

Subjects of Education Against School, Family and Tribe

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to analyze the subject of students at school. Qualitative research method was used in this paper. A study group of 30 students was selected from a school in Altındağ District of Ankara. An interview form was developed as a data collection instrument. The data was analyzed thematically by hermeneutic reading. The findings of the paper indicate that students do not have an input, on the contrary, they are subjects in the educational process. The study was carried out within the framework of a new approach, which address students as subjects of education in contrary to the approach, which deals with students as objects of the education process. Therefore, the present paper is thought to be significant, as it attempts to indicate the potentiality of the new approach in describing educational reality.

INTRODUCTION

The system approach (Balci 2014) for many years has been the dominant approach in the educational management field. It metaphorically describes the school as a factory. It includes three elements, that is, input, process and output. Therefore, managers, teachers, staff, parents and students are seen as instruments in the systems approach. Students are defined as passive beings who can be handled in the educational process. In fact, research has shown that students are not considered subjects in the educational sciences. But there are a lot of researches in which students are seen as inputs.

Özsoy (2004: 305) points out that students make sense only as statistical figures in Turkey. As such, they are dealt with as a homogeneous, collective community rather than subjects in statistical contexts. According to Özsoy, of two approaches regarding students and being students, “objectivist approach” discusses students and being a student as a status and as a position occupied in pedagogical relationship.

On the contrary, “subjectivist or voluntaristic approach” handles students predominantly as a subject with their conscience, struggles and acts. In the objectivist approach, a student is considered as a conception, while subjectivist approach deals with a student as a concrete phenomenon (Özsoy 2004: 310). Özsoy suggests that one is not to choose one of these approaches, instead, both approaches can be applied in a complementary way. The reason is that one of the approaches is focused on anatomy of students as a community, while the other is about the physiology of it. Bearing in mind Özsoy’s argument, it would be sensible to examine students by departing from the idea of student as a subject and their conscience, struggles and actions in “a position occupied within a pedagogical relationship”. To put it in another way, what is appropriate is to take students as subjects within the context of their experience of education, which is a subjectivity process, pointing to their demographic facts such as gender, settlement, age, family income, and educational status and their psychological “status and position”.

Most studies in educational research are carried out with the philosophy that education is merely a means to something else. As for students, naturally, they are considered as objects that are shaped for achieving the targets to which the school is dedicated to. This approach misses individual, social and cultural facts regarding students themselves. Despite being situated in the centre of education and instruction, the concept of student is appointed as an object in this

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process, which seems not to help portray the truth of overall education and instruction process. The present study suggests the reading of education and instruction processes with a different approach by placing the student in the position of subject in literature about educational sciences. Therefore, it can point to variable meanings of educational experiences by subjectifying the student, such as perceiving them as entities having specific aims regarding school and belonging to a different social group. With this aim in mind, Posha students (they are written as *the students* in the paper), who belong to one of the specific communities within the Turkish society, are examined in this study.

The Tribe (they are called *tribe*, so in the paper they are written as *The Tribe*), is a seminomadic community who makes their living by making and selling sieves. Some researchers define (Bozkurt 2004; Sarkis 2000) The Tribe as Gypsy. However, the group regards being defined as “Gypsies” insulting. Therefore, they prefer the word “Posha”. Because they are a tribe, they have a blood relation. Tribes are characterized by internal solidarity and a sort of “aggression” becoming functional in case of external attacks as ibn Haldun (2002) suggests, because the tribe is small and it is a closed group, they are prone to a form of “aggression”.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to analyze strategies of subjectness applied by students at school while they lead a life under the control of their families and The Tribe. The study was carried out to find out what strategies the students take to start their lives against family, school and The Tribe.

For this purpose, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the meaning and importance of school?
2. What are the benefits of school?
3. What is the relations with friends?
4. What is the relation to knowledge?

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The qualitative methodology was selected in this study taking into consideration the pur-

pose of determining subjectness strategies of the students. This study was planned within the approach, which was based on subjectification of the student (Ünal and Özsoy 2010: 181) instead of approaching the student as an object. In this approach, the concept of “field” is of key importance. Researchers such as Kurt Lewin, Norbert Elias, Sapir and Jakobson, Dumêzil and Lêvi Strauss used the concept of field in their analysis in social studies. Today, the concept of field is used in a range of studies, mainly regarding education, drama and gender (Bourdieu 2006; McNay Lois 1999; Altun 2007). The concept of field refers to placing of subjects in multidimensional positions and different capitals into these positions and realizing their specific achievements (Bourdieu 2006). In essence, Bourdieu suggests that first of all, actors in a field must be determined for study of the field. Then, connections must be drawn between the positions of subjects and institutions in that field. Lastly, subjects’ capacity of realizing themselves in the field must be investigated.

