

## **An Evaluation of John Taylor Gatto's Opposition to Compulsory School Education**

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### **Abstract**

Education has an important role in people's lives, both individually and socially. For this reason, it is accepted by almost everyone that education has a decisive power in the economic development and multi-faceted improvement of societies. From this point of view, education systems, which are among the most important institutional structures of the society, have been formed in order to provide a better education service to the individuals of all countries. Different approaches have been introduced on the establishment, functions and efficiency of education systems from past to present. These different approaches and perspectives can contribute to benefiting more from the power of education in increasing the effectiveness of education systems and providing all aspects of social development through education. However, completely opposing the education system and schools and arguing that it is unnecessary is incompatible with the reality of the life we live today. This study aims to make a scientific and academic evaluation of the criticisms of an American retired teacher named John Taylor Gatto on compulsory and public education. As it is known, John Taylor Gatto's popular book *Weapons of Mass Instruction: A schoolteacher's journey through the dark world of compulsory schooling* (2009; in Turkish 2018) made an impact all over the world and started an important discussion compulsory education. With the publication of mentioned book, John Taylor Gatto's thoughts on compulsory and public education have recently become the agenda all over the world, as well as in Turkey. The aim of the study is to bring a different perspective to this debate, to put forward the necessity of compulsory and public education with its scientific justifications. It also aims to correct the wrong perceptions that emerged with the publication of the books by John Taylor Gatto. Case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. In this research, John Taylor Gatto's views on compulsory education and schools, which he included in his books and writings, especially in his book, "*Weapon of Mass Instruction*", which has also been translated into Turkish, has been discussed and scientifically criticized. From the findings and evaluations, it has been concluded that Gatto's thoughts on education do not have a counterpart in today's and future world in many ways and do not comply with scientific facts.

**Keywords:** Critical pedagogy, Compulsory education, John Taylor Gatto, Public education, Education for the future

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## Introduction

Education has played an important role in the development of humanity, both at the individual and societal levels. It is accepted by almost everyone that education has a decisive power in the economic development and multi-faceted development of societies. Education systems, which are institutional structures, have been formed in every country as a result of the need to give compulsory education to all individuals by the state and for a certain period of time. Education is carried out in schools on a substantial and massive level. Schools form the basis of the education systems. Every nation has its own values, traditions and historical development processes. Depending on these facts, the education systems of each country differ from others. Countries' educational goals, educational policies and practices in schools also change. Today, every society is making a great effort to improve its education system and make it more effective. As in the past, planned education maintains its importance in today's conditions and in the near future and will continue to do so for a while. For this reason, the right to receive a modern and qualified education is seen among the most basic human rights in the developed world. In this context, the task of creating a qualified education system is among the most fundamental responsibilities of the states and governments. Thus, they will be able to provide all their citizens with the skills they need. In short, “the school has been one of the most indispensable institutions of all periods” (Uçak and Doğan, 2020) and it still continues to be so now and in the future.

While this is the case, it is understood that the book of an American retired teacher named John Taylor Gatto, which has been published in many countries recently and which rejects education, has attracted great attention. John Taylor Gatto's popular book *Weapon of Mass Instruction A Schoolteachers' Journey Through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling* (Gatto, 2009) has rekindled an important debate around the world. In the book, education, which was thought to save humanity for centuries, even thousands of years, is actually presented as a weapon that destroys people in mass.

Along with his mentioned book, other books by John Taylor Gatto has similar ideas in his other books, articles and also in interviews with him. These ideas have recently become on the agenda in the education world. By at least some people, Gatto's ideas are considered a critique for the current approaches and practices of education within the framework of critical pedagogy. Yet, his thoughts should be seen as a total objection against compulsory schooling and public education. When we examine and analyze Gatto's expressions in his books (Gatto, 2005; Gatto, 2009; Gatto, 2018), it is seen that these criticisms and thoughts are not within the scope of critical pedagogy. As it is known, there are some criticisms and different approaches about the inequality of opportunity in education, quality of education, practices of education and so on. The field of critical pedagogy has

emerged as a result of the criticisms. Critical pedagogy also encompasses the use of the economic and political power of education in favor of the advantaged classes of society.

Critical pedagogy is an educational approach created with the thoughts of people such as Paulo Freire (2004), Peter McLaren (1995), and Ivan Illich (2006). It brought a different perspective to education around the world in a short time with the criticisms it directed towards existing educational practices and it became a new approach in educational sciences. “It can be said that there are two important factors behind the critical pedagogy gaining such an important and meaningful academic ground, political support and social sensitivity in a short time: First, the inadequacy of educational approaches and practices that defend the current status quo; the second one is the advantages of Critical Pedagogy” (İnal, 2018), thus, the justification of its arguments about educational policies carried out around the world.

