The private education dilemma: Why public school teachers are opting for alternative options for their children?

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Abstract

In this study, the preference of public school teachers for sending their children to private schools has been regarded as a dilemma, and the reasons behind the choices made by public school teachers and the consequences of these preferences have been uncovered through semi-structured interviews with public school teachers. The research was limited to the views of 17 teachers working in public schools in Ankara, Turkey, in the 2021-2022 academic year who send their children to private schools. The phenomenological method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. The data obtained from the interviews were analysed using content analysis technique. As a result of the analysis, the reasons why public school teachers send their children to private schools can be categorized into two groups. The first category, "push factors away from public schools," comprises four sub-categories: "the physical condition of schools," "lack of school services," "lack of academic offerings" and "school population". The second category, "pull to private schools," includes four sub-categories: "spoils system, " "religionization," "allurements of private schools," and "education and training incentives given to private schools." According to the participants, the most important consequences of private school existence are social segregation and the inequalities that arise between students attending private schools who go to private schools and those who cannot. Disparities between public and private schools are also examined in accordance with the participants'

views under the codes of disparities related to students, teachers, and administration. Finally, the participants' recommendations for strengthening public education explored across four codes such as "building/physical changes in the school", "changes in school services", "academic changes" and "state policy changes".

Keywords: *private schools, private school preference, public schools, public school teachers, Turkey*

Private schooling, school choices and neoliberalism in Turkey

The commercialization and privatization processes in public schools and the increase in private schooling (the number of private schools, students, and teachers) have been important topics examined in the field of educational sciences, especially since the 1980s in the context of neoliberalism. This is because the privatization processes observed at all levels of education, which accelerated in the 1980s, are explained by the neoliberal policies that became effective in the late 1970s (Hill, 2003; Aksoy, 2005; Apple, 2006; Nikolakaki, 2014; Karaboğa, 2018; Mintz, 2021). As neoliberal ideology and policy forces supporting privatization have become fully effective on a global scale (Lubienski, 2014), privatizations have taken the form of direct privatization of public institutions and services, as well as the transfer of practicalities such as performance criteria, different employment practices, and governance applications from private businesses to public institutions (Ercan, 1998; Apple, 2006; Yolcu, 2021). In the privatization process, the role of educators, students, and families as the subjects of education has decreased, and the power of neoliberal institutions imposing their standards has increased (Aksoy, 2015; Rasco, 2020; Anita, Sudrajat, and Aman, 2023). With neoliberalism, schools were considered to be profit-making institutions, and teachers were reduced to

the positions of technicians and security guards at schools. As more wealth is distributed to the rich people and companies in the countries where neoliberal policies are implemented, the states' resources are depleted. There were attempts to remedy the resulting fiscal deficits by implementing budget cuts in public schools and other essential public services (Giroux, 2013).

The reduction of education expenditures by states is a dimension of privatization, which is at the center of neoliberal policies, and this has increased in education costs for families (Kurul Tural, 2002; Yılmaz and Sarpkaya, 2016). While there has been a numerical increase in total education expenditures in Turkey over the years, the share of total education expenditures in "gross domestic product" is decreasing. For example, while the share of education expenditures in gross domestic product was 6% in 2019, this rate decreased to 5.4% in 2020. In 2020, only 74.7% of the education expenditures in Turkey were financed by the government, while the share of household expenditures in education expenditures increased to 20.2% (Turkish Statistical Institute /TÜİK, 2020). While the ratio of the budget of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to the central government budget was 11.45% in 2020, this rate decreased to 10.91% in 2021 (MoNE, 2021a), and the ratio of the total education budget (schools under to MoNE and universities) to the central government budget decreased from 16.21% to 15.75% (MoNE, 2021b). According to the Statistics of Formal Education of MoNE, while the number of students in public schools was 15 million 189 thousand 878 in the 2019-2020 academic year, it increased to 15 million 194 thousand 574 in the 2020-2021 academic year. However, despite the increase in the number of students, a decrease in the budget is observed. It is possible to say that, in addition to the decrease in the budget of the MoNE, teachers' salaries are not at a sufficient level and have significantly fallen over the past ten years. Turkey, along with countries such as Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, and North Macedonia, was listed in the

Eurydice 2020-2021 report in the category where teacher salaries are lower than European countries; also, it was included in the category of countries with teachers; annual salaries below 10 thousand Euros (Eurydice, 2022). In 2022, the salary of public teachers is 441 dollars, which is enough to buy only 4 quarters of gold (Eğitim Sen, 2022b). The salaries and labour rights of teachers in private schools exhibit disparities in comparison to those of their counterparts in public schools. Research conducted in Turkey indicates that many teachers working in private schools are often employed under a low-wage policy and conditions that diminish the prestige of teaching (such as being subjected to long working hours, working on weekends, and performing tasks beyond their job description). Additionally, it has been found that due to being employed on 1-year contracts under the Law No. 5580, they also harbor concerns about contract non-renewal (Çimen & Karadağ, 2020; Çerev & Coşkun, 2020).

