physical facilities in the school. The social capital of parents has an important part in the school choice process and the social networks in which they are involved determine the school choice processes considerably. Since the enrolment of students in primary schools in Turkey is address-based, parents wishing to enrol their children in other schools develop various strategies during the enrolment process, notably "address change".

Keywords: School Choice, Parentocracy, Inequality, Social Capital

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[1]Although defining middle class is quite difficult and controversial, an operational definition can be made with reference to lifestyle, education, occupation, income, culture and consumption habits. In this study, middle class refers to people who are educated, having a profession, having middle income, living in an affluent area and joining cultural activities.

INTRODUCTION

In the labour market, competition has been increasing in accessing jobs that require high-quality features, provide status and yield more income. Parallel to increasing competition, parents who have various opportunities and wish their children to gain a better position in the future tend towards educational institutions that enable access to these positions. There is a competition between students and their families who claim qualified schools in the education market which operates in a similar way to the labour market. This competition has led parents to develop various strategies and to invest in their children to help them enter better educational institutions since the beginning of basic education. Although this process seems to be functioning rationally, school choices are closely related to the social class of the parents. Because, parents' efforts and school choice strategies depend on the amount of economic, cultural and social capital they have.

Brown (1990) argued that, in parallel with the reforms implemented in education in Anglo-Saxon societies, the education of the child was not shaped according to the efforts and abilities of the child, but according to the wishes and wealth of the parents and defined this change as a transition from meritocracy to parentocracy. According to this approach, which assumes that education functioned in accordance with the meritocracy idea in the pre-reform period, parents' resources play active role in determining the quality of education received in the parentocratic period. However, it can be said that social inequalities led to inequalities in access to education in the past and the socio-economic level of the family was decisive for the level and quality of education. Yet, due to the relatively low social demand for jobs requiring qualifications, it was also possible for individuals from different segments of society to access to quality education, which provides access to these positions parallel to the massification of education. Although there were many social inequalities in education, the expansion of education, especially in industrialized countries, which have welfare state policies, has increased the number of individuals from different social classes who could receive quality education (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2000; Schofer and Meyer, 2005). This relative improvement in access to education has led to the development of the idea of meritocracy, which argues that talented individuals from different segments of society can receive qualified education and thus obtain qualified jobs, social status and good income in the labour market. However, inequalities in education continued. Especially in the 1960s and 70s, these inequalities were drawn to attention and it was suggested that meritocracy thesis actually legitimized social inequalities in education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Although there are arguments that meritocracy is still functioning today, educational inequalities have become more visible than in the past. In many countries, there is a rivalry for a limited number of different types and levels of educational institutions that allow the transition to higher education institutions providing access to qualified professions in parallel with the growing demand for these professions. It is suggested that educational inequalities can be reduced by opening schools to competition, increasing the quality of schools through school development activities and enabling parents to access qualified schools (Balcı, 2014; Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2004). These theses are mainly based on the understanding that market forces in education will bring about an increase in quality. It is among the main claims that opening schools to competition and parents' choice between schools will both improve the quality of education and provide equal opportunities for families (Levin, 2002; Smrerkar and Goldring, 1999; Woods, 1993). However, this claim ignores the social origins of the students and hides the role of the economic, social and cultural capital of the parents in the education of the child. This study first discusses Brown's thesis, which is about the transition from meritocracy to parentocracy, and parents' role in the education of the child in the context of social inequalities in education. Then, in the view of these discussions, it attempts to reveal the school choice practices of middle-class families in Turkey with the qualitative research approach.

Inequalities in Education from Meritocracy to Parentocracy

Meritocracy thesis is based on the assumption that all individuals in society have equal opportunities in accessing social resources, and it includes the claim that those who are capable and those who endeavour can benefit from public spending equally. On this axis, education opportunity is offered to everyone, but those with some inborn characteristics such as talent and intelligence and those showing enough effort can take the full advantage of the educational opportunities. Therefore, they can have a better position in terms of social status and income compared to other individuals thanks to the qualified education they receive. Education serves as a tool to distinguish talented individuals in society and to ensure that those who are competent and determined has the highest position (Swingewood, 2000). This makes some people in a privileged position compared to others and creates a functional stratification in society (Turner, 1997).

It is assumed that the backgrounds of the parents, their economic, social and cultural capital do not play an active role in education taken in a social system functioning according to meritocratic principles. Because, in such a process, it is accepted that all sections of the society will have access to education provided by the state and that those who are capable and those who get sufficient efforts will obtain a good social position in parallel to the education they receive. However, meritocracy thesis has been the subject of criticism in many ways, and arguments have been made that education does not operate on the basis of meritocratic principles. An individual's social status and income can be determined by structural dynamics such as economic and social conditions, labour market characteristics, and can also be shaped according to the individual's class, religious and ethnic characteristics. Therefore, besides the ability and effort, many different factors can play a role in determining the education and social status of the individuals. One of the main criticisms of the functioning of the educational process was expressed in the reproduction theories[1]. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), the school privileges the dominant cultural form in society on the basis of social class differentiation and contributes to the reproduction of cultural tendencies in accordance with the cultural capital of the children close to this culture. Therefore, the cultural codes transmitted in the school lead to an increase in the educational achievement of children with sufficient cultural capital. Bernstein (1971) emphasizes that students from different social classes use different speech codes and this use reproduces social inequalities through education. As schools convey middle-class cultural codes, children from middle-to-upper social classes have no difficulty in adapting to detailed speech codes, while children from lower social classes have difficulty adapting to these codes and fail at school. Bowles and Gintis (1976, 102) argue that education plays a role in the reproduction of existing social inequalities and that the meritocracy thesis legitimizes this unequal functioning. Because the education system legitimizes existing inequalities by creating the impression that individuals have access to unequal economic positions through an open, objective and meritocratic mechanism, and strengthens the thesis that economic success depends on skill and ability. Many studies show that despite the prolongation of schooling time for all students, educational inequalities continue to climb upward, and in some countries, the gap between the most advantageous and disadvantaged groups has widened (Duru-Bellat, 2000).

