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The Enacted Curriculum's Impact on Learner Identity and Inequities in Türkiye

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Inequities are apparent worldwide, and those are affected by many social, political, economic and educational factors. Especially in education, ideological perspectives shape the learners' future via educational components. The present study aimed to reveal the role of the enacted curriculum in deepening and reproducing inequities by making sense of the experiences of disadvantaged Turkish learners regarding identity construction. Interpretive phenomenology was used as a research design to achieve this aim based on sociological and sociocultural perspectives. Since interpretative phenomenology argues that experiences cannot be separated from social and cultural life, it is a design that naturally includes recognition, context and experience, forming learner identity dimensions included in this study's theoretical base. Participants comprised seven disadvantaged Turkish single mothers and their secondary-level children from different backgrounds. For data analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse interviews through MAXQDA2020. As a result of the analysis, it was shown that the learners constructed fluid identities based on different contexts and conditions. These identities were related to the reproduction of capital accumulation and reinforced by the enacted curriculum. In addition, social issues like COVID-19 affected the identities of learners since it had various social and educational results.

Introduction

The curriculum is an ideological tool that shapes learners' behaviors (Apple, 1990). The enacted curriculum refers to the interpretation and application of the official curriculum by the teacher. During this process, the teacher plans the teaching based on the curriculum's guidelines and existing conditions, but this plan may change according to the dynamics of the teaching-learning environment. Factors such as the teacher's past experiences, their adopted philosophy, their perception of the official curriculum, the characteristics of the teaching environment, and unexpected events during the teaching-learning process can differentiate the enacted curriculum from the official one. Additionally, whether the teacher views the curriculum as a guide or as a

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structure to be strictly followed can further impact how it is applied. Nonetheless, there is no complete departure from the official curriculum. In terms of scope, the content presented and emphasized by teachers, along with the learning outcomes and standards for which learners are held accountable, fall within the realm of the enacted curriculum (Posner, 2004).

A study by Klein, Tye, and Wright (1979) examined the enacted curriculum through observations across four dimensions: the physical environment, classroom activities, context-based teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, and materials used in the classroom. Considering all these dimensions and scope, it is evident that the sociocultural context emphasized in identity construction also plays a significant role in terms of the enacted curriculum. From the reconceptualization process, the enacted curriculum is considered a live structure that is experienced in many aspects, such as every context in which the learning-teaching process takes place, the individuals around them, the tools/materials they use, discourses at school or out of school, events that are indirectly exposed. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2008) described the curriculum as educational experiences explained by individuals. They also evaluated the curriculum as context-sensitive. In this way, the learning experiences, contextual factors, and the temporal process that formed these experiences were included in the scope of the enacted curriculum. Based on this perspective, when the curriculum is considered a phenomenological, ideological, biographical, feminist, racial, religious, aesthetic, and historical text, it enables us to focus on the identity and characteristics of learners.

From a sociological perspective, identity is a social construct encompassing gender, social class, race, ethnicity, age, and more (Jenkins, 2008). These social identities perpetuate inequities for disadvantaged groups, including in education. Bourdieu and Passeron (2019) highlight that a child of a senior manager is 40 times more likely to attend university than a child of an agricultural worker. Despite shared goals, farm workers' children's likelihood of success is lower. Reasons can be explained by Bourdieu's social theory. He defines habitus and four forms of capital: cultural, economic, social and symbolic. Bourdieu (2002) defines the habitus "as a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (p. 43). In simpler terms, habitus refers to the lifestyle, behaviors, and tendencies that a group of people living together have objectively internalized. This internalization influences every member of the group. It can also be seen as the field where Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, economic, and social capital are put into practice. Cultural capital encompasses an individual's and their family's intellectual accumulation, the materials reflecting this accumulation, and their academic qualifications. Social capital represents the network of relationships a person possesses and their social status/title. Economic capital refers to a socio-economic condition that can be converted into money (Bourdieu, 2018), while symbolic capital includes characteristics such as prestige, authority, and demeanor that highlight an individual, often in connection with other forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). Associated with the forms of capital and habitus, education, intended to bridge these disparities, often legitimizes and reproduces them, shaping learners' identities and perpetuating inequities. As a result, neither education nor schools are neutral. This dynamic can alienate disadvantaged groups, whose social identities may clash with societal expectations imposed through the curriculum, leading to differing expectations.

Apart from the sociological perspective, the sociocultural perspective takes identity as multidimensional and context-sensitive. The primary purpose of the sociocultural perspective is to evaluate the individual in a specific context or in relation to more than one context (Falsafi,

2010). Unlike the sociological perspective, this argues that individuals can have various identities based on roles, personality traits, activities and actions, and social categories. In addition, a learning process is required first to construct an identity for all social categories, such as gender, race or religion, which fall under the concept of social identity (Falsafi, 2010). The learner identity shapes this learning process. According to this perspective based on Vygotsky and going back to Hegel, identity is fluid, context-sensitive, and variable. Vygotsky's (1978) thoughts on social constructivism and the Situational Learning Theory emphasized by Lave and Wenger (1991) constitute the underlying context of this very perspective. Roberts (2007) specified that when individuals are given specific roles within certain practices, social forces legitimize the identities associated with those roles. For instance, although some fixed identity categories like race and gender are hard to change physically, they can be expressed differently in various social contexts. Knowledge transfer across different settings, such as home and school, is shaped by the relationship between learning and identity.

The sociocultural perspective considers identity from three dimensions: experience, context, and recognition. These three dimensions are in an ongoing relationship with one another. As a first dimension, experience covers discourses and narratives. According to Bruner (2002), narratives can explain who individuals are, what they do and why they do it. As narratives and stories allow learners to connect the past and the future, they provide clues about constructing learner identity (Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). While the learners interpret these experiences, decisions, activities, dominant ideologies, values, beliefs or norms, and pedagogical approaches also affect identity construction. These represent the context dimension. When individuals engage in different practices as learners, they not only communicate with other people but also interact with the entire sociocultural environment (Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Since this requires the unity of a group of people, it is closely related to the last dimension, recognition. Recognition is the consideration, questioning and approval of the individual by others. In this case, the individuals need to understand the learning purpose, the subject learned and the learning situation. They also make sense of themselves and the people around them in a particular situation. In a learning environment, learner identity is built through participation and interaction. Based on these dimensions, identity is considered in the interaction with social categories in this study (Figure 1).