Research Design

The research design was developed qualitatively since it allows the subjectification of individuals in the research process (Kümbetoglu 2005). In a case study, factors related to the case are investigated with a holistic approach and there is a focus on how they affect the relevant conditions and how they are affected by the relevant conditions (Yildirim and Simsek 2008: 77). In the paper, because the subjectivity of the students is examined in the context of their conditions in which they live, a case study is important for the possibility of analysis.

Study Group

The study group was determined using the purposive sampling technique (Balci 2015). The study group consisted of 30 students selected from the second grade in a school in Altındağ District of Ankara where the students predominantly attended during the 2012-2013 academic period. Eight of them are girls and twenty-two are boys. Study participants were coded on the basis of gender, name and age variables. To imply whether the interviewee is a male (M) or female (F), different names were used for girls and boys. Also, they were coded by noting their ages

next to the names. For example, Ismet 15 was referred to as MI15.

Data Collection Instrument and Analysis

In the paper, an interview form was developed for data collection based on the relevant literature. Necessary corrections in the interview form were made by experts. The form included two types of questions. A section of the interview addresses such information as personal information, family and The Tribe. The other group of questions was intended to collect knowledge about students' relations to school, teachers, friends and knowledge. During analysis of the data, the interviewees' responses to the same questions were collated with respect to the context. Obtained texts were reread in order to reach coherence between questions and related concepts. The themes irrelevant to the text were omitted. In this way, thematic integrity was ensured in the text and the parts relevant to the same theme were interpreted in integrity. By this way, the students applied the "subject" strategies in order to keep and reconstruct their identity against the school's constriction of official identity. These subject strategies were tried to be determined. In which context, the states of subjectivation were realized and how subjectivation was established in the position and the relations with other subjects were tried to be analyzed in produced relation.

Reliability and Validity

To prove the reliability and validity of the paper, expert examination, purposive sampling, dependability and conformability techniques (Yildirim and Simsek 2008: 265) were used. The paper was examined by an educational science expert. Expert views have supported the views of the researchers. The statements of the interviewed students resonates the findings. Purposive sampling technique was used to choose the study group in relation to the aims and sub-aims of the paper. While developing the theme of the study, researchers took into account internal dependability.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained from the interviews were arranged in a thematic logic. At the end of the analysis, five main themes were identified,

namely, *Meaning and Importance of School, One Costs As Much As Her/His Capital, Benefits of Another World: School, and Friendship, and Relation to Knowledge.*

Meaning and Importance of School

The school the students attended is regarded one of the worst educational institutions in Ankara because it is ranked at the bottom by the central examinations held in Turkey. Still, a school means a lot to students. Bearing in mind that The Tribe live in isolation in Ankara, their positive perception regarding school can be explained as they feel a sense of belonging to the school where they also get some form of help. This paper discusses The Tribe who live near the school who are against schooling due to traditional and religious prejudices. Thus, families who send their children to school and those students themselves continue schooling by fighting The Tribe predominantly as a closed group. This preference can be said to be an informed action.

The students' views about school are concentrated on its function for "providing an occupation" except for MI15, who says "school can bring a better life". Most of the students consider being "a policeman, teacher (or other profession) as a profession to earn one's money". For example, FK12 recognizes school as a "home for education" and believes that the school will help her continue a good high school (education) and "acquire a profession". Further, FF15 put his aspiration in a more concrete way by mentioning the professions to be acquired thanks to school, that is, having a profession in the form of "a policeman or a teacher". Another participant MM13, who worked at a hairdresser's for 1.5 years, says "education gives a good social status." He explained that he was appreciated at the hairdresser's because he is a student. Thus, he wants to be a "hairdresser", a profession which he achieved and enjoys performing.

As for the female students, they mostly mentioned their intention to acquire a profession which helps them stand on their own feet. FG15 states this intention as "To acquire a good profession. To earn my own money myself. To work." As understood from the expression above, she needs a profession to help her make her own living, on the contrary to most of the The Tribe' girls who are not skilled. Similarly, FN14 wants a profession "for a bright future". In addi-

tion, FN12 referred to the traditional function of school in Turkey as “having education to be a decent person”. Moreover, FF13 seems to have total belief that school “can take one to a better place, as long as one studies hard”.