Brown (1990) argues that the third wave has started in the socio-historical development of education because of the reforms implemented in the UK education system in the last quarter of the 20th century. He calls the ideology of this age as parentocracy because of the emphasis on the role of parents in education. According to Brown, in the meritocratic period, the state implemented policies to ensure equality of opportunity in education. The parentocratic period, on the other hand, points to a process when equal opportunity policy in education is abandoned and replaced by school choice freedom and that accelerate policies in this direction (Waldow, 2016). According to Brown (1990), the

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[1] In France, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990), Baudelot and Establet (1971), Bernstein (1971) in the UK, Bowles and Gintis (1976) in the United States, in some of their researches, have reached conclusions that the inequalities in society and existing social relations are reproduced in the family and school, and they are legitimized through education.

inability of the state to provide equal opportunities in education by providing a standard in educational institutions has brought about the parents to be more involved in the education process of their children. Parents' wishes and resources are much more effective in education and the subsequent life of the children than before.

The role of the state in the provision of educational services has started to change globally along with neoliberal policies. Financing for social services such as education and health care previously provided by the state largely has been limited, different financing models in the provision of services has been searched. In addition, a series of transformations have taken place in the educational organization. Instead of traditional administration, new public management has been adopted (Clarke et al., 2000). The main thesis behind this paradigmatic change is that with the new approach, the central power in the field of education will be weakened and market-specific practices will bring about effective and efficient service delivery (Fusarelli and Johnson, 2004). Many changes have been implemented in public schools with structural arrangements that may differ according to countries and local dynamics from the perspective of new public management. Regulations highlighting performance, focusing on decentralization of schools and enabling parents to control more their education processes as a customer have been accelerated (Dempster et al., 2001). In many countries, school choice policy has been strengthened on the grounds that it provides access to qualified education for all social groups in parallel with privatization practices, and parents have been able to choose schools under given conditions. Attractive words such as "choice", "freedom", "competition", "standards" have played important part in establishing the market forces in education (Brown, 2000).

Theoretical Context of School Choice Practices

Parents' school choice practices vary according to their socio-economic levels (Evans, 2014; Lareau and Weininger, 2003; Lareau, 2011). Choosing a school and having this skill are often associated with the middle-class identity (Reay et al, 2013). Because middle-class parents have the necessary economic, cultural and social capital to increase their children's chances of success and to reproduce their class positions (Bourdieu, 2006). It should be emphasized that parents' habitus plays an important part in school choice. As Bourdieu (2006) emphasizes, differentiated habitus gives rise to segregated and divergent practices. In this context, parents with different habitus behave differently in choosing schools. Each parent develops educational strategies in line with its cultural capital to reproduce its current accumulation. In this context, the school operates in accordance with a complex mechanism that plays a role in the distribution and reproduction of cultural capital. The more important the cultural capital of the family and the larger the volume, the more importance it attaches to education and expands its investments (Bourdieu, 2006, 35). In the context of the long-term preparations, parents as the knowing actors implement the strategies they have developed based on the plans they have made for their children's education.

The social capital of the parents is another important determinant in school choice. Coleman (1994) draws attention to the positive relationship between the family background and the education supporting the individual by using the concept of social capital. The social capital of the family is formed in the axis of relations with various groups and communities and this advantage is reflected in children. Fine (2001) states that Coleman's social capital approach is rooted in the rational choice theory, and suggests that his approach revives the individual in rational choice theory. According to Fine, Coleman makes use of an analytically fixed social capital concept in his work in terms of the ability to overcome market imperfections. In Bourdieu's approach, on the other hand, the unit of analysis is not an individual directly. Undoubtedly, the individual is positioned as a social actor in the field. However, in order to understand the strategies and positions of individuals, the knowledge of the field should be used. Therefore, an actor must have a minimum level of capital in order to be involved in the game and to have a say in the field (Wacquant, 2007, p. 63). Actors' participation in the game is directly proportional to the amount of capital they have. The struggle in the field may lead to the reproduction or deterioration of the capital distribution. People enter the struggle for power in areas

with their own game rules with their different capital (Wacquant, 2007). Therefore, the actors act in different ways according to social class characteristics and they are stratified on the axis of their capital. This stratification leads to inequalities in access to educational resources.