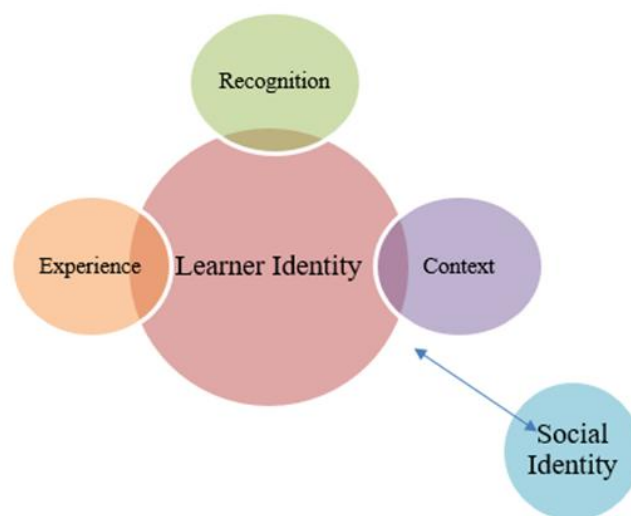


Figure 1. The Structure of Learner Identity

When the literature about identity construction was searched, it was shown that various disciplines worked on identity. These studies were generally related to English language learners' identity construction in different settings (Chen, Tan and Lei, 2022; Lian & Zheng, 2023; Moore, 2023); after-COVID-19 learner identity construction (Cubero-Pérez, Cubero, Matías-García & Bascón, 2023); pedagogic practices in different social compositions and identity construction (Kneppers, 2023; Wagner, 2022); learners' place identity construction through the curriculum (Kuwahara, 2013; Sianturi & Sumarsono, 2022); university students' learner identity construction in different fields (Cantillon, de Grave & Dornan, 2022; Timar-Anton, Negru-Subtirica & Opre, 2022). However, the studies about learner identity construction through the hidden curriculum were widespread in terms of curriculum studies. For instance, Anyon (1980) found that working-class and middle-class students were trained to be white-collar workers who did not require much analytical and creative thinking through the hidden curriculum, while upper-class students were trained to be artists, intellectuals, and scientific and technical experts. Elite students were trained to be leaders who could manage society and analyse social situations. According to Young (1971), those who hold power decide what information is available to whom and how much. This shows that decisions are taken based on the value judgments of the authority and that they are ideological in terms of curriculum. Ayling (2015) argued that Many elite Nigerian parents chose British private boarding schools for their children, as they thought these schools would provide them with qualities linked to excellence by immersing them in elite White British culture. These parents believed that being in White elitist environments helped their children acquire important traits like respectability and a refined accent. These attributes were crucial for establishing a true elite identity in contemporary Nigerian society. In terms of Chinese students, the learning and teaching process has shown that individuals take on different identities influenced by Western and Confucian values. These identities include the exam-oriented, the enterprising, the familial, and the free and happy identities (Wang, 2023). Each curriculum reflects different perspectives, and it causes fluid identities.

Understanding how disadvantaged learners build their identity within the curriculum's learning-teaching process and how this reinforces inequities is crucial since learning is continuous. As individuals learn throughout life, conditions change, as seen in the transition from face-to-face to distance education during the pandemic. This shift saw decreased participation rates, with disadvantaged learners facing more significant learning losses due to a lack of support, lower income levels, the type of school attended, and available opportunities (Alasuutari, 2020; Apples, Nygaard, Kerswill & Robinson, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Can, 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2020; Doyle, 2020; Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Thus, it is essential to explore how disadvantaged learners construct their identities through the curriculum in both face-to-face and distance education, from sociocultural and sociological perspectives, and how inequities are reproduced. Moreover, associating the learner's identity experiences with the curriculum provides deep learning (Esteban-Guitart, 2019). When developing or implementing the curriculum, considering learner identities can minimize inequities by making the outcome qualified.

In this study, the enacted curriculum, blending many fields such as feminist studies, sociology and psychology, was analysed as an ideological, autobiographical and phenomenological text. In addition, a critical perspective has been adopted. This approach allows disadvantaged learners to express themselves, question their identities, and determine what and why they have learned. Thus, the enacted curriculum will be transformative by revealing the reproduction of their disadvantaged position. The enacted curriculum covers all learning and teaching experiences, learners' families, peers, teachers, materials, approaches, methods and strategies,

learning context, decisions made by educators, and social, political and cultural factors that affect the implementation. In this context, it is aimed to reveal the role of the Turkish enacted curriculum in the deepening and reproduction of inequities by making sense of the experiences of disadvantaged Turkish learners about identity construction. The research questions are below:

- (1) How are disadvantaged learners perceived as learners in the learning-teaching process outlined by the curriculum?
- (2) How do the characteristics of the context in which the curriculum is implemented impact the process of identity construction for learners?
- (3) Through curriculum implementation, how do disadvantaged learners experience constructing their learning identity, both at school and at home?

Methods

This study was designed in interpretative phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs. In the philosophical approach of phenomenology, one should focus on individual experiences without focusing on a single reality to understand the essence of a phenomenon. As a research design, phenomenology involves discovering or interpreting individuals' experiences of a phenomenon by examining them deeply. It is crucial to discover the participants' perceptions about the phenomenon, how they experience it, what they feel, how they convey it to different individuals or how they make sense of it (Patton, 2018, p. 104). Since the study aims to make sense of the learners' experiences and to examine these experiences in-depth, this design was considered quite appropriate. Also, it is a context-sensitive design arguing that experiences cannot be separated from social and cultural life. In this respect, it can be said that it naturally includes recognition, context and experience, which form the dimensions of learner identity.

Participants

The snowball sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling techniques, was used to determine the participants in the study. In snowball sampling, it is possible to reach different people from a selected participant. According to Woodley and Lockard (2016), the primary purpose of snowball sampling is to reach individuals who cannot be reached immediately in daily life, especially those who avoid being accessible, sensitive, or suppressed/silenced. Since the individuals reached in this study also constitute a disadvantaged group, it overlaps with this aspect of snowball sampling. According to UNESCO (2021), a disadvantaged group is at risk of exclusion from education due to factors such as gender, poverty, special needs, location, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, or other characteristics. Individuals within this group are also frequently subjected to inequalities. For this reason, it was acknowledged at the outset of this study that socio-economically and gender-disadvantaged individuals experience inequality. Consequently, the relationship between disadvantaged groups and the presence of inequality was addressed in the study. First, the participants were identified by searching the immediate environment. The person who reached out is a single mother divorced from her husband, who lives in Türkiye. This mother is deemed suitable because she is known to be in a disadvantaged position regarding social class and gender. In this respect, her child is also in a disadvantaged group. The purpose of the study was briefly mentioned by interviewing this mother; she was asked whether she wanted to be included in the study and whether she knew other individuals who could be included in line with the purpose of the study. The first participant suggested five single mothers and their children as participants. Accordingly, the participants were limited to disadvantaged single mothers regarding social class and their



children who continue formal education. Since the study was conducted during the pandemic, it was deemed necessary for these children to have learning-teaching experiences in both face-to-face and distance education. Seven mothers and children agreed to participate in the study. In the reporting process, pseudonyms were used for all participants to ensure their confidentiality. Information about the characteristics of the participants was shared with their permission in Figure 2.

