

## Cultural Justice in Turkish Primary Schools

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**ABSTRACT** Justice problem in schools is seen as a basic problem. Unfair practices emerge when schools try to raise children according to society's dominant culture and when they disregard students from low socioeconomic status. Problems related to social and cultural justice in schools lead to disruption in the sense of justice. In this paper, cultural justice problems occurring in schools and the development of cultural justice in schools are emphasized. The aim of this paper is to determine primary school administrators' views of cultural justice and their practices for developing cultural justice. Sixteen primary schools' principals have been asked interview questions related to cultural justice. Data has been analyzed and evaluated in terms of qualitative research approach. It is determined that primary school principals have positive view about cultural justice.

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of educational quality has been discussed as an international issue in recent years. The quality obtained nationally in countries is not found to be enough and the concern of increasing educational quality in schools necessitates radical change in schools. Offering every child quality education is addressed as a fundamental education policy.

Global marketplace economy expanding with globalization process brings about some ethical problems. Local and national cultures are under excessive pressure of cultural globalization. Globalization of culture can be defined as a process of homogenizing dominant cultures in the face of world culture (Naude and Naude 2005). Due to globalization of culture, powerful countries' culture cause pressure on the culture of developing and underdeveloped countries. Globalization turns life into a homogenized culture through mass media and consumption society. While economic globalization affects distributive justice, cultural globalization influences cultural justice.

Justice problem in schools is seen as a basic problem. Unfair practices emerge when schools try to raise children according to society's dominant culture and when they disregard students from low socio-economic status. Problems related to social and cultural justice in schools lead to disruption in the sense of justice. In addition to this, it is stressed that women experience problems because of cultural traditions, and it causes cultural injustice in education in terms of gender (Baumeister 2012; Tomul et al. 2012).

### Cultural Justice Concept

Different definitions regarding justice exist. In the narrowest sense, justice means a kind of equity. According to given definition of Aristotle, justice can be defined as a ratio rather than identity (Kaufman 1995). Justice is an important factor considered in organizational analysis. In this respect, Rawls' (1999) justice theory makes a major contribution. Rawls has developed two justice principles. Firstly, each individual should have equal rights compatible with the broadest basic freedoms. Secondly, it is related to regulation of social and economic inequality. Rawls defines this principle as advantages should be rationally consistent to meet everyone's expectations and reaching to particular positions, and taking certain jobs should be open and available to everyone.

Justice in philosophy and social sciences is examined in two major ways and under multiple sub-titles. Two basic justice forms are distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice is the equal and honest distribution of pains, priorities, rights, responsibilities, gains and costs (Miller 1999). Procedural justice focuses on individual's participation in to the decision making process based on honesty, transparency and respect (Prilletensky 2012).

Fraser claims that three factors affect cultural justice negatively: (1) Cultural dominance: Behaving according to his/her own culture and showing hostile attitude toward other cultures. (2) Not accepting: Refusing symbolic cultural elements and communication forms (3) Disre-

spect: Reviling and judging daily life styles and society's cultural life in a biased way (Fraser 1997).

Cultural justice has been discussed as part of social justice. Gewirtz and Cribb (2003) take the issue of social justice in three dimensions namely relational, distributive and cultural justice:

1. *Relational Justice*: It refers to the extent that individuals and groups take part in process of establishing policies. This type of justice attaches importance to participation of social groups like poor people who are traditionally under-represented, and the groups of isolated students in decision-making process.
2. *Distributive-Equilibrating Justice*: Distributive justice influenced by Rawls' approach firstly focuses on the distribution of economic resources between social groups. Distributive justice stresses on developing educational policies in order to overcome educational inequalities.
3. *Cultural Justice*: It focuses on the problem that to what extent existing cultures are acknowledged and respected in society. Cultural justice emphasizes opposition against inequalities and it stresses on the responsibility of prevention from policies and practices, prioritizing majority and ignoring minority which lead to isolation of minority cultural groups.