Various researches have suggested that school choice is largely dependent on the social class, cultural and social capital of the parents. Researches on school choice in industrialized countries have shown that parents who actively choose schools are well educated and have a higher income than those who do not choose a school (Bosetti, 2000; Hatcher, 1998; Whitty et al., 1998; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Smrekar and Goldring, 1999). However, it cannot be said that these families who can be described as middle class are homogeneous. Stating that the priorities and strategies of parents differ in the school choice, Vincent et al. (2012) classify them into four groups according to these differences. The first group consists of parents who plan for long terms, take private lessons for their children and who can move their house for their child's school when necessary. The other two groups in the middle were labelled as "watchful" and "warrior". These two groups vary in terms of occupation, income, educational qualifications and their class identity. Although they attach importance to success, they are not as stable as the first group. The third group, called warriors, sometimes goes beyond the boundaries of the routine practice of most schools, often in connection with their own children, but also by challenging the school directly on more general issues such as inequality. The last group is pro-active with regard to education and the success of their children, but is less concerned with schooling. Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996), on the other hand, gather the parents who choose school in three groups as ideal types. The first of these types, which includes various social groups, is the disconnected choosers, usually composed of working-class families; the latter is privileged/skilled choosers, almost entirely composed of professionals, middle-class families; the third is semi-skilled choosers with various class backgrounds. The privileged choosers manage the school choice process by investigating different possibilities, exchanging views with teachers and other parents and making plans for the future of their children. Semi-skilled choosers are actively involved in school choice but do not dominate the rules as much as the first group. This group, which has less social capital and therefore cannot get enough information about the functioning of the system, usually gets the information about schools from newspaper news or rumours. Unplanned or disconnected choosers are less interested in the education market, although they are interested in their children's future, and therefore generally prefer the school closest to home (Giddens, 2008, 739). Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) emphasize that school choice is directly and strongly related to social class differences, and that this choice is also a factor that increases class divisions and inequalities. Parents with some qualifications and resources can always operate the system, use the private school option and create conditions for their children to benefit from. In addition, the current school choice system allows privileged choosers to guarantee their reproduction via their cultural, economic and social capital and at the same time brings about social segregation.

Focusing on the decision-making process of parents in school choice, Cucchiara & Horvat (2014) argue that the choice is not only a way of looking for the best school but also a means of building and expressing a particular identity. Hence, parents act politically and symbolically in school choice. Raveaud and Van Zanten (2007), in their study on school choice in the UK and France, reveal that all parents' definitions of good education such as "intellectual development", and "a happy and successful school at the individual level" have common characteristics. On the other hand, in order to minimize the negative effects of choosing a local school, the middle classes are considering using their cultural and social resources. Bussell (1999) emphasizes that there is a consensus among parents that the decision is important in primary school choice, and that the most prominent factors in the decision-making process are the child's happiness and safety. In addition, school location, standards and organizational issues are also important. Çimen (2015), on the other hand, reached the finding that the most important factor in the primary school choice is the qualified teacher and that the selected public school should be like a private school. Some studies show that the variation between socioeconomic groups is quite low in terms of school choice criteria (Coldron and Boulton, 1991). However, middle-class parents have higher expectations than the opportunities offered by the school. Bussell (1999), in her study, states that issues such as class size, teacher-student ratio and disciplinary are expressed only by middle-class parents. Schools try to attract more middle-class parents, and middle-class parents

who know how the system works due to their cultural capital also act earlier than working-class parents (Bussell, 1999).

In the school choice process, information about schools can be distributed in formal and informal forms. Contrary to the official one, the information spreading in networks and local areas through rumours is distributed among different social groups and used in different ways during the school choice process (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Parents respond to rumour based information in three categories; doubt, suspicion, and acceptance, which are not directly related to the social class. Ball and Vincent (1998) argue that those who are sceptical of rumour-based information are either the professional middle class with cultural capital or working-class parents who feel that there is not so much difference between schools to use this information. Those who are indecisive despite using information are defined as privileged/skilled or semi-skilled. The third group, on the other hand, accepts rumour-based information. Other parents' choices are influential in the school choices of this group, which is defined as semi-skilled choosers who make the most of this information. The majority of parents receive information from social networks, school visits and interviews with teachers when deciding on the choice of school (Bosetti, 2004). Social networks, which are highly effective in the circulation of informal knowledge, are mostly composed of educated professionals who are more knowledgeable about the education system.

METHOD

This study is planned to reveal the school choice experiences of middle-class parents whose children attending primary school. Hence, it adopts the case study design, which is one of the qualitative research approaches. Merriam (1998) states that the case study provides in-depth knowledge about the research topic of interest and aims to understand the event in every aspect. Thus, the most prominent feature of the case study is that it allows for in-depth examination by allowing focusing on facts, situations, individuals, groups, and programs (Yin, 2002). The situation to be enlightened by this method can be understood, described and interpreted within its limits, in its original environment.

Participants

The study group consists of parents of a public primary school located in a central location where generally middle-class families live, largely receiving students from outside the region. Among these parents, I determined twenty-four of them by means of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. While convenience sampling gave speed and practicality to the research, snowball sampling provided great convenience in reaching the study group (Creswell, 2007). The group is mainly composed of middle-class professionals (See table 1). School choice is not permitted in Turkey and can only be achieved using various strategies. Thus, middle classes usually apply such strategies. It is also known, however, that parents with good economic conditions or sufficient cultural and social capital tend to choose a better school to send their children, even though they reside in a lower-class neighbourhood.

