

# Discrimination in Primary Education in the Slums of Turkey: Problems about Equity of Education

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**Abstract**—This study was carried out in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, in order to determine how people living in the slums of Ankara benefit from educational equality. Within the scope of the research, interviews were made with 64 families whose children have been getting education from the primary schools of these parts and the data of the study was collected by the researcher. The results of the research demonstrate that the children getting education in the slums of Ankara can not experience educational equality and justice. The results of this study show that the opportunities of the schools in the slums of Ankara are very limited, so the individuals in these districts can not equally benefit from the education. The families are aware of the problem they are faced with.

**Keywords**—Discrimination, inequality, primary education, slums of Turkey.

## I. INTRODUCTION

EVERY society in the world aims to give efficient education, to present educational facilities based on equality and justice and to prepare people effectively for their future lives. Continuous improvement in today's world, increasing competition rules, and the constant rise in the quality of products and services have brought about the necessity to educate more qualified individuals. Societies can be powerful in the international arena and can compete effectively provided that they bring up qualified persons. In other words, the qualification and the quantity of manpower play a considerable role in coping up with the worldwide competition.

If the new generations can make maximum use of education, it will contribute not only to the improvement of the individual but also to the development of society. However, it would be very difficult to indicate that everybody, in the metropolises continuously developing, can benefit from the educational facilities equally and sufficiently. Unal and Ozsoy point out:

*In modern societies, economic workings lead to the emergence of conditions that enable the more qualified to achieve success. This situation is itself based on inequality. While education gives the citizens the opportunity to acquire the necessary values, it also creates a mechanism by which inequality among classes is established. [1]*

Thus, especially those in the slums of the metropolises are doomed to suffer inequality. In these areas, very rapidly

improving establishment process brings about socio-economic problems as well as the difficulties in consequence of insufficient sources. This causes the appearance of inadequate conditions at schools, a living culture isolated from urban culture and it also led to the emergence of individuals who have not been educated as qualified people. So, the less qualified and those who have inadequate socio-economic conditions are always confined to failures in social and educational life due to the inequality that inevitably appears. This is one of the most basic and common problems of many developing countries. The people, who can not sufficiently benefit from the social, cultural and economic opportunities of the city, even if they are living in that environment, have difficulties to be in harmony with the urban structure. Therefore, this makes it difficult for them to establish their future and achieve success.

Especially in Turkey, the primary education level, which is compulsory and by which the individual acquires the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes, if opportunities are not provided for the individual or these chances are less in some parts of the city than the other districts, there will inevitably appear serious problems. The primary education process, which gives the new generations all the social culture from the past to the present, is very important. The possible inadequacies and negative situations that may take place in this process will make it difficult for the individuals to be in unity with the society. Moreover, it will prevent them from going on their education and from broadening their minds.

In Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, there has been a considerable rise in the rate of this problem. Ankara, which became the capital of Turkey with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, has improved with plans and projects. Nevertheless, in the last 20 years, there has been a noticeable increase in the population of the city. 30% of the population is living in the slums of the city. These parts of the city have appeared with the inner migrations within 25-30 years and have expanded rapidly. Sufficient educational opportunities have not been provided for those being faced with difficulties to be in conformity with the city culture and living conditions. Moreover, the local administration could not find a solution for the subway of these slums. As a result of rapid development and increasing population, these regions of the city have constituted their own cultural values. As these parts of the city are isolated from the social and educational facilities of the developed areas, they are faced with discrimination in terms of educational system. Holzer and Ludwig emphasize: "The appropriate definition of discrimination for within-school assignments is also complex

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on both equity and efficiency grounds” [2]. It is impossible not to indicate educational equality and equity in terms of results though an equal educational system is offered to everybody. The inefficiency of social and economic structure of schools in the slums of the city have brought about inequity and suffering of many students who are the victims of the wrong system. Thus, since these children are not strong enough to challenge the situation, the government and the adults should pay attention to this problem.

It would be true to claim that the schools and the educationalists in these slums are not efficient and effective enough owing to the different cultural values adopted in these districts. Furthermore, necessary and sufficient investments have not been made and also an educational system based on equality and justice could not be provided for these individuals. Besides, the rapidly increasing rate of population in these parts has caused the creation of short-term solutions. What is more important is that the Turkish politicians see the people in these areas as a group who has the most potential to give votes in the local and general elections. Therefore, instead of long-term solutions for the problems of these people, more populist policies have appeared by the politicians due to their anxiety for the elections.