In this respect, critical pedagogy is an approach that criticizes education and school with its existing structure and practices, rather than rejecting public education and schooling. Thus, critical pedagogy does not handle education completely unnecessary and harmful. Gatto's criticisms, on the other hand, are an understanding that completely rejects school and education. Therefore, it cannot be handled within the framework of critical pedagogy.

### **The Emergence of Compulsory Education and Its Basis**

The phenomenon of education goes as back as the history of humanity. It is through education that people transfer their own experiences, knowledge and thoughts about life to other individuals. However, in periods when life and living conditions were simpler, social structures also consisted of smaller groups. Complex social structures and institutions did not exist at the present level. At that time, education was given informally as a part of daily life, mostly by family members and other individuals around. As social relations have become more intense and complex, educational activities carried out in informal ways have also changed. This change has also affected the scope and quality of education. The changes that occurred as a result of this interaction necessitated that education should be given to all individuals of the society in a more systematic and qualified manner. In order to meet this need, specially designed environments have been created. Although their characteristics and features differ, these specially created environments aimed to provide educational activities more effectively and efficiently. These educational institutions are called schools. Depending on the political, economic and scientific development of the societies, the establishment of a more qualified education system has become a necessity for all developed countries (Topcu, 2020, 1).

The basis of today's modern education systems is based on the Renaissance and Reformation movements that emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries and the Enlightenment Era that developed

later. The positivist thought formed by the change in the scientific field, the individual rights and freedoms shaped by the French Revolution in the social field, the changes in the economic field with the industrial revolution and the developments in the political field have made the functions of education more evident.

Thus, starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the period of formal education has begun through education systems that attach importance to their social, political and economic functions. It is seen that instead of the religion-centered education approach of the Middle Ages, the way for individuals to be educated with a scientific, rational and libertarian approach and in more democratic environments has been paved. The school system based on students' age and their development has been developed. This system has standard curriculums and textbooks. It transfers scientific knowledge and national values. It has teachers who are the representatives of rationality. It is an education system based on the reproduction of modernity (İnal, 2018).

The transformations that are effective in the formation of the modern education system are seen in four main areas:

- 1. *Scientific and technological change:*** Studies of scientists and philosophers based on rational thought, experimentation and observation have led to important leaps in the scientific field. With the contributions of scientists such as Descartes, Gilbert, Newton, Laplace, Copernicus, Galilei, Kepler, and thinkers such as Bacon, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Locke, Humboldt, Diderot, and Kant, the scientific revolution took place and the way to the industrial revolution was opened.
- 2. *Economic change:*** Along with the Industrial Revolution, great changes have occurred in the field of production and consumption. One of the most important situations that emerged with the revolution is the need for trained manpower. This need has been one of the most important factors in the spread of education to large masses of people. Along with industrialization, the development of human intelligence and abilities has also gained importance. It has been accepted that this development is only possible through education. Education and vocational training practices that have existed for a long time in the history of humanity have turned into a more professional way.
- 3. *Political change:*** After the French Revolution, a new model of political organization emerged, giving importance to individual rights and freedoms and democratic values. This change has led to the establishment of nation states. These modern democratic states, which are called nation states, had to use education effectively through appropriate programs in order to maintain the political structure they established.

4. **Social change:** The changes briefly summarized above actually led to changes in the social structure. Changes in production and consumption, cultural formations required by the new situation and the prevention of social conflicts necessitated schools and compulsory education as a tool.

All these changes also affected the educational approaches, which were transcendent, scholastic, dictatorial and mystical, especially in the periods when religious institutions were the only determinant. Along with the disciplines such as pedagogy, pediatrics, psychology, etc., the new education was formed in order to train the labor force needed by the bourgeois class for commercial and industrial works. The new nation-state structure also supported this economic base of the bourgeoisie politically. Public school systems were established in order to benefit more from education within the framework of various ideals such as economic and social development (İnal, 2018).