Data Collection and Analysis

The basic technique used for the collection of qualitative data is the interview. I conducted interviews by using a semi-structured interview form to ensure the active participation of the parents, to give flexibility to the research and in order to get in-depth information. The first part of the form includes questions about demographic information and the second part contains questions about parents' school choice experiences. The questions to be answered in relation to the subject of the research are as follows: What are the socioeconomic characteristics of the parents who make school choice? Which factors influence school preference? How and where do parents get information about schools when choosing a school? What kind of strategies do parents develop to enrol in their chosen school? I analysed the data of the research by descriptive analysis method. Şimşek and Yıldırım (2006) propose to follow four stages in the descriptive analysis process, including creating a thematic framework, processing the data according to it, describing and interpreting the findings. I utilized

research questions and the conceptual framework during the thematic frame-building phase of the analysis. In addition, the data emerging from the analysis of the interview records allowed new themes to be added or removed. Thematic topics can be listed as parents' characteristics, factors affecting school choice, sources of information in school choice and school enrolment strategies.

Validity and Reliability

I have followed various strategies to increase the validity and reliability of the study. In qualitative research, the credibility and transferability of the research are important factors to increase the quality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose strategies such as long-term interaction, diversification, and peer debriefing to achieve credibility. In this study, I attempted long-term interaction with the participants and spent time in the study area to enable observation. Two basic strategies that increase the transferability of the research results can be mentioned (Patton, 2002; Simsek and Yildirim, 2006). One is detailed description and the other is purposive sampling. In this study, I arranged the data under appropriate themes and transferred them directly by quotations in order to provide detailed descriptions. Peer debriefing in qualitative research is an important strategy that increases the reliability of the research (Creswell, 2007). For this reason, I shared data, analysis, and my comments with a colleague from the field and the suggestions were effective in shaping of the study.

FINDINGS

In this section, I have classified the school choice practices of parents who can be defined as middle class, seeking an education that will ensure that their children gain a good job and social position in the future, under four themes. The first theme focuses on the parents' characteristics, the second one includes the factors affecting school choice; the third consists of the information sources in the school choice process, and the last theme deals with the enrolment strategies for the chosen school.

Some notes on parents and the school

Table 1. Parent Characteristics

Participant	Edu. Level of Part.	Participant Profession	Education Level of the Partner	Profession of the Partner	Income of the Family (TL/Month)	Number of Children
P1	Master's	House-wife	PhD.	Chief of police	7.500	1
P2	High school	House-wife	Bachelor's	Tourism	10.000	3
P3	Master's	Civil servant	Master's	Civil servant	7.000	2
P4	Bachelor's	Civil servant	Bachelor's	Manager	8.500	1
P5	High school	Store manager	High school	Butcher	8.000	1
P6	Bachelor's	Financial advisor	High school	Notary's clerk	10.000	2
P7	Master's	Academic	Bachelor's	Self-employment	8.500	1
P8	Master's	Lawyer	Master's	Lawyer	15.000	2
P9	Bachelor's	Lawyer	Bachelor's	Civil servant	9.000	1
P10	Bachelor's	Civil servant	High school	Driver	7.000	2
P11	Bachelor's	Not working	Bachelor's	Not working	10.000	2
P12	Master's	Art director	Bachelor's	Agency owner	12.000	1
P13	Bachelor's	Insurer	Bachelor's	Insurer	9.000	1
P14	Bachelor's	House-wife	Bachelor's	Engineer	9.000	1
P15	Secondary school	House-wife	Secondary school	Pastry cook	4.000	2
P16	Bachelor's	Engineer	Bachelor's	Engineer	13.000	2
P17	Bachelor's	Broadcaster	Bachelor's	Broadcaster	12.000	2
P18	High school	House-wife	Bachelor's	Educationist	6.500	1
P19	Bachelor's	Teacher	PhD.	Academic	9.500	1
P20	Bachelor's	House-wife	Bachelor's	Self-employment	13.000	1
P21	Bachelor's	Teacher	Bachelor's	Doctor	11.500	1
P22	Bachelor's	Civil servant	Bachelor's	Engineer	10.000	2
P23	High school	Civil servant	Bachelor's	Civil servant	8.500	2
P24	Bachelor's	Civil servant	Master's	Self-employment	9.000	1

When the profile of the parents is examined, it is seen that almost all of them have a bachelor's degree and they belong to professional groups called white collars such as engineers, designers, journalists, insurers, and teachers. These parents, who usually have one or two children, reside close to the school in terms of transportation, but are largely not in the school enrolment area. Parents' narratives about their living conditions are similar. P21, for example, expressed their life as follows:

We have a house. Do not have a lot of financial trouble. My partner and I work. That is why we usually rush on weekdays. In the evenings, we try to spend as much time as possible with the whole family. We are a family that cares about education. (...) Ali goes to various courses at the weekends. We usually take care of him. Sending him to sports classes. He also takes music lessons once a week. We try to go to the cinema or the theatre with the whole family when we find a chance (P21).