According to Woods and Roberts (2016) social justice is defined in a four-fold scheme as the lessening or elimination of unfair inequalities:

1. Socio-economic resources (distributive justice)
2. Participation in decision (participative justice)
3. Respect for identity and beliefs (cultural justice)
4. Opportunities for learning and personal development (developmental justice).

Fraser divides injustice into two sub-titles namely socio-economic injustice and cultural injustice. Two different paradigms have been developed for these two types of injustice. Fraser underlines the requirement that political-economic structure should be restructured by means of developing equality ethics and cultural changes which make differences valuable should be made in order to remove cultural injustice (Armstrong 2008).

Fraser claims that policies aiming at equal distribution of goods are need to be developed in order to remove unjust distribution. In cultural injustice, the necessity regarding the positive confirmation of disadvantaged groups arises. Distributive and cultural justice policies to the detriment of certain groups like the racist and gendered practices result in serious reaction from these groups (Gewirtz and Cribb 2003).

Cultural justice by meaning is a term open to discussion. Cultural justice is closely related to cultural rights. Cultural rights are the rights given based on national and international laws. Cultural justice cannot be thought separately from socio-economic conditions. Some approaches related to cultural justice have dealt simply with people regardless of their economical context. However, cultural justice underlines the importance of not only respecting gender, race, nationality and ethnicity but also having equal conditions in terms of deriving profit, health, education, religious freedom and employment. As a result, cultural justice is accepted as a necessary supplementary of fundamental human rights.

Niezen (2009) examines cultural justice in terms of two cases. First one is the cultural privileges given only to local community excluding non-local populations, and the other one is fundamental problems related to these rights. Niezen explains this idea grounded on political theory. Cultural justice attempts to remove political injustice at cultural level. Cultural discrimination paralyses individuals' self-values, as a result, it makes destructive impact on individual's identity.

### **Relation between Cultural Capital and Justice**

Schools offer educational services in the meantime, they transfer cultural heritage from one generation to another one. School culture explaining the school's life style consists of school's culture, values, beliefs, traditions, stories and symbols (Celik 2012). Students' adaptation to school can only be possible via sharing of school culture. Shared school culture means a life area where students want to be educated and employees want to work. For this reason, academic achievement increases in school cultures where administration is based on values. Besides, fewer problems related to cultural justice are experienced in these school cultures.

Each school produces its own culture. School culture is developed by the influence of social culture. Values, norms, traditions and routines developed in school originate from social culture. Thus, problems about justice and equity in societal culture manifest themselves in schools. Especially, schools are primary organizations where cultural injustice is experienced. However, schools as a duty, have to offer educational services equally to everyone. For this reason, on the condition that social and cultural justice cannot be secured, schools might become centres of social conflict.

All values produced by school culture can be regarded as cultural capital. Schools' saving of cultural capital shows their cultural wealth. Schools which are expected to transmit societies' cultural values to students can adopt a system which is responsive to the society. Schools are defined as organizations which aim at meeting the whole societies' educational expectations, rather than meeting the expectations of marginal parties. For this reason, schools are supposed to create a more sharing culture.

School culture can be defined as school's life style. Values and norms shaping the school's culture are used as primary measure of behaviors. Accepted and rejected behaviors are shaped according to values and norms of school culture. Core values come to the forefront when developing a school culture. School has to deliver cultural values fairly to all students. When this delivery is un-equable, school's cultural justice weakens. Cultural capital influences students' achievement. Inadequacy of cultural capital has effect on students' all educational experience including his/her school selection, academic achievement and quality of education given to him/her. Thus, cultural capital is accepted as an important factor which shapes future education policies (Jaeger 2011; Dumais 2002).

Is cultural justice precisely secured in schools? Schools are seriously criticized on this point. Schools usually try to transmit cultural values of middle-class. In this situation, children from low socio-economic environment have difficulty in adapting to school culture. Schools value and reward students who have dominant cultural capital. On the other hand, schools underestimate cultural capital of students from low classes. Cultural capital symbolizes the students' economic power. Thus, main problem created by schools in terms of cultural capital is that schools

cheapen cultural capital of students from low-class. As a result, school demonstrates an unfair attitude in producing cultural capital which is already converted into economical capital (McLaren 2011).