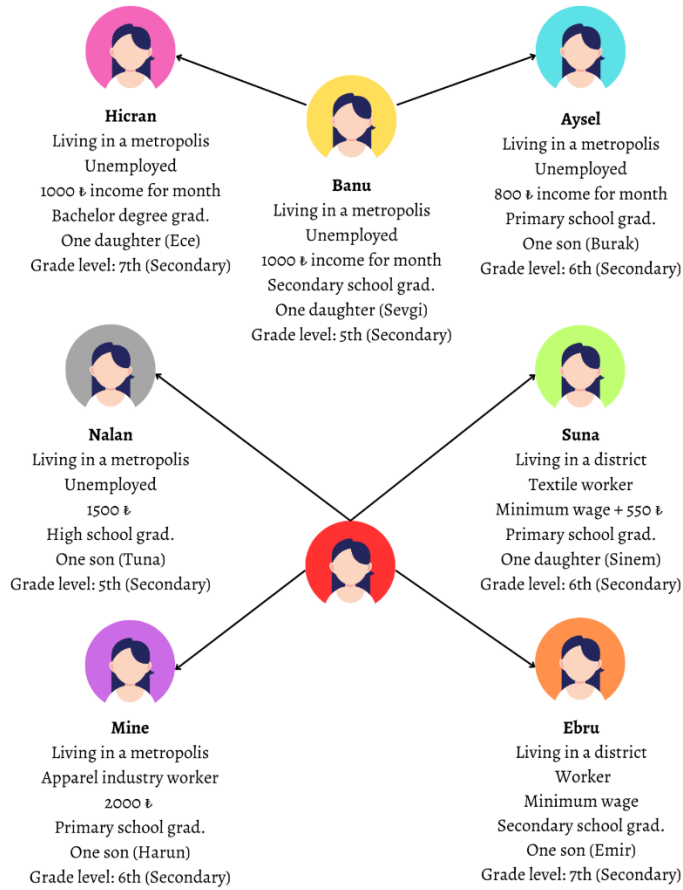


Figure 2. The Participants and Their Network

The participants predominantly come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with limited and unstable incomes, often relying on low-paying jobs, alimony, or familial support. Most are single mothers with low educational attainment, typically primary or middle school level, which affects their ability to assist their children academically. Social challenges, including strained relationships with ex-spouses, experiences of domestic violence, and reliance on external support, further impact their lives. Access to technology and the internet varies, creating disparities in educational opportunities for their children during the pandemic. These challenges highlight the compounded economic, social, and cultural disadvantages faced by the participants.

Data collection and analysis

This study used participant information forms, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to collect data. In addition, the researchers kept a research diary to record the steps, views and comments taken from the research planning to the reporting process. Where necessary, the diary data were also used. The researcher prepared the participant information form to obtain information about gender, education level, socio-economic status, occupation,

number of children, schools attended by the child/children, and digital access (internet connection, access to technological devices). The form was only applied to mothers. For semi-structured interviews, different questions were prepared for mothers and learners with the same purpose. The questions were mainly designed to reveal the parents' experiences regarding how they position themselves during the implementation of the curriculum and the experiences of learners regarding the identity construction through the enacted curriculum from the first moment they started school to the present, in terms of the learning-teaching process. Since the research process coincided with the pandemic, interviews were conducted by phone at different times. The analysis of the data obtained was intertwined with the data collection process.

The study used the interpretive phenomenological analysis method to analyse the data obtained. The MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis program was used for data analysis. The coding was carried out based on the literature and followed an inductive way. The researcher carried out the coding in three steps. In the first step, the entire interview was coded with in-vivo codes. In the second step, categories were created by grouping similar codes with descriptive codes. The coding revealed that the themes were grouped under the recognition, context, and experience that constitute the learner's identity. In this way, the interviews of both mothers and learners were coded separately, and the relationship between them was provided. However, everyone's experience made sense within themselves, and then similar experiences were grouped. It was not intended to make a direct generalization of experiences. A validity study was conducted among researchers throughout the analysis process of the study. The coding is finalized in more than two cycles.

Results

Disadvantaged Learners: What Is the Process of Recognition?

The disadvantaged learners seem to have a fluid identity in the learning-teaching process. This fluid identity was shown under two categories: perceptions of the environment and learners' self-perception. The code tree can be seen in Figure 3 for mothers and 4 for children.

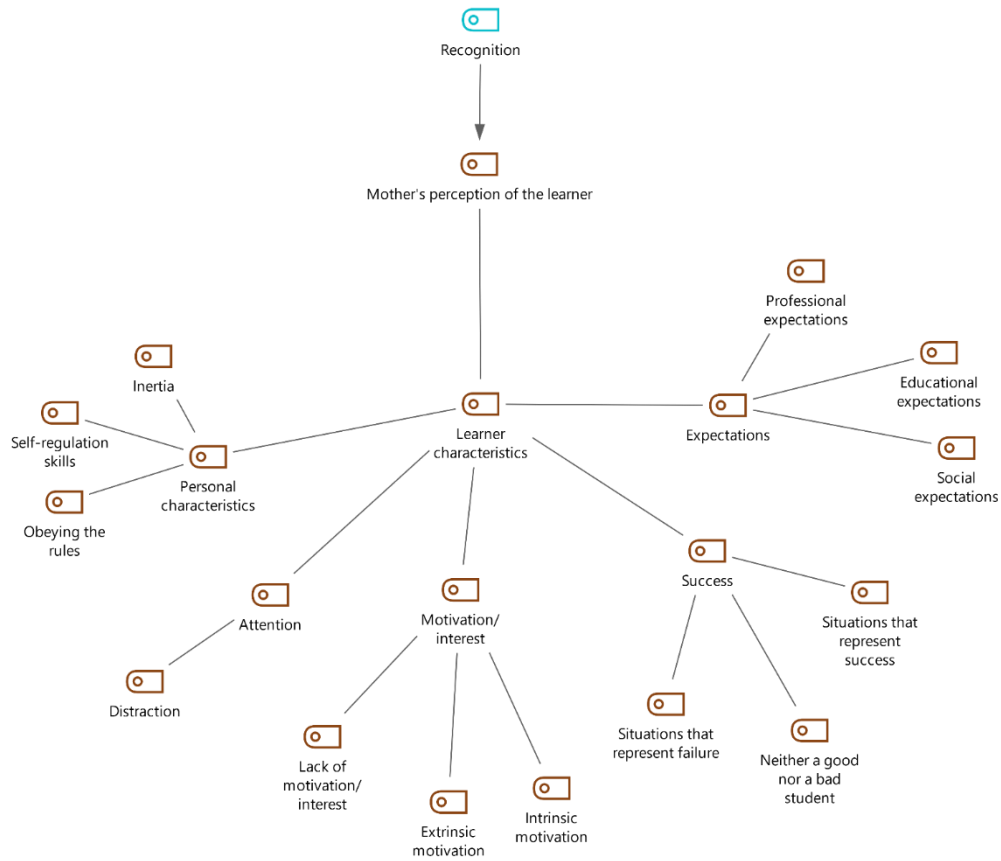


Figure 3. The Code Tree of Recognition Theme (Mothers)