Similarly, P19 pointed out that they did not have any financial difficulties, but they were trying to survive as salaried people. Saying, "I didn't have these opportunities when I was a child", P19, indicated that it is possible for her child to be educated in better conditions.

In fact, one of the main reasons why we have one child is to give her the best opportunities. I continued my education in difficult conditions and became a teacher. Of course, teaching is not bad, but I could have a better position. (...) We could have preferred a private school by forcing ourselves a bit more for our daughter, but I think public school is better in primary school. There are experienced teachers. (...) We are doing some things for the cultural development of her. At the weekends, she attends an English course, as well as takes tennis lessons. (P19)

As can be seen from Table 1, it is noteworthy that some of the participants who are mostly women do not work even though they have high levels of education. When I asked them why they did not have a job, they stated that this was a conscious choice.

We talked a lot with my partner and reached a decision. I had two choices: Either I would do my job and I would not be able to give enough care to Enes and his education or I would give all my energy to my son. I preferred the second one and now I spend a great deal of time for Enes. (P1)

Actually, I cannot say I am not working. I go to school every day. In the morning, we leave home with Naz. After leaving her, we sit in a café near the school with other parents. (...) We usually talk about school-related issues about our children. Sometimes we criticize teachers. We talk about the things we do about our kids. This is also very instructive. I am interested in feeding my daughter when it's noon. If she has a problem at school, I'm interested in with the issue, etc. (P11)

Similarly, it is possible to talk about the volunteers working in the school, instead of sitting in a café every day.

Burak and I go to school every day. I leave Burak to school and I like to help with schoolwork. At first, I was not doing anything for school. However, I was helping with Burak's class teacher. One day, the principal asked me if I could help with photocopying. There was a photocopier at the school, but there was no one to make copies. From that day on, I started working in the library. I am not paid for it, it's a voluntary work. (P2)

I am a "class mother". I am responsible for organizing class activities, raising money and organizing all kinds of activities. At first, I accepted this job to take care of my daughter. So I could be closer and help her when she needed me. Then I liked to care for kids. I am like a teacher's assistant. She tells me when she needs something, and I try to do it. Of course, I should be at school every day. (P18)

Some parents who are active in the school and who come to school every day as part of the school work in school-parent association. The head of the school-parent association and his assistants carry out some school works such as financial affairs, the relationships between school and parents, the needs of the teachers, various management roles. In all these processes, active members of the school-parent association develop close relations with the school administration and teachers.

Factors Affecting School Choice

Table 2. Prominent Features in School Choice

Features	Frequency (f)
School location	15
School success	18
Experienced teachers	23
Close to home	14
Having a rooted history	3
Close to the workplace	12
Discipline	8
Profile of the parents	9
Security	11
Physical facilities in the school	10
Good school administrators	2
Class size	5
Sport activities	2
Teacher-student relationship	13
Like a private school	4

Many factors play a role in the school choice process of the parents. As can be seen from Table 2, the main characteristics highlighted by parents are related to school success. Particular emphasis has been placed on the teacher's being qualified and experienced. Almost all of the parents attending the interviews pointed out that the main factor in choosing the school was teacher quality.

> *The most important reason for choosing this school is that the teachers are experienced and successful. The more experienced the teacher is, the higher he has knowledge and experience. (P1)*

> *I received very positive information about teachers. Many people talked about how good the teachers are. I came and saw them, all experienced teachers. That is why we decided to choose this school. (P14)*

More emphasis on teacher quality compared to other factors may be related to conducting the research in a primary school. This is because primary school teacher plays an important role in the future education of the child and is effective in determining the other schools he/she will go. Stating that he preferred the school because of the classroom teacher and that he had donated a significant amount to the school in order to choose that teacher, P20 described his child's teacher as follows:

> *Our teacher is one of the most popular teachers in the school. Many parents coming to this school want to give their children to this teacher. How is it going to be? The school management says, "If you want to choose this teacher, you have to donate to the school". A very dedicated and very experienced teacher. She cares for all the kids without getting tired. We are very happy with our teacher. (P20)*

Another prominent factor that has been mentioned most is school success, which is also related to the quality of teachers. In Turkey, the evaluation of school success is usually associated with the performance of the school in centralized examinations. There is currently no central examination after primary school. However, the previous achievements of the school are known in the vicinity and expressed by parents.

School success is very important! Ultimately, this is Turkey; children can come to a place with exams. The school has a very good image. Especially parents whose children have graduated from this school are telling very nice things. Students have always gone to good schools after graduation. (P10)

In addition to mentioning the qualifications and experiences of teachers in the school, another factor expressed is the quality of the relationship between teachers and students. In a sense, these relations, which shape the culture and atmosphere in the school, play an important role in the formation of the school image. The fact that school graduates often visit their teachers shows the quality of this relationship and at the same time allows their success to be known. Another reason stated mostly for the school choice is the location of the school. This is sometimes expressed as being close to home or work, while sometimes it is pointed out that the school has a central location.

