

An Analysis of the Socio-Economic Root of the Technical Programme Choice in Higher Education: A Sample from Tarsus Technical Education Faculty

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the social class basis of the technical education choices with reference to the students' socio-economic features in Tarsus Technical Education Faculty. The data were obtained through a questionnaire from 427 students studying at Tarsus Technical Education Faculty, Mersin University. The data were analyzed with frequency and percentage analysis from the descriptive statistical techniques. The main concern of the study was to make an analysis of the foundations of the social classes for the preference of technical education. For this purpose, the prevalence of the students' socio-economic features has been tried to be specified. Although this prevalence rate increases, more students' socio-economic features are accepted to be matched. According to the findings, the socio-economic features of the students show a homogeneous distribution. This homogeneity has mostly been observed in lower socio-economic features. Accordingly, the students at Tarsus Technical Education Faculty are mostly lower socio-economic rooted. The number of students with upper socio-economic features is rather small. Almost all of the students come from families whose incomes are below the poverty threshold. Parents of the students are mostly working in arm dense, poor quality, unqualified or semi qualified jobs. Once more, it is specified that the parents' education level is low and the number of students whose parents graduated from higher education is also low. Findings of the other social and economic features have the characteristics of lower socio-economic status. These determinations indicate that there are direct links between social class and educational choices.

Key Words

Higher Education, Socio-Economic Root, the Choice of Technical Education.

This study discusses the composition of students in a technical education faculty where the reflections of the socio-economic features of the individuals can be observed on their technical education course choices. The system of regenerating the social structures and their functions are the

general problem of the study. With reference to this problem, the relationship between choosing the technical education with the socio-economic origin is trying to be identified. It is accepted that identifying the socio-economic features of the students at Mersin University Tarsus Technical Education Faculty will have an impact on the relationship between choosing technical education and socio-economic features.

The relationship between education and the society's opportunity, privilege and power structure (Tan, 1987) reveals itself in the level of education, type of school or university and faculty. The choice of a university or a course is highly influenced by the social classes and it affects the root of the students' future life as Reay and Ball says (1998, p. 444). The ratio of the students from the upper social

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classes is generally greater than the ones belonging to the lower social classes in all higher education faculties. This is especially true in universities and courses and they appear to have a higher stake in the job market for their graduate which shows the differences of the educational choices made (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1995; Centre for the Study of Higher Education [CSHE], 2008; Zimdars, 2010).

In this study the choice of technical education is discussed in the social reproduction context. There are a few studies discussing the education in a social reproduction context. Apple (2006), Ball, Davies, David, and Reay (2002), Bernstein (1990), Bourdieu (1995), Bowles & Gintis (2001) pointed out the relationship between the different social classes, educational choices and the other social, cultural and economic conditions.

As for Archer, Halsal, and Hollingworth (2005), CSHE (2008), Eserpek (1977), Goldthorpe (1996), Van Zanten (2005), Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung (2003) the choice of education is a rational investment. It seems that both approaches share the same emphasis on the social classes' roots of the educational choices. However, 'the social reproducers' indicate that the differentiation of educational choices comes from a predisposition in the historicity due to the obligations and conditions, 'the rational decision-makers' points out that the social classes act rationally about the most appropriate choice.

There are many studies showing the inequalities in the distribution of the students in higher education according to their social class worldwide (Apple, 2006; Ball et al., 2002; Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1995; Bowles & Gintis, 2001; CSHE, 2008; Greenbank, 2007; James et al., 1999; Long, 2002; McCowan, 2004). The number of the studies are limited in Turkey, which covers the area of how students decide whether or not to have higher education and if so which university or faculty and department to choose for their study. The common significant point of the studies is to provide the students socio-economic related features data to the education management so that course practice and activities can be planned and implemented. Akyurt's (2009), Atasever's (2007), Gizir et al. (2010), İssi's (2008), Keskin, Koraltan, and Öztürk's (2010), Nartgün and Yüksel's (2009), Sarpkaya's (2010), Şahin's (2005), Şenol and Tüfekçi's (2007), Yiğit, Esenay, and Derebent's (2007) studies are some of the profile studies that have been conducted recently. In these profile studies, the relationship between the students' choice of higher education and their social roots has not been mentioned. Özsoy's (2004)

and Buyruk's (2009) studies are the latest ones that deal with the educational choices associated with the social roots.