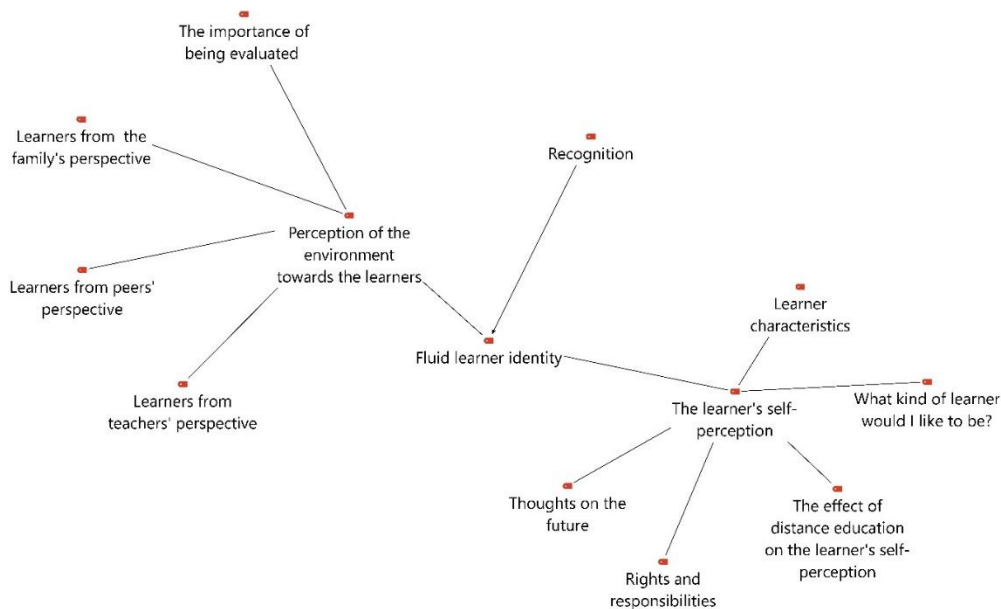


Figure 4. The Code-Tree of Recognition Theme (Children)

The environment included learners' mothers, peers, and teachers. Opinions were based on learners' perceptions of how their environment viewed their behavior. According to learners, their teachers, peers, and mothers evaluated them based on their characteristics and success, with teachers often comparing them to one another. Teachers focused on exam grades, task

accomplishment, good results, and learning. Learners valued teachers and were influenced by their classroom comments, leading them to compare themselves with peers. All learners felt that teachers guided them to study, participate, reach goals, and be active. Teachers expected students to be compatible, respectful, and quiet.

Regarding mothers, learners were seen as successful, intermediate, or lazy, with success judged by grades, certificates, motivation, and teachers' opinions. Failure was attributed to capacity, boredom, and lack of motivation or attention. Learners lacked motivation in courses they did not understand and avoided potential failure. All learners believed mothers/families had positive perceptions of them, though mothers also evaluated them negatively. Their first evaluation was based on rule obedience. Mothers were happy when children adapted to school and listened to teachers, wanting them to be easy-going and disciplined in class. One mother said these words:

Compatible, listening to lectures, doing homework, and taking materials. She was a perfect kid who kept up with school well. I will say it that way. There is nothing to open even more... However, I like her respect and compatibility with the school, class and teachers.

Another aspect reflecting mothers' perceptions was inertia. Some mothers noted that their children did not work voluntarily, mainly due to learning obstacles. During the pandemic, some learners did not attend classes and were unbothered by it. Those lacking self-regulation skills struggled, as they needed to follow schedules and assignments. High screen time and short attention spans also contributed to the difficulty.

Learners expressed how they were perceived by people around them and its importance. This perception impacted their concerns about the future, confidence, motivation to learn, and self-reflection. However, one learner noted that, unlike others, their motivation to study stemmed from the environment's negative thoughts. She recalled this with these words:

Nobody knew that; everybody thought that I could not have a job and would not be able to graduate, but I wanted to have a profession. Later, they returned and said she could do it. For example, there were some friends of my mom. They told those, but I still picked up and did it; I succeeded in the lessons. [When they said it] My eyes were full of tears; I struggled not to cry.

It was found that learners felt the need for approval, belonging, or participation, essential for their identity formation. When examining learners' self-perceptions, they generally viewed themselves as average in terms of success. Their perceptions of themselves in the learning process varied based on the environment, experiences, shared views, or current conditions, indicating fluid identity construction. In terms of their future-oriented thoughts, it was found that they preferred a successful education life and a high-status or permanent profession to 'save themselves.' Learners were also asked who the successful learner was. One of the learners said:

I always wanted my exam grades not to be below 80. Then, I always wanted to be appreciated. So, I would like to be pretty good... [To be more hardworking] I must work and read a book. So, I am doing it. Then, I must repeat what is written in the notebook continuously.

Where Can I Learn? What Does It Matter?

The context in which the learning-teaching process occurs is also critical in constructing learner identity. Contextual findings in the study were presented under three headings: teachers, peers, and family. These three groups formed the learner's sociocultural environment. The code tree can be seen in Figure 5 for mothers and 6 for children.



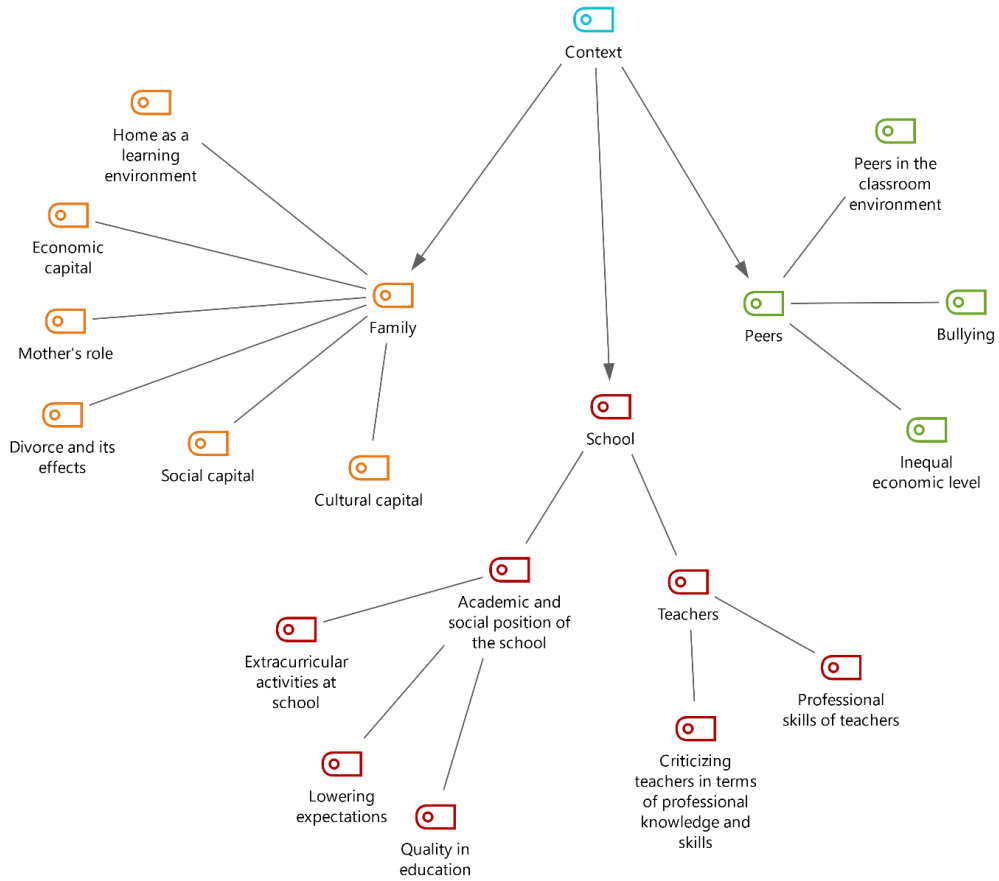


Figure 5. The Code Tree of Context Theme (Mothers)