Societies and cities try to establish their future by means of the cultural values and living styles they have created. The provision of equality in education is primarily a legal necessity. In the 26<sup>th</sup> article of Turkish Republic, it is said that: “The state is obliged to educate every individual and to provide the people with an equal and fair education system.” Consequently, in every country that is regarded as a social jurisprudence state, the government is responsible for presenting its citizens the best educational facilities and equal opportunities. However, at this point, the most important thing that should be asked is how this can be accomplished. In the world, even if equality in education is achieved, the results of education would definitely be different because of the life conditions, financial situation, the skills and the family structure of the students. All these factors would certainly play a negative role for those leading their lives in the undeveloped or developing parts of the world.

The schools which contain all the necessary equipments can not be established and the educational needs can not be met properly in the slums of cities developing rapidly in terms of population density. Therefore, the educational and cultural background of the new generations has become insufficient. Thus, these people can not enlarge their visions. As a result, they hardly have the opportunity to continue their education at upper levels.

In Turkey, primary education is compulsory for everybody between 7-14 years and it is free in public schools. Today, while 95% of children gets education in the public schools, 5% goes to private educational institutions requiring payment. Most of the people believe that those getting education in the private schools have the right to attain better education owing to their financial prosperity. Hence, as Aksoy states: “Privatization of education, which is based on the belief that the public schools are not able to give good education, leads to the generalization that better education is not necessary for those who are economically in good position” [3]. Thus, inequality of education starts just from the beginning since all

the people in a society can not be in the same level in terms of their living standards and financial situations. But whether in public or private educational institutions, all the individuals should be involved in primary education. The Ministry of National Education states that the rate of attendance in primary education is 92% in Turkey [4]. Considering the results of a compensation education project carried out in Turkey with the support of UNICEF, the number of children who can not get primary education due to various reasons is 600.000. According to UNICEF report, approximately 78% of this number contains the children of families living in the slums or rural areas [5]. This rate clearly demonstrates that the children in the undeveloped slums of Turkey can not get equal educational opportunities. The researches carried out for this issue illustrate that the socio-economic level of the families in these districts is very low. In addition, in these regions, the government does not invest sufficiently for the educational needs and there is not enough effort to make every individual living in these regions conscious about the importance of education. Hyde indicates “Policymakers need to have access to the missing data to make changes in and redesign educational policies” [6]. In other words, unless the state pays attention to the educational problems, the situation of those in the undeveloped districts will be worse. This proves that education in the urban areas is not based on equality, justice and freedom. As a result, what comes to the fore is discrimination in the educational system of the metropolises in Turkey. Golba also underlines the educational difference between the urban and the suburban parts: “Unless the inequalities in education between suburban and urban school are diminished, the schools and their students will always be victims of the division of race and class” [7]. So, rather than separating people into classes, they should be considered to be a whole, because education is not a privilege, but a right for everybody. The term ‘privilege’, implies that a person is superior from the other and has the right to own the things the other can not possess. Instead, the term ‘right’ should be employed for education. Since ‘right’ stands for equality of everybody. Therefore, education is a right for everybody [8]. However, in Turkey, discrimination in education and educational differences among areas come to the fore [9].

In Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, nearly 30% of children in primary education goes to the schools in the slums of Ankara. The families of these children constitute the group with the lowest socio-economic level. Within the process of modernization and westernization of Turkey, in rapidly developing Ankara, in many of the schools, there appears dual education. (In dual education, a group of students go to school from morning to noon. After they leave, the other part comes and gets education till the evening). This shows that the number of students doubles up the capacity of these educational institutions. The educationalists in these slums want to work in the areas which are more developed in terms of social, cultural and economic ways. Thus, the number of teachers appointed every year to more developed parts is more in these undeveloped districts of Ankara than the developed areas. The children and their families disapprove of this situation, because it takes a lot of time for the new teachers to learn about the district and the families, and also to establish positive relationships with the children. In other words, it

would not be wrong to claim that these children start life as disadvantaged as De Frajai indicates:

*Some groups are "disadvantaged": Individuals belonging to these groups are less likely to have high potential to benefit from education. These differences in the distribution of the potential to benefit from education, which we take as exogenous, may be due to a variety of causes: explicit or implicit discrimination, differences in social skills [10].*

It is clear that the children, in many parts of the world as well as in the slums of Ankara, face this discrimination and try to get education despite all the difficulties and inadequacies. Not only these disadvantaged students, but also their parents feel this inequality, but since they can not change the situation, they are left behind as helpless with their own miseries.