It is claimed that schools encourage the cultural capital of dominant classes while they isolate students who do not accept the cultural capital of dominant classes. In this point, a new problem appears. Do teachers and school administrators assure the dominance of students from high-class on the low-class students? Schools' cultural justice is seriously questioned because of schools' inability to deliver cultural capital equally among students. Does cultural justice really exist in schools? Unfair delivery of cultural capital weakens the sense of cultural justice.

Teachers show an attitude according to social class that students belong to. Teachers who try to meet dominant class' expectations ignore students from low class. Teachers think that students' cultural behaviors are related to cultural capital that their families offer. Students' late arrival to class, their behaviors about sincerity, honesty, responsibility and kindness, their way of clothing, speaking and behaving are shaped by the culture they are living in. Students' social status is formed based on the cultural capital that they bring from their families (McLaren 2011). Bordieu states that schools protect the difference between students who are equipped with unequal cultural capital. Schools by sorting, differentiate students who bring family-inherited high cultural capital, from the students who have low cultural capital (Bordieu 2006).

Cultural justice and leadership are closely related to social justice. The foundation of cultural justice relies on social justice. Gewirtz (1998) defines social justice as a response to the expectations of marginalized and isolated groups who are outputs of corrupted and destroyed order. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) qualify social justice as sustainable, improvable and applicable organizational power regulations which are based on equity, honesty and human rights in personal, educational, social and economic sense. Thus, corrupted social justice leads to damaged cultural justice (Bates 2005).

Theoharis (2007) claims that social justice leadership is a kind of leadership that school administrator prevents the creation of marginal conditions based on race, class, gender and freedom. Basic point in this definition of social jus-

tice leadership is to remove marginality out of schools. Like social justice leadership, cultural justice leadership focuses on inequity in schools. According to social learning theory, knowledge and skills that individuals get from environment have effect on their cultural capital (Scanlan 2012). In order to secure cultural justice, school administrator has to be an architect building the learning environment.

As the risk societies come into existence, children from disadvantaged environments experience more problems about social isolation and this situation negatively affects these students' social status in school. Children in risk groups experience serious problems about taking advantage of educational opportunities. One of the most important action expected from today's educational administrators is to expand school's opportunities for at-risk and disadvantaged students.

For children who live in shanty town or come from low socio-economic environments, it is very unlikely to go to high-quality schools. At-risk children are likely to go to low quality schools. Unless educational leaders provide these children with appropriate environments, at-risk children would be forced to experience one more inequality. For example, when students are classified according to academic achievement, these students would fall into the least successful classrooms.

Bureaucratic structure of schools results in distrust. Relationships established in schools' formal nature lead to development of social hierarchy, and this situation brings out injustice. Educational administrator has a privileged social status in school's formal nature. If he/she uses this privileged social status as a coercive power against teachers and students, then he/she would be the first one destroying cultural justice. Educational leadership requires to secure cultural justice and to develop horizontal relationship.

Cultural justice leaders have to provide equality in terms of possibility and opportunity. Securing cultural justice is as important as providing a safe environment for disadvantaged and at-risk students. In order to establish peace and trust, firstly cultural justice has to be secured. Who will meet the needs of poor students? School leader can make use of environmental opportunities in order to meet the needs of students whose families have financial difficulties.

School leader should try to establish a school culture which accepts every student equal without discriminating based on gender, race, language, belief and status.

### **Purpose**

The aim of this research is to determine views of school administrators about cultural justice and to identify their practices regarding this issue. Based on the aim of research, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. Is students' sub-culture accepted adequately by school administration?
2. What are the problems related cultural justice in schools?
3. What are the practices for removing cultural injustice?
4. Does school culture contribute adequately to the development of cultural justice?

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this research, interview which is a qualitative research method has been employed. Semi-structured interview has been applied and for the interview, an interview form has been used. Interview forms are developed in order to focus on similar issues and collect information on the same issue from different people (Yildirim and Simsek 2006). The reason for using qualitative method in this research can be explained in terms of the difficulty in understanding conceptual frame which occurs as a result of schools' insufficient work on cultural justice. Thus, the idea of exploring school administrators' perspective and attitude toward cultural justice has influenced the decision about conducting a qualitative research. Research data has been gathered via interview which is a technique of qualitative research.