Our house is normally close to the school, but not in the area where the school receives students. The school we have to send our child is different. If we compare the schools, of course, this school is of better quality and not far from home, so we preferred it. (P17)

My wife and I both work. Our workplaces and home are close to the school. If anything happens, you have access to school immediately. Otherwise, our mind would always be in the child. (P13)

Among the factors influencing the choice of school, the physical facilities of the school were frequently mentioned. Although the school did not provide much space and buildings at first glance, it was often stated that the buildings were well cared for, a new additional building was built and care was taken for cleaning. Some parents even indicated that they chose the school because it was like a private school.

The school is very regular. What I mean by this is that the buildings of the school are beautiful, the paint is new and the garden is well maintained. School layout is immediately noticeable when you look at it. (...) There is no gym, but there is an area inside the school that can be used as a hall. (P23)

Before enrolment, I came to the school with my partner and we visited the classes. The organization was very nice. The desks, tables, the children's cabinets were all decent. The walls were clean and painted. It attracts the attention of man. (P3)

Donations made by previous or current parents to the school have an important role in the formation of physical conditions in the school. After the school starts, parents have a meeting at the request of the class teacher or spontaneously; they renew classrooms, modify materials or revise to provide a better educational environment.

After enrolling in school, our teacher said that the tables and desks in the classroom should be overhauled. She had a meeting at the beginning of the year, classroom mother was determined. An immediate calculation was made, and the amount per person was determined. The tables and desks of the class, the floor tiles and the curtains were renewed in a short time. (P22)

Parents also expressed the importance of school safety and discipline in school selection. Today, the increasing number of violence in schools and the insecurity of the school environment make the parents more sensitive. For this reason, many schools have an agreement with security firms or, if not possible, try to assign existing staff to this end.

Safety is the most important thing we care about. There are some schools where it is not clear who goes. We searched this out before the enrolment. They said that this school had an agreement with a security firm. (...) We are comfortable while our son is in school. (P7)

> *There are addicts and glue sniffers around the schools. God bless children, anything can happen at any moment. However, this school is very good in this respect. The teachers observe the students carefully and see them at break times. Security is also good. (P15)*

One of the issues that the parents emphasized in the interviews was the parent profile of the school. Parents with similar socio-economic characteristics prefer the schools where there are parents with similar characteristics. One of the main reasons for this is to improve the physical facilities in the school together so that their children can have an education in better conditions.

> *You want the class renewed, someone else might not. You want children to sit on better benches, breathe in clean places, and use the smart board. Someone may not accept them. Therefore, it is much better for children if parents agree (P17).*

> *Everyone needs to attend to do something for school and class. I give money, another one does not give anything. Then it is hard to get anything done. Our class is very good in this respect (P8).*

Of course, there is a belief that the quality of education will be better at a school with high socioeconomic status. Because, especially in the middle classes, parents with higher education place more emphasis on education and training and thus can play a role in the implementation of a range of activities, from improving physical conditions at school to planning social activities. This is evident in the words of P15, whose economic conditions are not as good as the others.

> *When it was time for the enrolment, we thought about where to register our daughter. Because the enrolments were address-based, there was not much choice. However, the success of the school we had to attend was not very high, and there was not a lot of students going to that school from the vicinity. In addition, what I know is that education is not given much importance in the neighbourhood. We decided that we should send her to a better school in an affluent area. (P15)*

In addition to these factors, it can be said that other factors playing a role in school choice are related to the history of the school, classroom size, and sports activities.

Information sources in school choice

The cultural capital of the parents is an important factor in getting out of the school district for a better school. Because, as Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) described, in order to be a privileged chooser it is necessary to know that there is such a situation and make an effort in this direction. As Bourdieu (2006) points out, parents with sufficient cultural capital read the game and turn to educational options that will make their children privileged in the education market. Thus, they develop mechanisms to reproduce their own class positions. Parents who are aware of the inequalities between schools and who can use their capital for education either look for the schools that can offer better opportunities or they create better opportunities for their children's education at the current school.

Table 3. Information Sources in the School Choice Process

Knowledge Sources	Frequency (f)
Parents	18
Friends	14
Internet	3
School management	3
Acquaintances	12
District	10
Nursery school	8
Teachers of the school	7
School visits	11
Neighbourhood	5

Parents whose children are of school age are involved in a research process as knowing agents. As can be seen in Table 3, the main source of information in school choice is the parents of other students.

When choosing the school, I paid attention to the success of the school and the percentage of success. I especially received information from the parents of students in this school. Our home is not far from school; we searched around, and reached just like that. (P1)

We started searching before the enrolment time. We investigated the surrounding schools. We consulted with the neighbours as we lived in a close neighbourhood. (...)The recommendations of the friends sending their children to this school, their positive thoughts about the school, what they said about the teachers were effective in our choice. (P3)

Another way of getting information about the school is to gather information from the parents of upper-class students who are still attending school. For this purpose, places such as cafes and teahouses, where parents are present, are used. Because some of the primary school parents spend a lot of time in the surrounding of the school. This period is transformed into a process of exchanging information about the educational process, as well as the preparation stage for determining the next educational level of the child.