The increasing population in the slums of Ankara and their own cultural values have influenced the urban life in many ways. So, it is necessary to make a research in order to determine what kind of problems the people living in these neighbourhoods have been faced with, and to analyze if the educational conditions and results are sufficient for these people or not. The city life should be considered as a whole, so the situation in these parts should also be taken into consideration. Equality in education should be regarded as a universal problem in developing and even in developed countries.

People in the slums of metropolises hope that their children also have the opportunity to benefit from the best educational facilities despite the fact that it is very difficult for them to compete with the other students who live in better parts of the city with better economic positions. Yet, it is very crucial to find out what they think and feel and what they find as solutions for this situation. This will contribute not only to the improvement of that country but also to the peace of world. For this reason, this study was carried out and the opinions and suggestions of the families whose children are getting education in the slums of Ankara were asked.

## II. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The families living in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara, and whose children continue their education in the slums of the city were asked to reply to these questions;

- 1) What do you think about equality in education?
- 2) What do you feel about the education system offered to your children?
- 3) Do you think that your children get education sufficiently and in high quality?
- 4) What do you do for the education and future of your children?
- 5) Can you have the opportunity to make use of the social and cultural opportunities of the city?

## III. METHOD

This study was carried out in Ankara, one of the metropolises of Turkey, so as to determine how equality in education can be achieved. It was performed between April and July, 2007. The group of this study consists of 64 families,

26 mothers and 38 fathers, whose children are at the primary education level. These children go to two different types of schools in one of the slums of Ankara, called Mamak. 68% of the research groups are graduates of primary education and 32% graduated from high schools.

The data of the study were collected by the researcher himself with interviews. The questions which were open to comments and containing trio measurement were answered. The interviews were made at schools. The data of the study were analyzed and evaluated by the researcher. Within the analysis of the data, frequency was used and the answers of questions, which were open to comments, were indicated according to the rank of prominence.

## IV. FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

The findings and comments based on the viewpoints of the parents are presented in a systematic way below.

Considering the data in the table, it is apparent that there are many insufficiencies at the schools in the slums of Ankara and the parents can not get adequate support from the school. Moreover, it is clear that the quality of education is low and the students can not make use of equality of education. In addition, the staff of the school can not make all the parents conscious about education, so it is very difficult for these children to continue the upper levels of education. It is also hard to say that the parents are satisfied with the quality of education in these slums. This shows that although the socio-economic levels of these families are low, they are aware of the problems they have experienced and are conscious enough to grasp the importance of education. Nevertheless, they have no financial power or cultural background to support the improvement of their children, so it is impossible to achieve equality and equity in terms of educational results in many parts of the world as well as in Turkey. The insufficiencies in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds make it clear that they are deprived of an equal education system and they also lack the necessary knowledge and skills to change their conditions. The inevitability of creating a country that will offer the citizens both an equal education system and equal results comes to the fore. However, the debates about establishing equity and equality can be realized in terms of educational results as Brown suggests:

*The first is that society should do what it can to achieve equality of opportunity at the start of each person's life, so that each person has a chance to reach the same outcomes in life [... ] The same educational opportunities must be available to equally talented individuals with the same willingness to make an effort to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications [11].*

Therefore, although all the citizens have the right to get education which must be fair and equal, it is very hard to observe such a kind of education in every fields of the world and in Turkey, so those in the undeveloped sides have to put up with educational inequality. Gamoran states that the cultural and social differences cause the separation of groups in society as privileged and unprivileged [12].

TABLE I  
THE RANGE OF THE PARENTS' VIEWPOINTS ON WHAT THEY  
THINK ABOUT THE EDUCATION SYSTEM THEIR CHILDREN ARE  
INVOLVED IN

STATEMENTS	Yes f	Partly f	No f
1) I think that education given to our child is sufficient.	12	23	29
2) The physical situation of the school is effective.	6	18	40
3) The tools, materials and the other equipments are adequate.	9	17	38
4) I can communicate with the teachers without any hesitation.	21	26	17
5) The administrators of the school support us.	14	22	28
6) The educationalists have sufficient knowledge and skills.	32	23	9
7) I can ask for the teachers' advice when my child has problems related to his/her education.	16	22	26
8) I think that my child gets a very good education.	19	24	11
9) My child is successful at his/her lessons.	15	21	28
10) My child is satisfied with his/her school.	17	20	29
11) I am glad that my child goes to his school.	13	19	32
12) I believe that my child has improved himself/herself in terms of social and cultural manners.	5	25	34
13) My child makes use of educational equality.	7	26	31
14) I suppose that my child can continue his/her education at the upper levels.	8	23	33
15) The school provides my child with necessary social and cultural opportunities.	6	24	34
16) The administrators and the teachers pay attention to not only to our child's improvement but also to our social and cultural improvement.	9	17	38
17) The government makes the necessary investments for the maintenance and development of schools.	4	28	32
18) The state provides our child with the necessary and the best education.	6	15	43