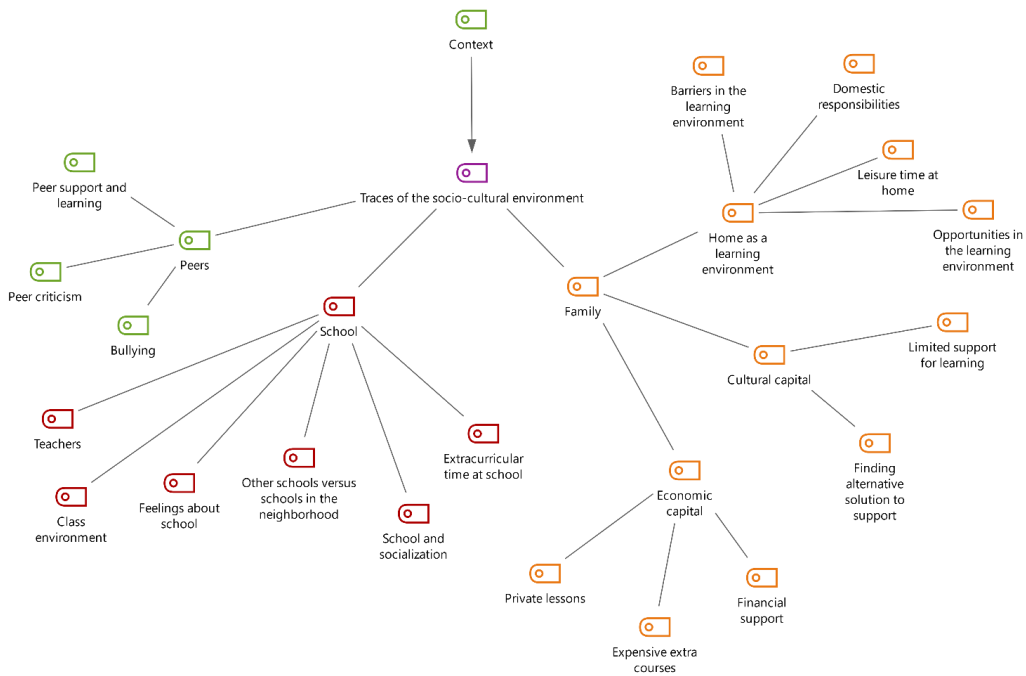


Figure 6. The Code Tree of Context Theme (Children)

School and Teachers

School as a context was a structure that included more than one participant. Therefore, there was also interaction within the context. Mothers acknowledged teachers for their strong teaching and communication skills but criticized them, particularly regarding classroom management and discipline. One mother suggested that teachers should effectively control the class while keeping learners engaged. Another argued that courses progressed well but emphasized the need for stricter supervision. Teachers were also criticized for their lack of effort in distance education, with concerns raised about inadequate communication with disadvantaged learners during the pandemic. This was mentioned by one of the mothers:

During the pandemic process, you know, instead of just giving synchronous classes and getting money from where they sit, I expect them to make more effort and be more successful and concerned. They think, 'We are doing our duty; we are already teaching,' Instead, they should ask what I can do for the children. I expect them to do that. So, we do not have many expectations; they do not show any concern. 'I am a teacher; I am trying to teach it!' They say, 'If s/he wants to learn, s/he learns it; if s/he does not, s/he will not. I have done my job. So, that is enough.' ... In my opinion, teaching is also a work of passion.

Mothers also expressed concerns that teachers were unfair. A socio-economically disadvantaged mother cited an example where her child and a teacher's child were treated differently, highlighting inequities at school. Mothers criticized teachers for not addressing learner characteristics, individual differences, and needs. They offered suggestions to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in classroom discipline, effective course delivery, learner-centered approaches, fairness, and communication. However, some of these mothers lacked more profound knowledge of school and education since they dropped out even in primary school.

Learners evaluated teachers based on various attitudes and characteristics. These included curiosity, discipline, meeting learner needs, fairness, impartiality, classroom supportiveness, enthusiasm, friendliness, and strictness. Learners tended to hold prejudices against teachers who did not fit their ideal of a "good" teacher. In their minds, this ideal teacher was supportive, friendly, adept at adjusting the tone of voice, encouraging work, maintaining discipline, fair in punishment, when necessary, non-discriminatory, and capable of sparking curiosity about the subject.

One learner categorized schools into good and bad schools. She labeled schools in her neighborhood as bad, attributing this judgment to shorter teaching durations and lack of homework assignments. A significant observation was that schools in her neighborhood seemed to adopt an attitude of "This child will not graduate anyway; let us stop trying to teach." This approach in a disadvantaged neighborhood highlighted and reinforced inequities.

Peers

The most significant issue with peers was bullying, which included verbal, social, physical, and cyberbullying. One male student found school boring and preferred staying home due to negative interactions with peers who provoked him during class. His mother was aware but did not intervene. On the other hand, a female student felt isolated at school without her friends and faced verbal and physical bullying. This mistreatment affected her motivation to learn and exacerbated her violent tendencies, leading to a physical altercation. Her mother, who had also experienced violence, did not effectively address the issue. Cyberbullying also emerged during distance education, with students mocking each other in chat messages.



Teachers focused on curriculum delivery often overlooked these issues. Despite challenges, learners missed the social aspect of school and valued peer interaction and support.

Family/Mothers

Family and mothers became more prominent during distance education. Mothers were asked about their educational experiences, with some having dropped out of school due to reasons like marriage, failure, financial issues, and family pressure, impacting their cultural capital. This low cultural capital influenced their children's participation in the learning process. Only one mother was a university graduate, showing more authoritarian involvement, while others with lower education levels relied on external help and the Internet to support their children. They often felt their children mirrored their own attitudes toward studying. When discussing their children's future, they expressed uncertainties, using phrases like "if they go to school," "if they succeed," "if they try," and "if they achieve their goals."

Economic capital was also significant for disadvantaged learners and their mothers. Mothers thought that when they were financially strong, they would be strong in all areas of their lives, with some not considering education compulsory because of economic constraints. They prioritized raising a good person first. This situation might have risks and consequences, such as the inability to continue education or to experience learning losses.

Regarding social capital, mothers highlighted limited communication with teachers before the pandemic despite valuing effective teacher communication. Distance education increased mothers' involvement, potentially enhancing their social capital.