The process of creating and making modern compulsory education systems in different geographies has also differed according to the countries. Education has played a fundamental role in the political, economic and social development and social integration of countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Compulsory education has been the basic element for the independence and sovereignty of the nation states. The idea that education can be a panacea, a solution to every problem, and therefore education can solve all kinds of problems, has become widespread (Weymann, 2010). Although there are always criticisms about the content, quality and problems of education, this idea still maintains its validity. As Çengel (2021) emphasizes, “education has many important goals such as “establishing scientific thinking, developing a culture of inquiry and research, raising the general cultural level of the country, and equipping tomorrow's adults with the necessary knowledge, skills and universal values”. Based on these basic objectives, education prepares individuals to live successfully and happily in the democratic society of tomorrow as citizens who respect basic human rights and freedoms. It enables all individuals to be competitive all over the world as a global citizen. From this point of view, education will continue to exist as an indispensable institutional structure for all societies.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

In this study, case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In qualitative research, researchers generally examine the way participants interpret their experiences, their perspectives on the events, what they learn from their experiences and what they reveal. In this aspect, researchers in qualitative research use words rather than numbers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research methods are widely used in the field of educational sciences as well as in social

sciences such as anthropology, sociology, etc. The research is a study in accordance with the document analysis technique. So Gatto's views which he shared in his books and interviews on education were analyzed and evaluated with document analysis technique in this research.

Document review is the scanning, examination and analysis of written sources about facts and events related to the subject. Data collection through documentation includes the process of collecting and analyzing written materials related to the events and phenomena that are considered to be investigated. If the data required by the research can be obtained from the relevant documents, an analysis and evaluation may occur without the need for data collection in different ways (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

### Data Collection

The data of the research were obtained from written and printed sources deemed necessary. The data of this study includes his thoughts on various platforms, especially the books he has published, as well as the opinions of different researchers on the subject. Qualitative data consists of information obtained directly from people's own lives through experiences, opinions, interviews. These data can also be collected and evaluated through direct quotations from the documents related to the subject (Patton, 2015, p.14). In its broadest sense, the term document encompasses printed materials related to a work, books that refer to it, official records, personal documents, and all visual documents, including popular culture and popular media (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.24-25).

### Research Material

Within the scope of this research, it has been tried to reach the author's own books, articles and interviews about the subject. Searches were made on the internet and using various search engines regarding the work of other people on the subject, as well. The sources found are given in Table 1 below.

**Table1. Resources published by Gatto and directly related to the subject**

Author	Source	Type	Published by
J. T. Gatto (2017)	The Underground History of American Education	Book	Oxford Schooling Press
J. T. Gatto (2009 )	Weapons of Mass Instruction	Book	New Society Publishers
J. T. Gatto (2018)	Eğitim Bir kitle İmha Silahı (Turkish)	Book	Edam
J. T. Gatto (2007)	Dumbing Us Down	Book	New Society Publishers
J. T. Gatto (2019)	Aptallaştırın Eğitim (Turkish)	Book	Pedagoji
J. T. Gatto	Schooling is Not Education (Retrieved on: 09.04.2021)	Interview	<a href="https://www.naturalchild.org/">https://www.naturalchild.org/</a>
J. T. Gatto	Everything We Think About Schooling Is Wrong (Retrieved on: 12.07.2021)	Interview	<a href="https://ttfuture.org/">https://ttfuture.org/</a>
J. T. Gatto	How Public Education Cripples Our Kids and Why? (Retrieved on:	Article	SAGEjournals

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	18.02.2022)		
J. T. Gatto	Why Schools Don't Educate? (Retrieved on: 25.02.2022)	Article	<a href="https://www.naturalchild.org/">https://www.naturalchild.org/</a>

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Regarding the subject, the author's three originally published books and the Turkish editions of two of these books were examined. Two interviews with the author in English and two articles written by the author were also found. In addition, it has been understood that three criticisms and one article for his book were published in Turkish.

### **Data Analysis**

Document analysis includes accessing documents, checking their authenticity, understanding documents, analyzing and interpreting data. In addition, document analysis includes detailed reading and detailed analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In document review, "data analysis starts with the selection of the document and access to the document" (Kıral, 2020). As stated earlier, this study is based on a literature review and is therefore categorized as a qualitative research.

In this study, the data obtained were analyzed and presented based on interpretation, as the researcher, due to the nature of the study, was in an epistemological interpretive position (Bryman, 2012, p.30-31) as it aimed to give an academic answer to the question "Can education be seen as a weapon of mass destruction", which is a subjective phenomenon. This method, which was followed in terms of the nature of the subject discussed, was thought to be more suitable for this study. The thoughts of the author (John Taylor Gatto) on the subject were analyzed and evaluated under certain headings. Thus, the findings, criticisms and justifications on the subject are presented in a way that the reader can understand. While analyzing the data of the research, firstly the sources in which Gatto revealed his thoughts were reached. Then these thoughts were defined and classified according to certain categories. It was then interpreted and converted into a report (results and conclusions) based on this classification.