Lower social classes are faced with many difficulties in gaining access to academic education which include the economic, cultural, and educational factors. Economical difficulties, parental or peer support inadequacies, cultural or linguistic inadequacies (Andrews, 1999; Apple, 2006; Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1995; Bowles & Gintis, 2001), lack of educational opportunities, the rareness of the sample or lack of inspirational figure in the region (Eserpek, 1977), a lower level of academic expectation, the lower academic success, the lower school completion rate (CSHE, 2008), the lack of self-confidence about academic success and the perception that higher education is inaccessible (Archer et al., 2005) may be countable among these difficulties.

The socio-cultural-economic capital provides an important clue in understanding the choices in higher education. The families' tendency to reproduce forms the basis of educational strategies. The social characteristic of the family continues the influence the individual's choice of higher education and also on the individuals' whole life. Families' education level, their profession and income levels influence and impact the early level of education as well as the students' choice when it comes to higher education (Archer et al., 2005; Bourdieu, 1995; Burgess, Gardiner, & Propper, 2006; Connor et al., 2001; CSHE, 2008; Dryler, 1998; James et al., 1999). Family members working in the labour intensive jobs create an emotional tendency (Habitus) in the choice of technical courses in the higher education. Their perception is that these programmes give them a sense of security in terms of increasing one's employability and are less likely to become unemployed or jobless in the labour market (Kellsall et al., 1972 as cited in Werfhorst et al., 2003, p. 45; Swingewood, 1998). Thus, the tendency to the manual labour intensive technical programme becomes an alternative that creates an opportunity which reduces the risk of not having education or not becoming unemployed (Goldthorpe, 1996, p. 496). As well as social and environmental conditions, possible tuition fees, the expenses which are directly related to education such as books, stationery, photocopying, and the cost of housing and transportation affect the higher education choices (Kim, 2004, p. 43). However, the increasing of education fees and decreasing of the unpaid economic aid provided to students further reduce the education costs to individuals (Pyke, 2004, p.201).

Method

In this study it is aimed to understand the social roots of the technical education choice by defining the socio-economic features of the students studying at Mersin University Tarsus Technical Education Faculty. This study is carried out by descriptive method, and as Bourdieu and Wacquant (2003, p. 237) says that it is also aimed to understand the social reality in terms of the social, cultural, and economic dimensions. In the study the social roots of technical education choices has been specified according to the common socio-economic features of the students and their families.

In the study, it is accepted that the technical education is mostly preferred by the social classes related to the students' predominantly centralized socio-economic features. On the other hand, it is accepted that finding little or non-socio-economic features is accepted as an indicator of social class roots of technical education choices. In this regard, while specifying the students' socio-economic features, on the other hand little or non-socio-economic features are also determined.

Research Group

874 students studying at Mersin University Tarsus Technical Education Faculty in 2008-2009 academic year took part in the study. Tarsus Technical Education Faculty, which was established to train teachers for the technical high schools, consists of two branches and six departments, which mostly trains students for private sector because of the limitations in the teachers' assignments. The students are high school and vocational technical schools rooted. The graduate students are mostly employed as a worker or technical personnel in private companies or workshops.

Instrument

The data collection tool 'the socio-economic composition of higher education students' has been designed by the researcher. The data were collected by a questionnaire which consists of 23 questions. In the study the socio-economic features of the students are divided into two basic levels according to the studies that have been previously carried out (Andrews, 1999; Archer & Hutchings, 2003; Bourdieu, 1995; Burgess et al., 2006; Connor et al., 2001; CSHE, 2008; James et al., 1999; Rowan, 2003). 'Lower social class' referred as the lower-economic conditions whereas 'upper social class' referred

to as the 'higher economic conditions' which has relatively better conditions. Three basic indicators are specified for the socio-economic status of the students, from the point of mentioned researches above: 'the level of individual-family income', 'the jobs of the parents' and 'the education level of the parents.'