Therefore, what is very important is the difference of the socio-economic condition between those in the slums of Ankara and the ones in the developed districts. So, the families of the children in the undeveloped areas are worried about their children's success and future. However, they still hope the best for their children. When the parents are asked to indicate their opinions about their children's success and their future education, the points on which they put more emphasis can be listed as they indicated:

*I hope*

*my son/daughter continues his/her education.*  
*he/she earns more money.*  
*he/she becomes successful.*  
*he/she passes his/her exams.*  
*he/she can leave these slums and find a better place.*  
*he/she can support us.*  
*he/she finds a good job.*

Considering the answers of the parents, it can be stated that they give importance to their children's education. However, it is clear that they regard education as a vehicle to experience the social, cultural and economic change and to find a job. In fact, education should not be regarded as a vehicle to achieve wealth and position, because it is both for acquiring knowledge, gaining the ability to use it and for becoming independent individuals, participating in useful facilities and

to enlarge our vision. Yet, in the undeveloped or developing parts of many countries and of Ankara; unfortunately, the aim is possession of money or finding a job. Moreover, they are so alien to the social activities that will contribute to their self-improvement that they are merely concerned with changing their living conditions rather than broadening their knowledge. When the parents are asked to emphasize their viewpoints about the social and cultural opportunities the city offers them and if they can benefit from these facilities or not, the replies show that 86% of them can never make use of these opportunities while the rest has benefited only once or twice. Furthermore, approximately half of them points out that they have taken part in some cultural activities such as concerts which were free. Thus, their economic anxieties and the restricted opportunities in their lives come to the foreground.

The replies of the parents to the question, "*What should be done to achieve equality in education in your environment?*" can be listed as follows:

- 1) The state and local administrations should support us.
- 2) Our children should be provided with scholars.
- 3) New educational buildings should be established.
- 4) The number of students in classes should be reduced.
- 5) The equipment the schools need should be improved.
- 6) The lessons should be prepared with more attention.
- 7) The teachers should not be appointed very often.
- 8) Social and cultural activities should be held at schools.
- 9) The dual education should come to an end. (In dual education, a group of students go to school from morning to noon. After they leave, the other part comes and gets education to the evening)
- 10) The school administration should allow us to communicate with them whenever we want.
- 11) The teachers should give us more time.
- 12) Our suggestions should also be asked for the decisions that will be taken related to school.

The statements of the parents show that The Ministry of National Education, which is responsible for the planning and practice of educational activities in Turkey, should be more efficient in establishing equality of education. In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education deals with the educational investments and the appropriations are determined by the budget of this ministry. Therefore, this institution should be more sensitive to educational problems so that every child can acquire the necessary ability and skills to compete with the others. In this sense, educational equality comes to the fore as Brown stresses: " 'Fair equality of opportunity' or 'equality of life chances' is the view that equally talented and similarly willing children from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds should have an equal chance to obtain the same skills and qualifications as their more favoured counterparts" [11]. Thus, every child should have the right to get education and to prove themselves not only at school but also in society.

The parents feel the necessity of a considerable increase in the quality of education and they think that the opportunities of schools should be improved. Furthermore, they pay attention not only to the inevitability of the rise in social and cultural facilities, but also to the importance of establishing a

more positive and an effective communication with the school staff. In this sense, their eagerness to participate in the school administration is very striking. This confirms that they are conscious and learned enough to make suggestions about what can be done to achieve educational equality.

## V. DISCUSSION

In the developing countries, while the big cities have been improving rapidly, the population density of the slums of these cities has increased as well. Approximately 30% of Ankara population is living in these slums. The results of this research show that equality in education is a serious problem in these areas. According to these results, the parents are not satisfied with the quality of the education given to their children. Also, they emphasize that the schools in these slums have serious educational problems. A mother states her viewpoint as follows: "If we had had another chance, I would have tried to bring my child to a school which had better opportunities. Unfortunately, it is impossible." Another mother says: "I think that the capacity and the abilities of my child have not improved considerably at this school. If we can improve our economic condition, we aim to bring our child to a better school next year." So, it is evident that it is not possible not to mention inequality as long as the differences in terms of cultural background, living style, social and financial position of people in different parts of the world remain. Nevertheless, the state and the citizens should deal with the ways to lessen the discrepancies among areas. In this sense, Aksoy indicates:

*Nowadays, especially in undeveloped and developing countries, serious problems appear about the acquisition of educational rights. The poor in the undeveloped countries are deprived of getting education. The first and foremost reason is the inadequacy of the budget and the sources of education.*[13]

While it is unavoidable for the undeveloped or developing countries to face inequality in terms of education, the government should still try to find ways to improve the conditions. Hence, most of the people in the world can not run away from unequal results of educational success as it can be recognized in Turkey as well. The children of the families living in the slums of Ankara have been faced with discrimination in education for a long time, therefore there is no educational equality for these children. As a result; social, cultural and economic problems appear in the city. These students can not continue their education at upper levels. Some of them have to stop getting education even at the primary level. Consequently this causes the emergence of many problems. Indeed, the compulsory primary education process is not sufficient for the self-improvement of the people. Right of education, which contributes to the improvement of the individual, should not be limited to a certain period and age. Because such a practice would result in preventing the citizens from broadening their knowledge and experiences. On the other hand, when the economy of a country is not sufficient for meeting the needs of a large population, the state has no alternative but to determine only

the primary education compulsory for each person as it can be seen in many developing countries and also in Turkey.

Lack of education and money also brings about dangers in society, since inadequacy of knowledge and economic prosperity causes people to commit crimes. According to Yearly Crime Statistics, 72% of those who have committed crimes come from the slums [14]. 70% of these offenders has never gone to school or left it. It is difficult for these individuals to be in harmony with the city culture, so they isolate themselves from the opportunities of life and they are not able to continue even the compulsory education. The most important point is that all these circumstances lead them to commit crime. As a result, it becomes more and more difficult for these children to establish a healthy and a secure life. The father of a child stresses his ideas about this situation: "My son does not like his school and his teachers, he does not want to study, he has some friends who have left school and he spends most of his time with them. He does not go to school. I don't know what to do for him." This problem shows that the child has been influenced by his friends to a great extent. The father of another child says that his son often runs away from his school to go to internet café and he adds that his son says one day he will earn a lot of money. All these facts demonstrate that the individuals who could not get sufficient education would be faced difficulties in establishing their future lives. In education, especially in primary education, the most important thing is to preserve equality and equity. Because, nearly in all the countries, primary education is compulsory and constitutes the basis of education. The wrong applications carried out in this level may cause the emergence of situations that can not be compensated.

The nations have undergone a very rapid process of development as a result of the improvements in the communication technologies, moreover, globalization has enabled these nations to become closer to one another. As a consequence the problems have become common as well. While the developing urban structure presents more improving and better facilities to the individual, at the same time it disturbs the balance of the structure in the city, especially in the slums. This situation results in not only the destruction of balance in terms social living conditions, but also the disappearance of the hopes and the dreams of many families and their children. This kind of restriction in the undeveloped parts of Ankara illustrates that these people have been subjected to unfair treatments and inequality of education. Therefore, these children in these districts can be likened to a class which is alienated from the others. Bynner and Joshi say, "class inequalities in educational achievement" [15] deprive these kinds of children not only from a better education system, but also from the cultural, social and economic facilities.

The data of this research prove that in the slums of Ankara, the capital and the second biggest city of Turkey, discrimination in education has been increasingly experienced by many people. In fact, this is also the problem of other big cities in Turkey. Turkey, which has been making great effort to be a member of European Union, first of all has to solve the problem about education and achieve educational equality. Preserving social peace and fulfilling the cultural integration largely depend on solving this problem.

It would be wrong not to state that not only in Turkey, but also in many parts of the world, there appear differences in terms of abilities, needs, health and living conditions which cause educational inequality [16]. Nevertheless, what should be carried out for the reform of many individuals and rehabilitating their conditions is to make effort to broaden people's knowledge and enlarge their vision of life and culture. The more you contribute to the improvement of the individuals, the more these people would play a role in the development of the world. If world communities aim at living in a more prosperous and a safer place, they have to take responsibility to provide all the citizens with equality and equity of education. Therefore, together with the national efforts, sharing the international experiences and the cooperation among nations would be also crucial to find solutions for this problem. Since these kinds of educational problems have a considerable influence upon other societies as well.

Finding permanent and effective solutions for the problem of equality in education depends on determining short and long term targets and considering this problem with the project management approach. Those having undergone the educational problems clearly expressed their experiences and indicated what should be done with their own suggestions. Although equality and equity of education can hardly be achieved in terms of the results in a competitive arena where the best, the most skilful and the most cultured can attain success, each society should make efforts to offer citizens an equal education system and to find sources for the improvement of education system.

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