### **Reliability and Validity of the Research**

It is seen that the documents used as data sources in researches are classified in various ways. For example, according to their qualifications; Texts classified as script-based consist of printed sources such as books, encyclopedias, reports, dictionaries, journals, and diaries. Image-based documents are materials such as photographs, posters, maps. Sound-based ones are sound recordings, music broadcasts, radio broadcasts, etc. are resources. There are also audio-visual-based sources, and data sources such as documentaries, TV programs, videos, and movies fall into this group (Kıral, 2020). In this research, text-based documents were used as data sources.

Adding the full names, references and details of the events in the document analysis makes the documents advantageous in the research process (Yin, 2016). It is important for the reliability and validity of the research that this exact information will shed light on further information. This advantageous situation gives the research reliability and validity.

One of the criteria that ensures the reliability and validity of the research in document review is the competence of the researcher. If the researcher can choose the documents examined in accordance with the purpose of the research, determine whether the content of the documents fit the conceptual framework of the study and can determine the originality, accuracy and reliability of the selected documents, the reliability and validity of the research will be ensured to this extent. In order to maximize the reliability and validity of the research, the documents were chosen in accordance with the purpose in this study. The originals of the documents have been reached and the accuracy of the sources has been confirmed at first hand. The impartiality, transparency and credibility of the research has been increased by giving sufficient place to direct quotations.

## **Findings**

### **The Invalidity of Gatto's Ideas in the Framework of Critical Pedagogy**

Education is one of the most discussed and criticized topic in the social and political life. The reason for this is probably that education has an indispensable basic functions accepted in all societies and social institutions. Criticisms made on education are in the direction of continuing education with better qualities and better practices instead of rejecting and exclusion. When we examine Gatto's opinions in his books (2007, 2009; 2017), it is clear that these thoughts do not fall within the scope of critical pedagogy. As it is known, there have been several criticisms and different approaches about the goals, quality and practices of education all over the world. It is normal to talk and discuss issues such as how to provide education, how to ensure effectiveness, and alternative education opportunities. The field of critical pedagogy has emerged as a result of these criticisms and also the use of the economic and political power of education in favor of the advantaged classes of the society. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach created with the thoughts of Paulo Freire (2013), Catherine Baker (2013), Peter McLaren (1995), Ivan Illich (2006) and some others. Critical pedagogy made a worldwide impact in a short time with the criticism it brought to current educational practices. "It can be said that there are two important factors behind the critical pedagogy gaining such an important and meaningful academic ground, political support and social sensitivity in a short time. First, the inadequacy of educational approaches that defend the current status quo; secondly, the advantages of Critical Pedagogy" (İnal, 2018). Based on these determinations, critical pedagogy is not an approach that rejects education and public schooling. It criticizes the system with its existing structure and practices, rather than handling it as unnecessary and even harmful process.

In fact, J.T. Gatto himself states that he is not against education, but against the American education system and school practices there. He takes school and education as separate things. According to Gatto (2009, 61). “schooling is a matter of habit and attitude training. Education is a matter of self-mastery, first; then self-enlargement, even self-transcendence. You can easily compensate for a lack of schooling - the human record is full of stories of those who have done so in the past and those who continue to do so in the present - but without education you will stumble through life, a sitting duck for exploitation and failure, no matter how much money you make”. As can be understood from these statements, Gatto accepts the vital importance of education.

What is criticized and opposed by Gatto is formal public education. Schools are places where formal education is carried out. This is what Gatto opposes. Gatto advocates a form of education that is only informal, that is, there is no regulatory mechanism, and that takes place spontaneously, and he reduces education entirely to this category. This kind of education was practiced when societies did not form complex structures yet, and it was sufficient at that time. Today, this kind of education practices continue only as a complement to formal education. In today's conditions, an incidental, voluntary and even unsystematic education practice as advocated by Gatto is far from meeting the needs of individuals and societies. Every country tries to improve the education system so that the education system achieves its goals. Of course, it is debatable to what extent countries have achieved these goals set by their education systems. Gatto's criticisms on the other hand are largely against schooling and education. He argues that there is no need for education. He completely rejects public schooling and education system. Therefore, it cannot be handled within the framework of critical pedagogy.