'The level of family income' is classified according to 'the national research of the income level' which has been published by Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş) since 1988. According to the research data collected in May, 2009, the starvation line for a family of four is 744 TL and the poverty line is 2.423 TL (Türk-İş, 2009). In the study, the family whose income level is below the poverty line is included to the 'lower socio-economic level', and the ones whose income level is above the poverty line is included to the 'upper socio-economic level'. The jobs of the parents have been classified into two categories with reference to Rowan (2003): The arm labor intensified qualified, semi qualified and unqualified jobs are accepted as a 'lower level socio-economic' indicator. The jobs which requires a specific educational career and head labor are accepted as a 'upper socio-economic level' indicator. While classifying the parents education level, the illiterates and 'the primary, secondary and two year degree graduates' are included in lower socio-economic level. The ones who have a bachelor or postgraduate degree are included in upper socio-economic level.

Process

The application of the data collection tool was carried out by the researcher in May, 2009. In the study a quantitative approach has been adopted, the inferences have been made through frequency and percentage values.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study show consistency with most of the studies which deal with the social root in the higher education choices. According to the findings, it is conferred that there is a parallelism between the social and economic composition of the students at Tarsus Technical Education Faculty and the characteristic features of the lower class. On the other hand, upper social economical level features are slightly seen and this shows that the choice of technical education mostly belongs to the lower class community.

Most of the participants who have taken part in the study are male. The difference between the male-female students rate can be attributed to the technical programmes of the faculty. Besides the students are city-rooted. Most of the students come from city and county town as Turkish Statistical Institute` [TÜİK] data in 2009 shows % 75,5 of Turkish live at city and county town (TÜİK, 2010). The education level of the parents, which is a main indicator of the social features, shows that the students come from under educated families. The number of the students whose parents graduated from higher education is low. Especially, the mothers' education level is very low. The students' expectations from the university are basically about finding guaranteed jobs offering better working condition. More than considering university as a part of life, accepting university education as a guarantee for their future is a low level class community feature. Generally, the social and cultural funds are at a low level, and this shows that the students come from socially and culturally low level funds families. The parents education level is low, besides the students expectations from university is mostly limited to being employed and their socio-economic capital is not enough. These are the factors that affect the students' choice in higher education. The results related to the economic features points to the students' lower social class level and are consistent with the results of the socio-cultural study. Nearly all the students come from families whose income level is below the poverty line. More than one fourth of the students' families incomes are below the starvation line. Only five per cent of the students' families' income is above the poverty line. This shows that there is almost no upper level rooted students. Another result supporting this evaluation is that the students' monthly income level is low. Only 6,8 % of the students are working at an income-generating job. The vast majority of the students meet their requirements with the family or public supports. Yet, almost half of the students point that they have suffered constant or frequent financial difficulties in the recent year. It is seen that in terms of the business of the families variables, one of the main determiners of the family's economic situation, is the low level economic features.

A large part of the parents work compromises of arm intense unqualified (farmer, worker) or semi qualified (private sector paid) jobs and especially public work such as public servants which do not require specific educational training

While most of the mothers are housewives, one in six per cent has jobs that can yield money. Based on this result, it can be said that the majority of the families' income depends on the men working, which is a characteristic of a lower social level.

Another result of the economic situation is related to the students having difficulty in meeting their basic needs. According to the findings, more than half of the students are having constant or frequent difficulty while meeting their health, dressing, sheltering and socio-cultural activity needs. In the study, the findings about the students at Tarsus Technical Education Faculty have similar characteristics with the findings of the studies conducted in the vocational schools which have similar characteristics (Akyurt, 2009; Keskin et al., 2010; Köse, 1999; Nartgün & Yüksel, 2009; Şenol & Tüfekçi, 2007; Tanrikulu, 2009). The findings of both this study and the mentioned ones show that the students studying in educational organizations which have similar social, cultural, and economic profit correspond to the characteristics of lower social level features.