The home environment, where all these distance education practices occurred, became more critical. Some mothers found this environment suitable for learning, and others did not. However, it was more distracting for the learners to experience the learning-teaching process at home, whether the space was private or shared. Regarding learners' household duties and responsibilities, the mothers thought of these as shopping, house cleaning, and everyday tasks. In contrast, the learners considered house cleaning, shopping, and preparing/cooking meals. The aim of helping the mother was emphasized. The leisure time spent at home was also mentioned. The learners enjoyed leisure activities such as going out and watching movies and television. However, some TV content was deemed inappropriate for their age group, covering sensitive topics like marriage, death, and crime.

What, Why and How Did I Experience It? Education, Schools, and Pandemic

Mothers' and learners' experiences during the learning-teaching process are essential in identity construction. The code trees related to these experiences are seen in Figures 7 and 8.

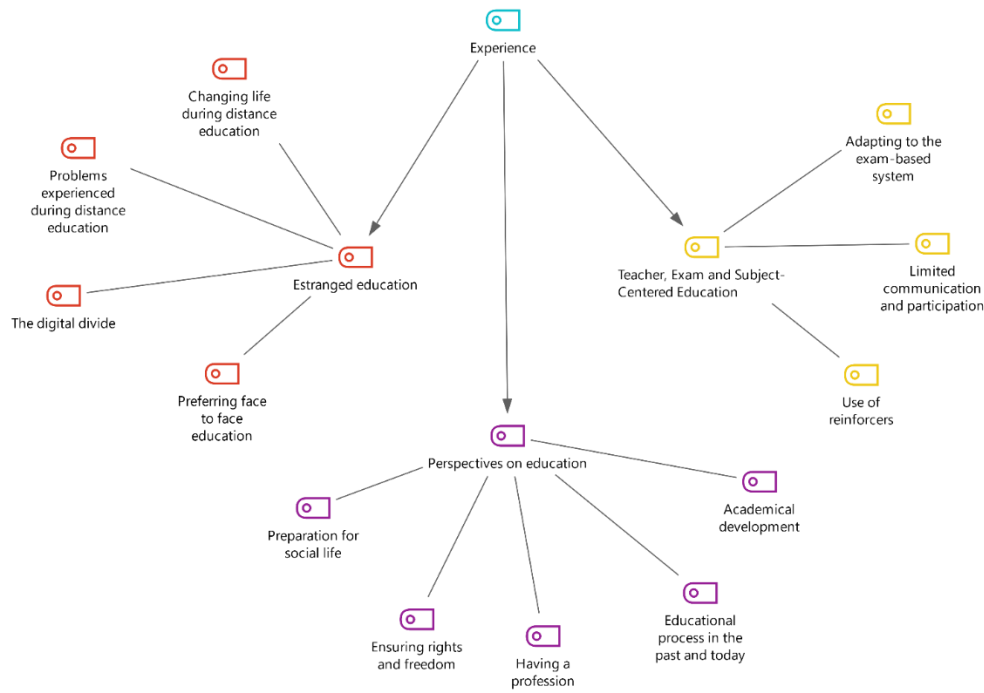


Figure 7. The Code Tree of Experience Theme (Mothers)

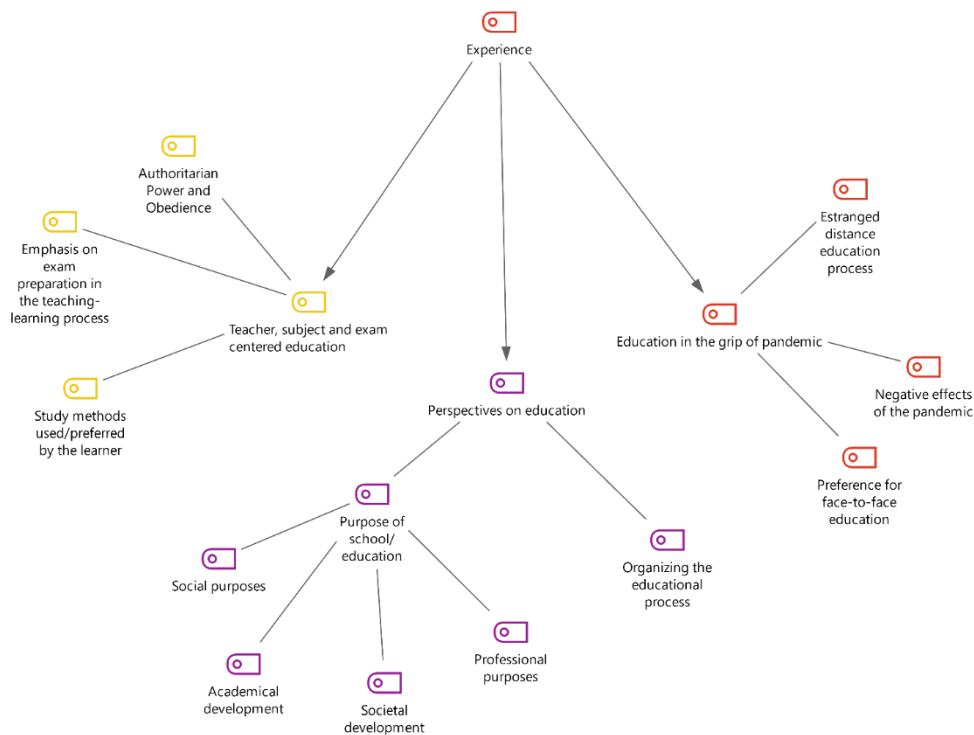


Figure 8. The Code Tree of Experience Theme (Children)

Mothers thought that going to school was a right and freedom. According to one of the mothers, it was necessary to receive a certain level of education to be ‘even a worker.’ Her expression showed that she associated being a labourer with low socioeconomic levels. Similarly, one learner described the uneducated as ‘homeless’: ‘I think why we go to school... I think I will find a job and earn money and not be like a homeless person in the future.’ He handled

education to gain a profession. However, it could not be said that everyone who did not continue their education was homeless. One mother treated it as a tool for ‘self-rescue.’ On the other hand, her son stated that he attended school to be academically intelligent and learn new information. However, his opinion on social development was quite remarkable. He explained what would have happened if he had never gone to school:

Nothing would be good... we would go back to the old days. There would be new wars... How can I say... If these things were not known or nothing was known, life would not progress. There would be no such thing as a profession. Everyone used to do animal husbandry, agriculture, and things like that.

He thought that social development would stop without education, and there would be no professions. At this point, it was seen that he did not regard animal husbandry or agriculture as a profession. One mother stated that an individual would have a good life when s/he went to school. She described the beautiful life by saying, ‘What a beautiful life is, more money, valuable profession. It is to have the best job. So, gold bracelet...’