### **The Invalidity of Gatto's Opposition to Compulsory Education Based on Allegations of the Ineffectiveness of Schools**

Another criticism by Gatto is the claim that the education given at school is not effective. He expresses the ineffectiveness of the American education system in these words: “We live in a time of great school crisis linked to an even greater social crisis. Our nation ranks at the bottom of nineteen industrial nations in reading, writing, and arithmetic. At the very bottom” (2005, 20). Then he talks about discipline problems in schools and uses the following expressions (Gatto, 2009, 7; 2018, 42):

Denied access to the ancient catalogue of *ad hoc* disciplinary tactics, classrooms descended into chaos, disorder spiraled out of control-passing into dangerous terrain from what once had been only a realm of petty annoyance. As word passed through student ranks that teachers' hands were tied, crowds of excited kids surged through hallways, howling, screaming, banging on doors, attacking one another.

He only takes the economic function of education and school and expresses that “School trains children to be employees and consumers”. Then he makes the following suggestions (Gatto, 2009, xxiii):

Teach your own to be leaders and adventurers. School trains children to obey reflexively; teach your own to think critically and independently. Well-schooled kids have a low threshold for boredom; help your own to develop an inner life so that they'll never be bored. Urge them to take on the serious material, the *grown-up* material, in history, literature, philosophy, music, art, economics, theology - all the stuff schoolteachers know well enough to avoid.

He gives some examples of the failure of American education system and tries to prove that why schools do not educate (Gatto, 2022b) and how public education cripples American kids (Gatto, 2022a). These claims then turn out to the criticisms that schools /education make individuals stupid (Gatto, 2005). As an alternative to school education he suggests home schooling saying that “the success of homeschooling shows a different road that has great promise” (Gatto, 2005, 29). Even that education given in a country is not effective, it cannot be concluded that education makes individuals stupid. It cannot be concluded that there is no need for school and education, either. There are international assessment programs to determine the effectiveness of countries' education systems, and there are differences between countries according to these evaluations. However, the fact that the effectiveness of a country's education system is low does not mean that that country does not need an education system or educational institutions.

Actually J.T. Gatto himself states that he does not oppose education, but the school system, rather the school practices in America. Yet, he describes schools as places that cause damage and harm students. He likens education to the weapons of mass destruction. Gatto (2009, 110) claims that “School has no choice but to limit free thought and speech to such a profound degree a gulf is opened between the sanctimonious homilies of pedagogy ('searching for truth; 'leveling the playing field; etc.) and the ugly reality of its practices”. The Australian example he gave to prove what he said is not consistent with them. He claims that “School disconnects, as it was charged to do. It is Caesar's "divide and conquer" strategy brought to peak efficiency. Children are divided from their families, their traditions, their communities, their religions, their natural allies - other children - their interests and on ad infinitum (Gatto, 2009, 130). However, these claims do not reflect the truth and are not compatible with the findings of educational sciences. When we examine the educational goals adopted by developed countries today, it is clearly seen that the aim of the schools is to raise individuals who have a balanced personality in terms of body and emotion, can think freely, can make

rational and scientific decisions, have developed communication skills, know their duties and responsibilities towards their family, environment and society and try to fulfill them.

### **The Invalidity of the Idea of The Unnecessariness of Education Over the Success Stories of Uneducated People**

Another issue that the author emphasizes frequently in his book is the success stories of people who have not received a school education. He gives many examples through real people on this subject. For example, he writes (Gatto, 2009, xv):

a considerable number of well-known Americans never went through the twelve-year wringer our kids currently go through, and they turned out all right. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln? Someone taught them, to be sure, but they were not products of a school system, and not one of them was ever "graduated" from a secondary school.

the unschooled rose to be admirals, like Farragut; inventors, like Edison; captains of industry, like Carnegie and Rockefeller; writers, like Melville and Twain and Contad; and even scholars, like Margaret Mead.

In every society, it is possible to meet people who have written success stories even though they have left their education in the way the author states in his book. As in many other countries, there are people who have been deprived of even basic education in every country, but who have been successful and famous in different ways in their later life. However, the number of these people is quite small, incomparable with the masses of millions. In other words, the number of such successful people is very limited everywhere and it is too few to generalize. These examples do not lead to the conclusion that public education is unnecessary today.