It is believed that school administrators play a critical role in securing cultural justice in schools. School administrators' views are important in detecting the problems related to cultural justice. This research has been conducted with 16 principals working in primary schools in Konya city centre in April, during 2012-2013 academic years. In qualitative researches, there is no exact or accurate number of participants. In this research, random sampling method has been applied.

## RESULTS

### Cultural Justice Perception Regarding the Status of Students' Families

Parents' expectation of more qualified education creates pressure on school administrators. Parents want school administrators to separate classrooms based on academic achievement and they want their children to be educated in highly achieving classes. Excessive pressure created by parents on school administrator's result in serious problems related to cultural justice. School administrators' perception of cultural justice based on the parents are as following:

*We do not judge students according to their identity. It is no matter which city or which culture student comes from. Every teacher wants to educate students who are already successful and have good family. Our primary mission is not to discriminate rich and poor students. We care for students coming from disadvantaged environments. I have sent special-needs child to Counselling and Research Centre. I refer students with financial difficulties to YIBOs. Teachers act fairly. I have never gotten any complaint from parents about teachers' unfair behaviors (Principal 1).*

*One of the primary problems related to justice in schools is to create classrooms based on academic achievement. Students' classrooms are determined by lot in our school. Parents may have different preferences in teacher selection. Parents prefer our school due to its physical well-being and appropriateness. Our preferences about students are not based on ethnicity. We prioritize students from low socio economic status in social activity organizations. Our students do not feel cultural identity problem (Principal 3).*

*Our school includes heterogeneous student groups. Teachers do not act according to students' ethnic identity. We do try to meet expectations of poor students. Teachers adopt cultural justice. Although I personally object to divide students into classes based on achievement, I created achievement-oriented classrooms in order to meet parents' expectations (Principal 14).*

### Removing Cultural Injustice

School administrators play an important role in removing cultural injustice in schools. School

administrators have different practices aiming at developing cultural justice in schools. Cultural justice is emphasized in schools by treating every student equally without considering the parent's social status and helping students who have insufficient financial resources. School administrators' practices aiming at developing cultural justice are stated below.

*There are students in our school from homogenous low culture. We experience problems regarding classifying students. In order not to discriminate students from each other, I as a school principal do not allow my child to use same entrance with me. We have a social help and solidarity club in our school. Students in this club weekly sell the foods that their parents prepared and give the money to poor students. We have been doing this for two years. In addition to this, we help poor students by collecting money from teachers. School culture contributes to securing of cultural justice in school (Principal 2).*

*Some professors in university wanted us to open a special classroom for their children. My response to this will was very strong. We collect information from parents when we create classrooms. We have put low-class, middle-class and high class students equally in each classroom. Our school culture contributed to the cultural justice. We try to raise children who are given to us as innocent human beings in the best possible way by developing their sense of justice positively. However, efforts for establishing cultural justice lead to professional exhaustion. I feel exhausted because of the excessive demand for our school (Principal 13).*

*...We do not differentiate between rich and poor students. We do not marginalize students. We apply a special project called hanging bagel in our school. We help poor students secretly. We give bagel and juice to poor students. Children do not know who pays for these services. We do not collect school-bus fee from poor students. We have a shared culture. We keep effective teamwork in order to establish cultural justice in our school (Principal 4).*

*If we can develop Mevlana's and Yunus Emre's view of humanity, if we can love people, I believe a lot of problems can be solved. One of our students' father has died. We, as teachers and students have visited his home. He was a thief. After our visit to his home, his behavior has completely faded away. If everyone is treat-*

*ed equally, we can win their hearts (Principal 15).*

*Both children who are from high socio-economic status and children from villages study in our school. Some children coming from villages are very successful. All teachers in our school aim at making the child-centered, parent-focused and success-oriented education meaningful (Principal 7).*