Some of the students realizing the meaning and importance of schools state that better results can be accomplished in a better school. For instance, FA12 says the school “enriched her culture a lot, expanded her knowledge and taught her much about life”. She also thinks school is a place “that provides a profession and helps one earn her living”. She further explains her goal by saying, “Afterwards, I want to study in Science High School. I haven’t opted for an occupation yet but my family wants me to become a doctor.” She added, “In a better school. Some things are missing in this school. It could have been better than the other schools. Being here hasn’t changed my goal. I am focused on my goal. This school is so bad in intangible aspects. There is disrespect for teachers.”

It can be inferred from statements above that those students also instrumentalize school because in traditional terms, school also comprises a value called “to be a decent person”. FF13 not only recalls this aspect but also attaches importance to gainings such as occupational-social status and other objectives in relation with money. The professions named by the students such as a policeman and teacher also imply at a certain extent that they are apt to detach themselves from the tribe. Economic skills to be gained in school can be said to indicate their chance of going out of the economic order within the tribe.

One Costs as Much as Her/His Capital

There is an emphasis on the relationship between benefits of education and social and cultural capital in the literature (Bourdieu 2006). It is seen in the present study that the students’ relation to school is also concerned with their capital. Those having a richer social and cultural capital leave school with more benefits and they are able to better express their outcomes. Thus, they identify potential future gainings from school more satisfactorily and set their goals to this end. Concerning level of education, it was seen that families of some students have educational backgrounds lower than elementary level. Though most of the students’ parents were graduates of high school, those who dropped out at elementary or secondary level were not few. It was seen that students’ relation to school is affected by

their parents’ education level because they witness that their families sustain the traditional, The Tribe way of life. In other words, there are no family members or elders who could change her/his way through education/school. For example, FN14 has both parents’ graduates of elementary school, but there are no examples available in her family who had an occupation by studying. Only one of her uncle’s daughters studied until the end of high school. Her father maintains his family by selling figs and garlic as most of the The Tribe’s members do. FK12 poses another example. Father of FK12 is a graduate of secondary school, while her mother has never attended school. None of her close relatives such as uncle or aunt had education beyond the basic level. This is also true for FF13, MA13 and MÝ15. In fact, these examples can be used to make inferences about the average duration of education among The Tribe.

Nevertheless, exceptional cases were found. Some of the students have relatives who studied beyond secondary school or high school. As an example, MF15’s father is a graduate of elementary school and sells garlic, his mother is a housewife, but his cousin “is studying to be a policeman”. Secondly, MG15 has a similar family profile, but his uncle went to culinary school and one of her cousins is a kindergarten teacher. Still, it can hardly be thought to imply a serious tendency to education in those families. Rather, they seem to be results of individual efforts.

One important finding regarding participants is that the students with a non-Tribe mother are in a more advantaged status than the others. Among The Tribe, boys start the same marginal occupations as their fathers as soon as they finish elementary school. However, MM13’s parents expect him to study further in spite of being uneducated and poor like most of the The Tribe’s members. The only thing that distinguishes this family is the fact that the mother does not come from the The Tribe. This is even more visible in cases of FA12 and FÇ15. Both of these school-girls have non-Tribe mothers. Besides, some of their aunts and uncles studied higher education and have qualified jobs such as kindergarten teacher, nurse, sergeant, computer engineer, policeman and commissar.

Benefits of Another World: School

Due to the fact that girls assign a different meaning to school, it can be suggested that they are aware of an important opportunity also bear-

ing in mind the social circumstances surrounding them and their destiny heavily determined by The Tribe. Thinking that most girls have to get engaged as early as elementary school years, their attitude towards schooling can be explained as a strategy developed against family and Tribe. For example, FG15 says she learnt a lot at school and her aim is to acquire “a good profession” and “to earn her own money herself”. She says that she wants to make her life by studying, though her family does not agree. Also, she adds that she could be more successful if she were in a better school. It is understood from FG15’s statements that The Tribe girls’ conflict with their families is not restricted to school. Rather, their attitude becomes concrete in relation with the matter of schooling. What’s more, those school-girls believe in existence of another world than the one offered by The Tribe and they see that the school embodies the potential for this aim.

In this regard, the case of FÇ15 seems more concrete. FÇ15 wants to study to “achieve her life” as she is not interested in “being like the elder sister and brother who did not study”. Moreover, she could get the “family’s permission” necessary to do so. FÇ15 explains it by saying, “The school helps my parents trust me. As they see I’m successful, they are changing their mind to send me to school further.” Like in FÇ15’s case, families end up realizing the benefits that a school can potentially provide for students’ future as they witness their children’s success.