The findings of the limited numbered studies conducted in Turkey reveals similar conclusions with the ones conducted in other countries. Burgess et al., (2006) in America, James et al., (1999), CSHE (2008) in Australia, in America and Canada, Ball et al., (2002), Connor et al., (2001), Pennell and West (2005), Werfhorst et al., (2003), Zimdars (2010) in England, McCowan (2004) in Brazil, Colley, James, Tedder, and Diment (2003) have revealed a relationship between social classes and educational life and educational choices in their studies. In these studies, it is emphasized that the main determiner of the individuals' educational life is the possessed social, cultural, and economic capital. Although, the ratio of upper social level students in the higher education is far more, there is scarcely any in this study. This supports the thesis that the departments which have a low employment and income level are more suitable to meet the requests of low social class level which is brought forward by McCowan (2004).

In conclusion, although the findings of the study are limited, it can be pointed that the choice of technical education in respect to having a classified qualification, maintains the reproduction function of these inequalities in the educational choice as long as the classified inequalities continues. From this point of view, radical solutions should be developed in order to remove the disadvantaged conditions of the lower social class level within

the frame of long term, equal, justice principles. Education should be evaluated as an opportunity for mental and intellectual development. The centered exams should be abolished and handling the higher education only as a labor force should be renounced. The position of education that has become the key in achieving the cultural, social and economic capital should be reviewed in modern society. Educational qualifications (diplomas) should not be seen as determiner criteria in the social context. The intellectual capacity of humanity should be improved and should be brought into a tool for the construction of more livable future.

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Dipnotlar

1 Bu çalışmada Bourdieu'nün 'sınıf' yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Bourdieu (1984; 1995), Marksist sınıf anlayışının, eyleyicilerin pratiklerinin kuramsal olarak belirlenimci (indirgeyici) ele alınışına çekinceli yaklaşır. Marx'ın sınıf kavramına yüklediği, 'ortak amaçlar için, diğer sınıfa karşı hareket eden, homojen ve sabit sınıfların varlığı yerine, koşullara ve beklentilere göre geçişlerin bulunduğu, sosyal ve ekonomik sermayeye göre toplumsal yaşamın farklı alanlarında çıkarları örtüşen bir toplumsal bölünmeyi gerçekçi bulur. Bir başka ifadeyle kağıt üzerindeki kurgusal sınıfların, toplumsal eyleyicilerin oluşturduğu gerçek gruplar olarak algılanmasını eleştirir. Anlamı üreten ve bu anlamlarla bağlantılı olarak diğerlerini üreten (diğer grupları tanımlayan), bir başka ifadeyle üreten ve üretilen toplumsal grupları ve gruplar arasındaki koruma-elde etme mücadelelerini kavramak daha gerçekçi olacaktır.

2 Bourdieu (1986) sermayeyi, toplumsal oyunda, çıkarları üretici ve yeniden üretici potansiyel olarak, her şeyi eşit olmayan bir biçimde olanaklı veya olanaksız hale getiren araçlar olarak görür. Birikimsel bir niteliği olan sermayenin türü ve niceliksel dağılımı toplumsal oyunda çeşitli biçimlerde gerekli olan sosyal enerjiji sağlayarak, eyleyicilerin başarı şansını belirler. Sahip olunan sermaye bir yönüyle bulunulan konumun hem kaynağı hem de ürünüdür. Sermaye türleri zamana ve topluma göre anlam kazanır. Temel üç sermayeden sözeder: *Ekonomik sermaye*, kısa erimde ve doğrudan paraya dönüştürülebilir ve mülkiyet hakları biçiminde kurumsallaşabilen sermayedir. *Kültürel sermaye*, belirli koşullarda ekonomik sermayeye dönüştürülebilir ve eğitimsel nitelikler biçiminde kurumsallaştırılabilen sermayedir. Zihinlerde ve bedenlerde uzun dönemli kalıcılığı olan, resim, kitap, enstrüman, makineler vb. biçiminde teorilerin ve problematiklerin kavranması gibi amaçları olan, eğitimsel niteliklerde olduğu gibi nesnelleştirilerek, güvence sağlayan sermayeleri kapsar. Sosyal sermaye, sosyal ilişkilerden oluşan yine belirli koşullarda ekonomik sermayeye dönüştürülebilir ve saygınlık ifadesi taşıyan unvanlar biçiminde kurumsallaşabilen sermayedir. Sosyal sermaye çıkarlara ulaşmada işlevsel olan kalıcı bir ilişkiler ağına, az çok kurumsallaşmış karşılıklı tanıma ve tanınmalar sayesinde elde edilen gerçek ya da potansiyel kaynakların toplamıdır. Yani böylesi bir ağına hareket geçirmeye olanak sağladığı sermaye ve güçlerin toplamıdır. Sosyal sermayenin gücü, sahip olunan sermayenin (ekonomik, kültürel veya simgesel) eyleyicinin içinde bulunduğu ilişkiler ağını, kendi lehine harekete geçirilebilmesine bağlıdır. Sosyal ilişkiler ağı, ister bilinçli, ister bilinçsiz, ister bireysel ister kolektif olsun kişi veya orta erimli kullanımı tasarlanan yatırım stratejilerinin ürünüdür.