While chatting with my friends about school choice, someone told me to go to the cafes around the schools. Because parents usually wait for their children in these cafes. That's what I did. I got a lot of information about schools and teachers. (P20)

Social networks around the school, which have evolved over time, have an important role in the school choice process and then create opportunities for parents to act together and exchange information in organizing the school process. In addition to the parents having students in the school, the second source of information that guides the parents in the choice process is the friends and acquaintances defined as the environment. Sometimes the neighbours give information about the school and sometimes the colleagues can guide the parents.

Since we have been living in (...) district for many years, we have many friends there. Of course, when the children come to the school age, the topic of the chats is about their schools. We have always heard positive things about both the school and the staff, so we preferred. (P9)

The place I work is close to the school. My colleagues who had information about the school before helped me. What they said made me think positively about the school. I also contacted with the school administration and got information about it. (P6)

In the school choice process, the most basic information sources are composed of parents whose children had education at that school before, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, and relatives. Therefore, the social capital of the family plays an important part in determining the school where the child will go.

School administrators and teachers who we can define as school staff can be the main source of information for parents. While teachers sometimes can provide guidance to the parents from neighbourhood, sometimes give parents with information during school visits.

One of the teachers was a close neighbour. He said that he would help us enrol at this school. According to him, the school was very good. Thus, we enrolled in this school with his help. (P15)

At first, I looked at the success of the school. I researched the teachers, the area and the principal. I consulted the people around me. Then we visited the school with my wife. We

241

had a meeting with the headmaster. We also had the opportunity to meet some teachers. That is how we decided. (P8)

Some parents, in the kindergarten years, begin to plan where their child's school will be. Aware of the importance of pre-school education in the education process, parents look for a kindergarten suitable for the child. In fact, the kindergarten is able to provide a source of information for the child's next level of education. For example, P13 stated that they had been chatting with other parents about the primary school where they could send their children and that he preferred this school on a recommendation.

We used to talk with parents about which school we were going to send the children from time to time. However, I got the real information from nursery school employees. The nursery is not far from this school. We had an idea what the school was, including teachers. (P13)

I heard from a parent in the nursery school that the school staff is very good. I also researched from National Education. I asked other friends who knew about the school. Then we decided. (P17)

An important detail to note here is that some private kindergartens also function as private tutoring centres. Students from surrounding schools go to these centres and some teachers of these schools are able to work in these centres although it is prohibited. Therefore, nursery or centre employees know the teachers of the surrounding schools, so that a commercial relationship can develop between kindergartens and schools. Therefore, because of their relationship with schools, these kindergartens in a sense constitute the student potential of the primary education classes of the schools.

In the school choice process, some schools become popular thanks to circulating information among the parents having similar concerns in a short time. Parents having similar experiences and are involved in the game by following similar paths gather in similar schools, so the capacity of the schools with the students they receive from outside of their surroundings increases gradually and gets crowded. In fact, overcrowded classrooms are one of the major complaint issues about the preferred schools. At that time, parents coming together through the networks, start to search for non-crowded schools. Parents who act together and agree to improve the physical conditions of the school or to provide additional activities to the existing ones play an active role in changing school conditions.

School enrolment strategies

Enrolment in primary schools in Turkey is done via the e-school system on the basis of address information in the national address database established by the provisions of the Population Services Law. For this reason, parents who choose schools outside of the school's enrolment area follow various strategies in order to enrol their children in those schools. It is possible to classify these strategies under three main headings. The first is to change the address by receiving an official letter from the neighbourhood unit indicating that the child's residence is in the school enrolment area.

We thought about how to enrol after we set the school. There was not much choice anyway. We were going to move in there or make it look like we were residing there. That is the way our neighbour enrolled his child in a school last year. I asked them how they did. They went to the mukhtar of that neighbourhood and they paid some money. He showed as if they were sitting there for a short time. We went to the mukhtar, too. We asked, and he said he could do. We also paid an amount. We changed the address on paper. Otherwise, it is very difficult to enrol. (P4)

There was also a parent stating that he made the address change through an acquaintance working in the registry office, but another way of appearing in the school district is to be a guest next

242

to a family already living there. Thus, the child may appear to live in that region until the school enrolment.

> *We have a friend residing in the school enrolment area. She lives alone. I asked her if we could change the address as if we were guests. The child had to be done early to appear in that area during the registration period. We went to the registry office together. My daughter and I registered as a guest at my friend's house by deleting our registration from our own address. This has some drawbacks. They could have come to control, but that did not happen. After school enrolment, we went back to our own address (P6).*

Some parents who do not proceed in this way may temporarily rent a house in the school area. The rental of the house until the enrolment period ends allows the child to be enrolled in the school according to the address-based enrolment system. In addition to the rental option, there were parents stating that they purchased houses to enrol in their targeted schools. This orientation, which is part of longer-term planning, was expressed by P16 as follows:

> *After we decided to move to Ankara, we thought a lot. Because Emre's school enrolment was approaching. At that moment, we started looking for a school. After looking for a large number of schools, we decided on this school. So first, we found the school, and then we bought the house (P16).*

Following these strategies, the parents who cannot enrol in the schools they want do not give up immediately. First, the enrolment of the child is made to the school that is in the region where the parents reside according to the address-based enrolment system. However, after this registration, parents try to transfer their children to the school they are targeting.