It is understood from the students’ statements that such opportunity school offers has a relation with quality of the school. For example, FÇ15 says, “All schools are equal to me. I’m not sure, maybe it could be good. But they have the same teachers and coursebooks there. I think there is no difference.” Still, she thinks, “But I would rather to go to school in a neighborhood like Çankaya/Kızılay.” On the other hand, some of the students think that they could receive a better education if they attended another school. As an example, though FK12 says, “here there is good education”, she points out that she can receive “a better education” in a different school since she justifies it by saying, “there is a lot of noise and lessons are disrupted here.” MM13 agrees with MK12. He says, “lessons are disrupted” and he proves his argument by saying, “fights often happen here”.

Friendship

Though one of the central quarters in Ankara, the quarter neighbourhood does not offer

venues of socialization such as children’s park and playgrounds. Therefore, students use the school and schoolyard as an area of socialization. They develop friendship relations in this context, too. Besides the physical factors, friendship seems to be closely connected with the meaning assigned to school by students. Three main themes were derived from the students’ friendship relations, that is, game, success and disrupting the lesson.

Most of the participants think they have got “good” friendships. However, it is seen that the idea of “good” varies depending on the participants’ gender. For schoolgirls, friendship is an obvious factor for “game and encouraging each other for success”. The idea is found in statements by FA12, FÇ15, FG15 and FN14, who say that they have a good time, play games, study and chat with “successful” and “good” friends at school. Additionally, FF13 says, “We go to the grocery store together, so we watch out for each other.” The statement of FF13 proposes another fact regarding the students. Although the distance between the grocery store and the school is only 150-200 meters, “going to the grocery store together” is an indicator of “good friendship” tells about the “insecure neighbourhood” of the school. The reason is that both families and students feel uncomfortable since the location of the school is in an area with lower-class entertainment venues nearby. As a consequence, it becomes dangerous especially for women and girls to go out of home alone. In such a setting, “going to the grocery store together” can be considered as a sign of solidarity for coping with an unsecure neighbourhood. This bears an encouraging example for The Tribe and particularly The Tribe’s women to go out of the home to be involved in the world they live in. Such small examples of solidarity can also potentially facilitate the discovery of the school along with its benefits.

On the other hand, friendship is perceived as a means of “game and disrupting the lesson” among schoolboys. The male participants define their relations with their friends as “good” while slightly complaining about “good relations”. For example, FF15 speaks as “some guide to school. But mostly they don’t. They sometimes suggest disrupting the lesson. And I sometimes string along with them.” Also MM13 gives the same feeling by saying “Some mates try to disrupt the lessons and tempt me.” On a differ-

ent note, MI15 seems to be emancipated from this situation as he speaks about his relations with his friends by saying, “We play games, we exchange assistance. Especially, we study before examinations.” The reaction of “disrupting the lesson” was found to be more widespread among male students who are engaged and determined to sustain their father’s job. For those children, school seems to have no other meaning than offering a diploma required for getting a driving license. Lastly, disrupting the lesson can be read as a way of having fun among boys who suffer from turning of the school life into angry.

Relation to Knowledge

Charlot (2010) and other researchers including Pouliot, Bader and Therriault (2010) used the concept of “relation to knowledge” to define the attitude of students about knowledge. In a broader sense, “relation to knowledge” (also called *le rapport au savoir*) is a collection of social meaning and function of school (or university) and knowledge, the discipline of study, opinions regarding learning and personality, expectations and judgments. In a narrow sense, relationship to knowledge can be defined as the information processes an individual or a group goes through, and the meaning and value relationship they establish with information products (Özsoy 2002: 20).

In the present study, it is seen that students establish relationship with knowledge on the basis of three pillars as “relationship with teacher”, “fun in the lesson” and “practicality” of information. For example, FA12 expresses her lack of interest in physical education lesson saying, “I feel as if I don’t learn anything. It is not so useful to me in life.” On the other hand, she said that “she has a lot of fun” during the lesson. As another example, FF15 says he is fond of mathematics and defines the instrumental relation with the lesson saying “Mathematics is the most important subject in school, too. It is also useful in business.” Apart from that, his proposition also includes, “Turkish is also fine. I don’t like English, it is all confusing” suggests that his social and cultural capital play an important role in his relationship with knowledge. The interviewee lives in a world where Turkish is spoken and he is exposed to Turkish. Apparently, he has no associations to settle for English in his context.