In another page, Gatto tells the story of the German Phoenix company moving from Germany to China. According to the author, the Germans needed expert teams to do this job, and they made a three-year plan for this. somehow, the Chinese say that they can handle this job in a shorter time, and moreover, with uneducated villagers. The story goes like this (Gatto, 2009, 31-32):

Not long ago, the ThyssenKrupp Corporation of Germany decided to unload its mighty "Phoenix" steel plant in Dortmund. ... The decision was made to sell all 220 acres of buildings to China. ... Management expected two payoffs: one in the sales price, and one in the bill to move the plant from Dortmund to near Shanghai. Thyssen Krupp estimated that would take three years and an army of specialists. ... China bought Phoenix, but choked on the moving bill. They would do the job themselves. One fine day a raggedy band of a thousand peasants led by peasant Shen Wenrong showed up in Dortmund.

Here's a capsule of data to help you think about Mr. Shen: He didn't use a computer. He didn't have a real office. He worked from behind something looking suspiciously like a kid's school desk. ... In three weeks, his crew built its own dormitories and commissary. Then it broke the steel plant down. Crated it. Shipped it to China. Uncrated it. And set it back up, inside of *one* year, not three. Numerous rules were broken in the process whenever more creative problem-solving seemed appropriate. ... If unschooled peasants can demolish and re-erect a steel plant three times faster than professionals, then you and I need to re-examine everything we've been conditioned to accept as truth.

There are many similar examples in Gatto's books and articles. People who are successful in real life, although they have never been educated, are described as examples. Based on these examples, it is concluded that there is no need for school and education. Of course, this is also an important mistake.

### **The Fact that Compulsory Education is Necessary Now and in The Future**

It is seen that there have been significant changes in the basic functions of education from the past to the present. Today, “education is a multifaceted enterprise with scientific, technological, political, psychological, socio-economic and cultural objectives” (Dinçer, 2003, p.105). Society consists of institutional structures with strong functional ties between them. The importance of educational functions listed above cannot be denied in the formation, development and maintenance of ties between social institutions. Education plays a leading role in the production and systematization of scientific knowledge. Technology production is largely based on scientific research and systematic knowledge production. Although there are critical approaches to the political function of education (Tan, 1990; İnal, 1996; Apple, 2006; Althusser, 2019), the protection and development of the political structure adopted by the society can best be achieved through education. Society consists of an order with its institutions and rules. The social function of education comes into play in providing and maintaining this order that society should have. Norms, values, rules and all kinds of cultural elements that ensure social integration are transferred to young generations through education. Likewise, it is possible to train the workforce in the best way necessary to produce the goods and services needed by the society through education. In other words, the human capital required for the economic development of the society can be raised to advanced levels through education.

Today, the success of countries such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan can be given as concrete examples. International student assessment programs such as PISA and TIMSS also confirm it. These countries were among the very backward countries in terms of economy and technology production in the 1960s and 70s. “However, since then they have taken their place among

the few developed economies of the world by determining their education system as a strategic field and developing their human capital” (Şimşek, 2015, 73). Finland, which improves its human capital through education and increases the welfare of its people through economic development, should be included among these countries.

The importance of applying qualified and systematic training programs in the formation of human capital is still valid, and this superior function of education will continue in the near future, as well. The report of the Ministry of Development (Turkey) on the subject includes the following determinations: “Education is one of the most important determinants of the current welfare level of societies and the social and economic mobility between generations. It is known that the quality of education is more effective than the length of stay in education for the development of countries, and global developments rapidly change expectations from education” (Ministry of Development, 2018, p.ix). Educational institutions will also have an important place in the construction of smart societies (Society 5.0) of the near future. “Individuals need to be ready and active for the super-smart society of the future, where artificial intelligence, internet of things, deep learning, big data and human-object-human interactions and communications will be decisive and everything from household appliances to cities will be smart. This is only possible with a dynamic education system integrated with the global world” (Çengel, 2021, p.19).

In addition to all these basic functions, another prominent function of education today is related to the environment. The environmental function of education includes leaving a sustainable living space for future generations by better protecting the environment in which people and all living things live. Rapid production and unconscious use of natural resources, especially with industrialization, have led to some deterioration in the balance of nature today. The world we live on and all living things, depending on it, are faced with risks that are emerging today and may cause bigger problems in the near future. It is also seen as the environmental function of education to create an awareness in all individuals about these problems and to ensure that natural resources are protected more consciously and used rationally. The basis of environmental education is the understanding of protecting nature and natural resources and maintaining a life in harmony with nature. Environmental education should be given to all individuals in educational institutions. Environmental education is important for a sustainable development. According to Dinçer (2003), people of our age should have a skeptical personality who knows how to learn, sees knowledge as a very valuable tool, and accepts that there can be no absolute truth in any sense. He is not content with what is taught and given to him, he is critical, acts like a change agent, is open to innovations and produces new values. Today's societies should consist of tolerant individuals who are interested in politics, equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills in the field in which they will work, with a democratic personality, and who do not treat anyone with prejudice. Today's society should be formed from people who have

learned to think, know how to research, produce and research the right thing while producing, and can add value to their products by using their creativity.