*Sometimes, students adopt negative attitudes toward different cultural identities. However, sharing school culture in our school softens these negative attitudes. We have created social help teams in our school. We provided financial help to poor students from villages. As requirement of social responsibility, we have helped village schools by providing money, materials and books. We have sent 670 packages of shoes, sportswear and stationery. We have helped 14 village schools by providing books. We have formed a school culture aiming at widening the justice, success, tolerance and love (Principal 7).*

### **Contribution of School Culture to the Cultural Justice**

Values which are among the basic factors in shaping school culture make contribution to the development of cultural justice. Equity, justice, respect to differences are the values supporting cultural justice. Accepting these values in school culture and internalizing them as shared values lead to consensus in cultural justice. Cultural injustice increases in negative school culture. School administrators' opinions regarding school culture's contribution to the development of cultural justice are reported in following paragraphs.

Students from low cultures are respected in our schools. Teachers are not interested whether students are from village or city. Students show difference in terms of their viewpoints. Parents need to help students in activities. Cultural justice differs in terms of parent support. Academic achievement is different in students who are from city or village and from divorced families. Students from disadvantaged families affect cultural justice negatively.

*We have difficulty in ensuring the participation of parents who are from low socio-economic status. Our suggestions which aim at increasing children's achievement are taken into consideration by parents. School culture does*

*not make enough contribution to the development of cultural justice. Cultural justice is firstly needed to be provided in families. How does a poor family buy a bar of soap? To what extent does a family meet child's necessary needs? It seems impossible to secure cultural justice in schools before the cultural justice is established between families (Principal 8).*

*We regard our students' cultural identity as richness. We perceive this as cultural tolerance. Students in our school feel comfortable in terms of their cultural identity. School's mission should be not to separate students but to integrate them (Principal 9).*

*Every student is valuable for us. We are interested in socio-economic status of parents. We even put more effort to increase academic achievement of students who have poor family. We think that in students' failure; firstly school administrators and secondly teachers are responsible. Students did not select their families. If we continue on family's disadvantaged status in school, we violate the cultural justice. I see every student as a potential to be developed. School culture contributes to the development of cultural justice because school culture improves the shared values (Principal 10).*

### **DISCUSSION**

It is stressed that students experience problems originated from language, reading habit and cultural structure (Billings 1995). Paris (2012) focuses on developing a more sustainable pedagogy. Culturally sustainable pedagogy advocates the formation of a societal order where cultural justice and equity are established rather than a mono-cultural structure. Fraser's three-dimensional justice model is examined in terms of cultural justice in schools (Power and Frandji 2010; Tikly and Barrett 2011). Researches conducted on the topics of economic, cultural and political justice have influence on educational policies (Keddie 2012).

Cultural justice approach rejects formation of monotype school culture. Cultural justice requires respect to differences. Management of differences and respecting them can only happen in schools where cultural justice is established. Educational leader should object to any kind of discrimination and try to form a sharing school culture which is respecting differences. Modern world's schools should open their doors to everyone by respecting differences.

Securing of cultural justice in schools can only be achieved by effective cultural leadership attitude. By considering fundamental ethical principles like respect and equity, school administrator should establish a school culture suitable for students coming from disadvantaged environments. Cultural justice leader tries to ensure equal distribution of cultural justice between teachers and students. If school administrator uses school's resources in favor of students who have high socio-economic background, cultural injustice increases in school. Cultural justice should be established by prioritizing especially at-risk students. Otherwise, when cultural justice is not provided, at-risk students may show unethical behaviors.

### CONCLUSION

Research results imply that cultural justice is secured in schools. School administrators' perception of cultural justice is at positive level. However, schools' eliminative system and transmission of elite-class values create a serious problem in terms of cultural justice. Although school administrators see cultural identity as richness, school culture can be exclusionary factor for students who are coming from low socio-economic status.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrator creates a work peace by providing cultural justice in school. Separating teachers according to some factors like labor unions, ideological beliefs or self-interest based relations results in violation of cultural justice. Cultural justice means respecting everyone's cultural values and beliefs. School administrator has to respect people's right to be different. Co-existence of different colors in school should be regarded as richness. A real cultural transformation in schools can only be achieved when cultural justice is insured.

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