Sermaye türleri büyük ölçüde ekonomik sermayeden elde edilir. Bazı çıkarlar doğrudan parasal değişime tabi iken bazıları ise ilişkilere bağlıdır. Özellikle sosyal sermayenin değeri, büyük ölçüde ilişkilerin zamansal geçişine bağlıdır. Sosyal ilişkilere bağlılık ve sadakatin geçmiş ne kadar uzarsa o denli diğer sermaye türlerine yüksek derecede dönüştürülebilir. Kültürel sermaye (özellikle eğitimsel nitelikler) daha yansız görünerek sembolik sermayenin dönüşümünü meşrulaştırır. Özellikle işgücü piyasasında ekonomik sermayeden daha uzun dönemli ve daha az riskli getirilere sahiptir. Kültürel sermaye -diğer sermaye türlerinin meşru dönüşmüş hali olarak- giderek sosyal yapıların yeniden üretiminde belirleyici etken haline gelmektedir. Eğitimsel nitelikler, giderek daha fazla oranda, geleneksel egemen grupların gücünün ve ayrıcalıklarının çocuklarına aktarımının meşru yolu haline gelmektedir. Daha az bulunan ve avantajlı konulara gelme hakkını vererek toplumsal nitelikler pazarında daha biçimlendirici bir etkendir.

3 Buradaki 'teknik' kavramı, yükseköğretimdeki meslek yüksekokulları ve teknik eğitim gibi çalışma koşulları ve ücretleri görece sınırlı, kol emeği yoğun, ağırlıklı olarak ara insan gücü (teknik personel) yetiştiren programları ifade etmektedir. Mühendislik alanları gibi temelinde teknik bir içeriğe sahip, ancak kafa emeği yoğun programlar kavramın kapsamı dışındadır. Yükseköğretim aşamasında tüm programlar mesleki yeterlik geliştirmeye yönelik olduğundan, 'mesleki-teknik' kavramı yerine, 'teknik' kavramı kullanılmıştır.

4 Bourdieu ve Wacquant (2003), Habitus kavramıyla, toplumsal ve tarihsel olarak, bedenlerde oluşan algı ve eylem şemalarını analiz eder. Tarihsel olarak bireysel ve kolektif eyleyicilerde, belirli yatkınlıkların ve elverişliliklerin oluşmasını, bu elverişliliklerin eyleyicileri yönlendirmesini ifade eder. Bu yönüyle rasyonel eylem teorisine karşıdır. Ancak bu, kadenci bir açıklama da değildir. Habitus, bireysel ve kolektif tarihin bağıntısıyla; eyleyicilerde bulunan tercih yapılarının, bu tarihler (geçmişler) aracılığıyla, onları üreten ve onların da yeniden üretme eğilimi gösterdikleri nesnel yapılarla karmaşık bir zamansal diyalektik içinde bulunur. Bourdieu ve Wacquant (2003) eylemlerin, anlık karşılıklar olmadığını, en küçük 'tepkinin bile, taraflar arasındaki bağıntının tarihiyle yüklü olduğunu belirtir.