> *We could not enrol Zeynep in this school, and started school in the neighbourhood, but we followed this. Because I did not want her to go to that school. The ambiance was not very good. We have decided to transfer, but either home or work will be in the school district. (...) There was a small restaurant in the region. We talked to them, agreed. They made me look like I have been working for a while. Then we were able to transfer the child (P14).*

The close proximity of the workplaces of the mother or father to the school creates the possibility of enrolling in the targeted school. However, this process is not as easy as the one based on home addresses. The speeches of a teacher struggling to enroll her child in the school where she works sum up the situation.

> *Since I was a teacher of this school, I thought we could easily enrol. I have a friend who enrolled her child in this school last year. When I talked to her, I realized there might be some problems. Anyway, I talked to the principal; "What about Reyhan's enrolment?" The principal told me not to worry. Then, it was time to enrol, lists occurred or something like that but Reyhan's name was absent. They said that the excuse enrolments would be later. I was shocked. I had a friend residing in this region. We were registered immediately next to her as a guest. Anyway, we finally solved the enrolment problem. (P21)*

Depending on the educational policies implemented in Turkey school choice is not allowed in primary and secondary levels. However, parents who want to choose a school do so using various strategies indirectly. Therefore, it is possible to talk about school choice practices even if it is not official. These practices are largely based on the amount of capital owned by parents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Parallel to the commercialization of education, while the responsibility and role of parents increase in the education process, the belief that the child cannot receive qualified education develops if the parents do not intervene. In the development of this ideology called parentocracy, reducing the

educational expenditures of the state with neo-liberal policies, increasing the role of standardized tests in the functioning of education, and expanding the market in education are important factors. As the role of the state in raising the quality of education decreases, parents try to fulfil this role.

Parents who want their children to be in a good position and status in line with the increasing competition in the labour market mobilize their economic, cultural and social capital to make their wishes come true. Therefore, the social class of parents is the main determining factor in the school choice. While it is not possible to choose a school for parents with insufficient capital, as shown in this study, middle-class parents develop various strategies to reproduce their class positions and ensure that their children are at least in the same class position. Choosing a school is one of these strategies. They associate providing their children with a privileged position with the educational process they think plays an important role in achieving this position. Aware of the increasing risks in the labour market and therefore in the education market, parents want to plan every stage of their children's educational process. School choice is the first and most important stage of planning. Because the chosen school plays an active role in determining the child's educational route. Teacher qualification, school location, quality of education, class size, activities and safety are important factors in primary school choice. The characteristics of the teacher, who play an important role in educational activities, are more prominent than other factors and are a determining factor in primary school choice. Çimen (2015) also found that primary school teacher qualification was an important factor in the school choice process. The fact that the characteristics of the primary school teacher are the main determining factor is related to the idea that these characteristics will determine the next educational route of the child. The cultural capital of the parents is an important factor in tending out of the school region. Because, as Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) classify, it is necessary to know that such a situation exists and efforts should be made to make a privileged choice. As Bourdieu (2006) points out, parents with sufficient cultural capital read the game and turn to educational options that make their children privileged in the education market. Thus, they develop mechanisms to reproduce their own class positions. Therefore, parents who are aware of the inequalities between schools and who can use their capital in this direction tend to schools that will provide better facilities or where they can create better opportunities for their children's education.

Parents who seek schools receive information from various sources. At the top of these resources, parents who experience this process take the first place. Sources of information sometimes consist of neighbours and sometimes parents with children at school. Therefore, the social capital of the parents has an important role in this process and the social networks in which they are involved guide them. Because, as Wacquant (2007) points out, an actor must have a minimum level of capital to be involved in the game and to have a voice on the field. Networks within and around the school not only determine the individual movements of parents, but also enable them to develop a collective movement. Parents with similar socioeconomic characteristics are gathered in similar schools so that they can build their school environment more comfortably. In addition, a popular school can be preferred too much. Parents with similar conditions then move together and look for alternatives. However, competition, on the other hand, sometimes provides a basis for parental practices that will hide information from others or not disseminate information about schools.

Since the enrolment for primary and secondary schools in Turkey is made address-based, parents who wish to choose a school outside the school region develop various strategies. The first of these strategies is that they appear to be registered at an address in the area temporarily where the school accepts students. This is sometimes possible as a guest to a friend residing in the school district, sometimes with the help of the district headman. Another strategy is to rent a house in the school region during the enrolment period. In addition, some parents can plan for longer and buy a house in the area. The fact that parents' workplace is in the school region allows the child to enrol in that school. Therefore, as an enrolment strategy, some parents appear to work temporarily in a workplace or they start a business in the region.

School choice is presented as a solution to social inequalities in education and is recommended to be implemented in the education system based on the assumption that everyone can

make rational choices. Various studies have shown that school choice is directly related to the economic, cultural and social capital of the parent. However, this study demonstrates how middle classes choose schools even though they are not allowed, and their school choice practices. While school choice causes social segregation between schools, some schools provide an increase in resources and differentiate their conditions from others. Thus, inequalities in education are reproduced. If it is desired to prevent parents from choosing schools using various strategies, disadvantaged schools should be supported to be qualified like advantageous schools.

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