Individuals who are sensitive to natural and social events, who are aware of the fact that their freedom and individuality are very valuable and do not compromise on these, have unlimited imagination, self-respect and self-confidence can be raised through education. As a matter of fact, raising people with these characteristics constitutes the general objectives of the education systems of all countries. All these show that the functions of education continue to increase today and in the future, but the philosophical foundations of education, the quality of education, the way of planning and implementing education, and the approaches of managing the system have changed.

### **Gatto's Stance against Scientific Studies and Frivolity of his Claims**

What reveals that Gatto's thoughts are not based on scientific foundations are his thoughts on scientific studies. Gatto makes fun with the scientific studies on education and pedagogy and the theories developed based on them. He rejects the basic theories accepted by the scientific world, using concepts such as "madness" and "fraud" in a manner that does not comply with scientific ethics.

Gatto's thoughts most deserving of criticism are his thoughts on scientific studies. Science, as a systematic study, includes efforts to reveal events and phenomena through experimentation, observation and research. Scientific studies and the theories developed based on them emerge as a result of long-term and self-sacrificing work with the cooperation of many people. Gatto, on the other hand, almost mocks them and makes fun of them. Regarding pedagogy and psychology, he uses the following expressions (Gatto, 2009, 45):

When the smoke cleared fifty years later, the imitation sciences of pedagogy and psychology had been imported from northern Germany, pressed into service through the school institution to create a proletariat: family-less, land-less people with only weak ties to religion, tradition, or culture.

From these words of the author, we understand that he does not value pedagogy and psychology at all. He sees the works of Bloom, who has an important place in the field of education, as madness and he makes fun of his studies with the following statements (Gatto, 2009, 4):

Benjamin Bloom's multi-volume *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, an enormous manual of over 1,000 pages out of Blooms Office at the University of Chicago. Later, this work impacted every school in America. Blooms massive effort is the work of a genuine academic madman, constituting, in his own words, "a tool to classify the ways individuals are to act, think and feel as the result of some unit of instruction."

While the author describes the work as 'imposing' and 'huge-dimensional', on the one hand, he makes fun of it and implies that it has negative effects on individuals.

Gatto sees the developmental stages and developmental psychology of the individual, which has an important place in education, as fake and evaluates the studies on these areas as fraudulent (Gatto, 2009, 45):

To enlist public opinion behind this utopian transformation, a pathological state of youth, heretofore unrecognized by history, was designed by G. Stanley Hall of Johns Hopkins University. He called it *adolescence* and debuted the condition in a huge two-volume study of that name, published in 1904. Trained in Prussia as behavioral psychologist Wilhelm Wundt's first assistant, Hall identified adolescence as a dangerously irrational state of human growth requiring psychological controls inculcated through schooling.

These and other similar expressions are seen more frequently in Gatto's books, articles and interviews. The author's view of education as unnecessary and presenting education as a "weapons of mass instruction" or a process that "dumbing us down" is a situation without any scientific or academic basis. These thoughts have no equivalent in current life. For this reason, this and similar approaches and thoughts should not be valued.

### **Discussions and Conclusions**

What Gatto criticizes and opposes is formal education. Schools are places where formal education is carried out. This is what Gatto opposes and rejects. Gatto commends a form of education that is only informal, that is, there is no regulatory mechanism, and that takes place spontaneously, and reduces education entirely to this category. This kind of educational practice was done when societies did not form complex structures yet, and it was sufficient then. Today, this kind of education practices continue as a complement to formal education. However, in today's conditions, an incidental, voluntary, unsystematic and even incompatible education practice is far from meeting the needs of individuals and societies at our present time. An effective education in today's conditions should be based on a plan and program. Again, the training required by today's conditions can be only given in specially designed environments, schools and by professionally trained experts, teachers and educational leaders.