Mothers frequently compared the past and current education systems, discussing changes in friendship, discipline, respect, and parental involvement. Criticism was directed at the rote learning approach. One mother recalled learning through physical discipline in Mathematics, expressing satisfaction despite harsh teaching methods. She contrasted past strictness with today's protective parenting, noting a shift in how teachers interact with students. While some mothers appreciated the obedience instilled in past education, others and some learners criticized it, emphasizing the importance of authority approval. One of the learners stated her ideas about the punishments:

Some classes are very stressful because they are so complex. The teacher says, “If you get this question wrong, you will get me a box of chocolates or something; it would be too bad for you if you confuse this or that.” Those classes were stressful.

Learners thought they should listen to the teacher actively to understand the content better. The teacher was a central and all-knowing transmitter of knowledge. According to one of the learners, the best learning environment should be silent, like a school. It was vital to think of school as a quiet place. This learner thought that when teachers asked a question, learners should stand up and answer the question. This thought of her reminded us of the military order. However, she did not know why she legitimized obedience to authority and even showed that she internalized it—constantly following the teacher as an authority figure, trying to do everything s/he said quickly, and wanting the teacher to see their obedience represented the situation.

Both learners and mothers shared similar experiences in the exam-centered education system. One mother preferred private tutoring focused on national exams, valuing direct exam-oriented support. She appreciated teachers using physical education classes to prepare for tests, seeing it as instilling responsibility in her son. A learner expressed prioritizing Mathematics over English courses to allow classmates more practice and participation in Math class, reflecting the emphasis on test performance.

As another issue, mothers noted significant changes in daily life and routines during distance education. They observed increased course intensity, learning setbacks, learner alienation from school, adaptation to disorder, and negative impacts of technology. Learners similarly expressed a need for a new order during the pandemic. They missed school as the optimal learning environment and faced challenges adapting to and feeling a sense of belonging in the

new educational format.

Three mothers stated that there were learning losses during the pandemic. One mother mentioned that even though her daughter attended a village school in primary school, she did not struggle in the middle school in the district. However, she regressed during distance education. The other mother argued that learners became distracted and lost motivation. One of the learners could not participate in live classes during distance education. Her mother expressed her views on this situation as follows:

Currently, she cannot go to school. Unfortunately, we are at a standstill. We can't manage distance education, and that's the issue. Before the pandemic, she was an excellent and successful learner, but this year, we're completely lost. The pandemic has ruined us... When it was face-to-face, she was very eager, but she is not motivated at all now. She had a desire to learn, to read, but that has vanished due to the pandemic. Honestly, there's regression; there's nothing positive, only negative... For example, now the child doesn't even know how to say her name in English. She couldn't learn at a distance. The child is like a blank slate now, like she's been reset. She hasn't learned anything at all. Moreover, she has even forgotten what she previously learned. It's like she's back to being a first-grader. Sure, she knows how to read and write, but when it comes to reading, she might even stammer.

From this perspective, considering the opinions of the mothers, it becomes evident that disadvantaged groups faced learning losses during the pandemic, which also impacted their construction of a learner identity. One learner, for instance, stated that she only followed EBA TV (Education Information Network), which was offered as an alternative to ensure the continuity of education, when she managed to wake up in the mornings and occasionally watched the reruns. This reveals that she could not fully benefit from the available resources due to the lack of motivation emphasized by her mother.

Besides, a mother questioned the grading system, highlighting concerns about artificial success and anticipating potential difficulties when face-to-face education resumed. This perceived fake sense of achievement may have negatively impacted learners' identities. Face-to-face education was preferred for effective attention, classroom discipline, individual teacher support, and peer learning. Learners and mothers emphasized a stronger sense of togetherness at school, contrasting with the decreased social presence during distance education. Despite its challenges, distance education was described by both learners and mothers as "better than nothing."

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the construction of learner identities and the reproduction of inequities in the Turkish context. It was found that learners had fluid identities that varied with context. Learners assessed themselves based on their environment's behaviors, showing a need for cognitive and affective approval. In Türkiye, despite a student-centered curriculum, teachers remain the primary decision-makers. It makes learners teacher-dependent individuals. A study by Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) revealed that economically and ethnically disadvantaged learners could succeed if teachers defined success in inclusive terms and supported their development in the curriculum. The present study found that unsuccessful learners often questioned themselves, harming their academic self-confidence because of their teachers. Cubero-Pérez et al. (2023) found similar results regarding learners' self-image, where students expressed both positive and negative attributes. Negatively, they cited disorganization, distractions, and poor time management, aggravated by limited interest in certain subjects. Positively, they identified strengths like modifying habits and routines to achieve goals and



showing personal responsibility and effort. They saw themselves as academically competent, asserting that challenges were not due to lack of ability. The present study showed that learners were more successful in subjects they liked but struggled with those they disliked. Brennan (2020) found that primary school students' high grades, ability to accomplish tasks, and positive feedback fostered positive attitudes towards lessons and teachers, leading to greater interest. Therefore, teachers should consider disadvantaged learners when defining success and implementing the curriculum.

Learners were exposed to a system legitimizing authority, making them accept their position without transformation. Kizilcelik (2015) noted that the Turkish education system aimed to produce obedient civil servants rather than free and happy individuals. Hempel-Jorgensen (2009) found that the ideal primary school pupil was expected to have an 'angel-like' personality, being quiet and submissive, yet teachers sometimes reacted negatively to these behaviors. Bruch and Soss (2018) discovered that authorities punished low-socioeconomic learners more than their high-socioeconomic counterparts, a disparity more pronounced for Black students. As the disadvantage level increased, so did the authority's pressure on learners. Baker (2015), in a study of Young, stated that the content of the curriculum was constructing social class inequity and that the elites and those in power organized this content. It became clear that the curriculum was a political structure that reflected the ideologies of the dominant power.

In the context dimension, some mothers evaluated themselves and their children as learners with similar characteristics, as a result leading to reproduction. In this respect, reproduction has only been observed in negative situations, such as not studying and lacking motivation. Particularly, mothers with lower levels of education emphasized that their children, like themselves, did not want to study. Cansiz, Ozbaylanli, and Colakoglu (2018) found that parents' education level and profession significantly affected children's success, suggesting increased parent-teacher interaction to mitigate this. However, socio-economically disadvantaged mothers typically trusted schools and teachers for educational support. They found the activities conducted at school and the way the lessons were taught to be sufficient and effective, and generally justified the problems by citing their level of economic capital and the learners' lack of motivation.

According to both mothers and learners, the purpose of attending a school is to obtain a job that offers a good salary and a prosperous life. When they have a prosperous life and a job with a good salary, they can change their social environment and daily life experiences. Learners can achieve vertical social mobility through education, reaching high-level positions requiring cultural capital (Sengonul, 2008). Mothers preferred well-paying professions for their children. Omurtak (2019) revealed that socio-economically disadvantaged families' professional expectations ranged from jobs that bring happiness to high-earning jobs. Families aimed to prevent their children from facing the same challenges, but this was rarely possible due to an education system favoring privileged classes. Similarly, Cubero-Pérez et al. (2023) stated that participants expressed their commitment to continue studying, some attending university. They defined the job and family goals that they intended to achieve. It was shown as a necessary characteristic for a healthy learner identity.