Furthermore, FK12 reflects on the relationship she establishes with the teacher of the les-

son itself. She states, “I like religious culture, mathematics, music and English lessons more.” Also, the statements of some students reveal that their relation to knowledge is affected from the teachers’ learning-teaching approach in each course. As an example, MM13 says, “I don’t like physical education course because they do it indoors.” FG15 also defines her positive feelings about courses saying, “I like English, Turkish and Sciences. I can learn these subjects more easily. Teachers’ teaching better has to do with that.” The same can be seen in MÝ15’s case as he says, “Turkish is a course, which makes you pay attention to it.”

DISCUSSION

A school is an area where different subjects of education attempt to achieve their targets and increase their gaining. As this study shows, students try to exist in line with specific aims of theirs and go through the process of subjectivity. The study re-explained the meaning of school as one of the indicators of students subjectness strategies. A similar finding can also be seen in the study by Özsoy (2002). Özsoy (2002) stated that students redefined the meaning of school outside of school’s defined meaning according to their experience. For example, students simulate the school to the “Plato’s academia”, to talk about the wisdom of love and they care about their experiences at school.

It can be seen in several studies that the benefit of schooling changes according to the social capital of individuals (Swartz 2011; Çetin 2014). In the paper, it seems that the students born of a non-Tribe mother develop positive perception regarding school and become motivated owing to the fact that they have relatives from mother’s side such as uncle, aunt and cousins who have studied till the end. Çelik (2014) has established a strong relationship between the student success and the school dropouts, and their socioeconomic levels in his research. According to him, the success of students from low socioeconomic levels is low and the school dropouts is high.

It is an often faced situation that the school allows social mobility for the girls. It is clear that the girls around here should make more effort (Jens 2013b). The Tribe is in a process of building a new identity, which is rebuilding itself over women (Akgül 2004). Bozkurt (2004) suggested

that the building of a new identity includes “virtuousness (gender), the historical background (essence history), selling sieves (labor process), Posha language (language), and Alawism (religion)” elements. That there is no education among these, a community that wants to rebuild the identity does not benefit from an important “opportunity” as education, makes it difficult for the social mobility of the girls. While girls find themselves getting engaged and married at early ages in the The Tribe culture, some girls can succeed to be saved or delay such events by proving to their families that they can study further.

CONCLUSION

Schools have been focused on “what” students must be rather than “who” they are throughout its historical development. Thus, an approach of education has eventually developed, which inhibits students from seeing their capabilities as subjects of education. Such an educational approach has dealt with students as mere objects to be shaped. In parallel, the expectation has been that knowledge, value and behaviors transmitted by schools are appreciated by those objects as planned. Placing the school and its targets in the heart of the process, this approach ignores the fact that education and instruction process is a type of interaction by nature. Defining the student as an object which is ready to be transformed as expected in the school’s objectives prevents perceiving of the student as a subject of education. At this point, the school can be said to be self-contradictory because its main aim is to build a subject who is able to establish a relationship with her/himself, her/his environment and the nature. As also seen in this study, individuals revise objectives of school in connection with their own social attachment as it is an important factor in their relations with school. It was found that some have objectives incompatible with the school’s objectives. According to the theoreticians who discuss school as an interaction circle, relations of actors with school/knowledge and their behaviors in school context might vary depending on the meaning and value they attach to school/knowledge. As a consequence, students are seen to instrumentalize the school in the way the state instrumentalizes education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It could be useful to plan schooling as a process by which subjectivity itself is experienced instead of students’ becoming subjects by means of explicit or indirect strategies. Furthermore, the school should stand as a multiple structure where differences are reflected taking students as subjects with varied social attachments and bear those facts with them via several means, not as homogenous entities. In light of the above, curriculum should be prepared with awareness about social culture and values, and curriculum development should involve several parties such as school principals, teachers, parents, students and specialists. As a summary, the school should no longer function as a process in which social conflicts are born and individuals become opponents. Instead, schools should be organizations where the suppressive and exclusivist hierarchy among different cultures of a society no longer exists in order to promote and develop social peace.

In the future, it is recommended that further research in educational sciences can be laid on sample studies, which handle student, parents, teachers and principals as subjects of the education and instruction process and recognizing their social roots. Lastly, other studies can be carried out to investigate the relationship between the students’ social aspects such as settled-nomadic lifestyle, religion, religious sect, socioeconomic class and their academic success.

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