Education increases human capital and expands employment opportunities. It provides economic productivity, increase in individual and national incomes and contributes to economic growth. The benefits of education to individuals are not limited to these economic values and go far beyond them. Education liberates individuals. Şimşek (2018, p.10) named a book he published as "Only the educated are free" due to the importance of education and he stated that this phrase belongs

to Epictetus, one of the Ancient Greek philosophers. As it is understood, education is seen as a process that develops and liberates individuals from ancient times to the present, and it also includes the education of the mind. From this point of view, education is to develop individuals' correct and rational thinking skills. Besides, education makes people healthier and helps them gain more control over their lives. It leads to the formation of trust between individuals and thus increases social capital. Social capital increases the level of shared welfare at the social level by strengthening institutional structures.

Today, education has become multidimensional and therefore it has become necessary to redefine the organization as a pluralistic and universal phenomenon and to think about it with new paradigms. These developments also significantly affect learning and research activities. It assigns new roles to the school, teacher and students (Uçak and Doğan, 2020). The main reason for these reforms and paradigm shifts in the field of education in the current period are the new situations, the developments at the global level and the need of individuals to have new skills in the face of these new situations. Education is both an individual and a social need as it has a purpose above all social values and institutions in the real sense (Dinçer, 2003, p.110-111).

One of the most basic needs of today's societies is a sustainable economic model, individuals who can respond to the requirements of the age and have employable qualifications. Societies can only meet these basic needs today and in the future with qualified education systems. However, a model based on thinking, researching and questioning should be developed instead of the old paradigm based on transferring information to students in education. Thus, students will be happier by using their imagination, exploring and improving their creativity. Schools and educational institutions will also become more fun, and they will not be boring places as Gatto claims.

It seems important to develop policies in education and to implement the necessary transformations in education with an approach in line with the spirit of the time. As Uçak and Doğan (2020 p.43) emphasized “in a world that is changing, transforming and evolving into a new formation every day; new perspectives required by the century are needed. It is understood that the continuity of education, which is accepted as a long process, is a necessity to rethink education from long-term education policies to daily gains”. Although there are different ideas and approaches towards education, education plays a key role in meeting individual and social needs today and in the future. For this reason, providing easy access to quality education for individuals is among the basic duties of governments. States also take the necessary initiatives to fulfill this duty and constantly strive to have a better education system.

It is necessary to take into account the criticisms of the important names of critical pedagogy on education systems and school practices. However, the conditions in which societies live, the

historical processes they live in, their levels of economic development, and their socio-economic indicators show that school is still an indispensable necessity (Uçak and Doğan, 2020). For this reason, an education paradigm that will meet the needs of today's and future societies should be created and implemented, taking into account the justified criticisms of education systems and school practices. Instead of taking such an approach, Gatto completely rejects public education and schools. However, it does not seem possible to build the smart societies of the future by completely rejecting education and schools.

Critical thoughts arguing that compulsory education is unnecessary can be based on different reasons. It may be justified to some extent to question the quality of education systems for not being effective enough, for not providing equal opportunity etc. Generating well-intentioned and scientifically based ideas about schools can be beneficial for our future in order to create a better social order and minimize inequalities between people. However, it is seen that Gatto's thoughts are not within this scope.

As Cemaloğlu (2018) detects, the aims of some people are not to improve compulsory education, but to realize their own secret aims in an environment where there is no compulsory education, to put the masses to sleep by giving them opium, and to reach their secret goals. These people cannot be expected to produce positive things for our future. The ideas put forward by Gatto in his books (2007, 2009, 2017; also published in Turkish, 2009, 2018) are briefly that public compulsory education and schools are unnecessary. As in the rest of the world, unfortunately, there are people in our country who adopt these ideas and try to spread them. However, the necessity of public compulsory education and schools is an undisputed reality in the historical process and today, and there is a wide literature on this subject (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Becker, 1993; Öztürk, 2001; Heater, 2004; World Bank, 2017; Khattab, 2017; Alwi and Rauf, 2019; Minc, 2019; Gul, Bashir and Mustafa, 2020). For this reason, public education that can meet the needs of the age we live in and comply with scientific principles should be requested, protected and maintained. In order to make the individual improvement and social development power of education more effective, studies that can minimize the inequality of opportunity in education should be given importance. While Gatto opposes schools outright, on the other hand, he tries to put forward alternatives so that educational activities that he cannot deny can be given to all individuals. What he suggests about education is self-education and home schooling, that is, leaving education by itself. However, education is not a subject to be left to its own fate. Equality of opportunity should be provided in education in order to make the power of education more effective for individual and social development. A new educational paradigm that can meet the needs of the individuals and societies of the future should be developed and practiced.

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