Learners developed prejudices against many aspects of the learning-teaching process. It was concluded that learners avoided certain behaviors, such as taking the floor and attending classes when the teacher was rude. Tasdemir and Tasdemir (2010) found that Turkish learners' question-asking behavior varied according to their success level. A successful learner listened

to the teacher attentively and asked and answered questions, while an unsuccessful learner did not want to join the class. McCrory-Calarco (2014) stated that disadvantaged learners avoided revealing their difficulties in the classroom and did not seek help. Learners restricted themselves from participating in the learning-teaching process for fear of being mocked and humiliated by their peers. Bullying was emphasized as a remarkable element in schools. This was due to the sociocultural environment in which the schools were located (Ozkan & Cifci, 2010). In addition, Radmard and Beltekin (2017) revealed that disadvantaged learners were exposed to bullying, they tried to cope with this situation in their own way, and learners who had such experiences were at risk of being further removed from school. The present study showed that mothers did not act against it. Parents with low socioeconomic levels prefer their children to comply with social rules (Hoff, Laursen & Tardif, 2019). In this respect, the learners' identity construction was shaped by the reinforcement of this situation through the enacted curriculum.

However, peers had some positive support. It was seen that the school's main emphasis was socialization, and learners missed the feeling of belonging to a group rather than the education given at school. Saefudin, Sriwiyanti and Yusoff (2021) stated that teacher support during the pandemic did not replace peers' support at school. Students were expected to receive emotional support that met the need to socialize with others. However, teachers provided educational and knowledge-based support. Bouakaz (2022) stated that young individuals with a fixed learning identity could transform it into a dynamic one in an alternative school setting marked by acknowledgment from educators and supportive circles of peers.

In the present study, both mothers and learners expressed that the cultural and economic capital created a particular problem in supporting learners. Similarly, Supardi (2022) found that the learners could not get support from their uneducated parents. Ozgun (2019) concluded that in addition to the inequities that learners experience at school, the school support could not be compensated by the families because schools represented a specific group, and the curriculum was developed for them. Those outside this group were ignored through the curriculum implemented and lost because they could not adapt to the learning-teaching process. Radmard and Beltekin (2017) concluded that families with low socioeconomic status had limited resources for education, problems in accessing education, the education system's inability to respond to demands, and school-related issues led learners away from school, which caused learners to leave school to work at an early age. An inefficient curriculum, poor teachers in terms of quality, education that did not respond to the learner's needs in terms of content, and unconscious families were considered factors affecting this situation. Haugen's (2020) study suggested that school choice was particularly crucial for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who encounter a challenging educational environment. Simultaneously, the choice processes might not be operating equitably. Instead, the study indicated that the perspectives of privileged students gained prominence, disadvantaging marginalized students. Educators in marginalized schools discussed how school choice conveyed the message to underprivileged individuals that they were unwelcome when they were assigned to their schools.

In the experience dimension, it was concluded that mothers especially yearned for the authoritarian education system in the past. Fox, Scholar, and Timmerman (2012) revealed that parents with low socioeconomic status exhibited authoritarian attitudes, supported obedience, used less logic, and more physical punishment. Moreover, the learning-teaching process resulted from an exam-oriented system. For this reason, families supported learners' habits such as taking tests or going to private lessons because exams seemed like a fair race to hide inequity.



Even the preparation stage for the exam required being at the middle-class level regarding economic and cultural capital (Hill, 2009, p. 298). In Türkiye, although teachers were provided the flexibility to make a difference in practice around the framework curriculum, national exams transformed it into rigid structures in practice (Bumen, 2019). It showed that the enacted curriculum was parallel to the tested curriculum in Türkiye.

Another situation was about the negative experiences of distance education during the pandemic. Some learners needed help to continue the courses leaving them with difficulties because of constraints related to technology, parent support and getting used to the new routine. In addition, distance education during the pandemic was teacher-centered. This led learners to regulate their learning process by themselves, but learners were not motivated, and parents could not help because of cultural and economic capital. This resulted in a disengagement from the learning-teaching process. Anderson (2020) thought that schools faced a difficult choice: if distance education was not chosen, all learners would be unable to follow the curriculum for a long time; however, if distance education was chosen, a significant group of already disadvantaged learners would be excluded and fall even further behind. Privileged groups, on the other hand, would easily access all kinds of tools and support during the distance education process. TEDMEM-Turkish Education Association's Center for Excellence in Education (2021) revealed this situation: 'The magnitude of learning losses varies according to the socio-economic level of the family, access to distance education, the quality of distance education, family support and interaction level.' This view supported this study's result and defined the ignored segment. With the deepening of inequities in the context of Türkiye, the recovery/intervention training curriculum came to the fore. However, a common denominator was not reached on to whom and to what extent it needs to ... Chen et al. (2022) evaluated learner identity construction during blended learning. Blended learning environments, where collaborative writing was taught, contributed to developing learners' identities depending on contextual factors. Learners, especially during this process, were significantly influenced by their peers. For learners who were able to continue their education during this period, the false sense of achievement created by assessment will lead to a confrontation with reality when schools reopen and harm their academic self-confidence. This, in turn, could negatively impact the motivation of all learners, whether disadvantaged or not, who are already alienated from school. A report presented by the Turkish Medical Association also highlighted that the social and emotional development of learners has been negatively affected during this period and will likely be further impacted (Yıldız & Vural, 2020). From this perspective, learners may face problems with socialization when they return to school. The impact of online and offline lessons on identity was diversified.

Moreover, since the study was conducted during the pandemic, it was not possible to observe the teaching-learning process, which constitutes a limitation of the research. The concept of identity, being broad in scope, was confined to social and sociocultural theories. The notion of disadvantage in the study was limited to gender and socio-economic status; mothers' education levels were not included as a disadvantage due to their variability. For these reasons, the study represents a group with specific conditions and characteristics. Considering this, future studies could explore the topic from different perspectives. In line with the study's findings, decision-making processes for curriculum should more strongly reflect the voices of learners to help them become autonomous, self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning. Learners should be encouraged not to passively accept ready-made information but to learn how to access information and actively construct their own learning. Opportunities to experience success in the learning-teaching process should be provided for disadvantaged learners through various activities. They should be given a voice, and their ideas should be

addressed without prejudice. The curriculum should be organized to raise awareness among mothers about distance education and related programs, and efforts should be made to enhance their cultural capital. Studies should be conducted with disadvantaged learners from various perspectives, such as migration, seasonal labor, religion, and race, to amplify the voices of these groups. This approach ensures that decision-making processes consider not only the desires of the middle class but also the needs and expectations of disadvantaged groups. Lastly, it is essential to listen to the experiences of learners, uncover unheard voices, and take the necessary steps or implement appropriate policies accordingly.

Ethics Statements

The data used in this study comes from the MA thesis of the first author, supervised by the second author. Ethics committee approval was given by Anadolu University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 30.12.2020 with protocol number 72900.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Informed Consent

Participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point if they felt reluctant without any consequences. All personal information was anonymized to protect participants' confidentiality.

Data Availability

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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