A significant step towards privatization in education was taken with the amendment to Law No. 6287 in 2012 (Bayram, 2018; Güven, 2012) and Law No. 5580 on Private Educational Institutions in 2014. Starting from the 2014-2015 academic year and continuing until the 2018-2019 academic year, the "education incentive support" program, which provides financial assistance, was initiated for students attending private schools after these amendments. Furthermore, with these legal amendments the preparatory courses for university entrance exams were closed and transformed into private schools. Because of these developments, the increases in the number of private schools, and the number of students and teachers in private schools in Turkey between 2011 and 2022 are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Number of private schools, number of students and teachers in private schools.

Academic Year	Number of Private Schools	Number of Private School Students	Number of Private School Teachers
2011-2012	4.664	535.788	64.520
2012-2013	5.942	613.064	74.745
2013-2014	6.710	698.912	84.503
2014-2015	7.474	823.515	90.316
2015-2016	9.581	1.174.409	130.668
2016-2017	10.053	1.217.755	120.962
2017-2018	11.694	1.351.712	149.457
2018-2019	12.809	1.440.577	169.740
2019-2020	13.870	1.468.198	174.750
2020-2021	13.501	1.310.605	162.215
2021-2022	14.179	1.578.233	163.975

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute.

Families who send their children to private schools may be from different professions and forms of employment. However, in this study, public school teachers have been specifically selected from among various occupational groups. The primary reason for this is that researchers consider it a dilemma that public school teachers, despite working in public education and acknowledging the working conditions of their colleagues in private schools, opt to enrol their children in private schools. Researchers assumed that public school teachers are in favour of strengthening public education. This prompts the critical inquiry: Why do public school teachers, despite being in favour of public education, opt for private school enrolment for their children? The reasons underlying this phenomenon need to be researched. The second reason is that public school teachers may have more comprehensive and qualified observations regarding both public and private schools. Having spent considerable time within public

school environments as teachers, they gained rich experience and knowledge related to administrative and educational processes in public schools. Simultaneously, their role as parents of private school students equips them with diverse experiences and perspectives on administrative and educational processes in private institutions. For this purpose, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for teachers working in public schools to send their children to private schools?
2. What are the consequences of the existence of private schools in the education system according to participants' views?
3. What disparities exist between public schools and private schools according to the participants' views?
4. What are the recommendations of the participants for strengthening public education?

Methodology

This study employs the phenomenological method, a qualitative research approach, with the primary objective of elucidating the significations attributed by individuals to their experiences related to a specific concept or phenomenon. Phenomenology, as a research methodology, is fundamentally concerned with the exploration of human experiences and the lifeworld. In conducting phenomenological inquiries aimed at uncovering individual experiences, researchers concentrate on identifying shared patterns of experience, ultimately yielding definitions and interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2020; Tekindal and Uğuz Arsu, 2020). This research focuses on the phenomenon of public school teachers enroling their children in private schools and seeks to illuminate common patterns in the experiences of educators through

a comprehensive analysis. The study was structured based on a phenomenological framework, predicated upon the premise that public school teachers, occupying dual roles as both parents and educators, possess the capacity to offer multifaceted insights into the examined phenomenon.

Study Group

The study group of the research included 17 teachers working in public schools in the 2021-2022 academic year. A Purposive sampling approach was used in sample selection. Snowball sampling and criterion sampling approach achieved purposive sampling. The criteria for inclusion involve working as a teacher in any public school in Ankara, Turkey, and either sending or having sent their children to private school. Information about the participants is given in the appendix.

Data Collection and Analysis

In phenomenological research, the principal data collection approach focuses primarily on conducting interviews with participants, to elucidate the shared significance of a phenomenon experienced by multiple individuals (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). To collect data within the scope of this study, a semi-structured interview form consisting of nine questions was meticulously prepared. The questions underwent a process of refinement and adjustment based on experts' opinions in educational sciences from various universities. Subsequently, the research received ethical approval from Ankara University's ethics committee. In semi-structured interviews, researchers utilize an interview guide featuring a checklist of topics pertinent to the research scope, pre-established phrases, and the order of questions. However, the sequencing of statements and questions is adaptively shaped by

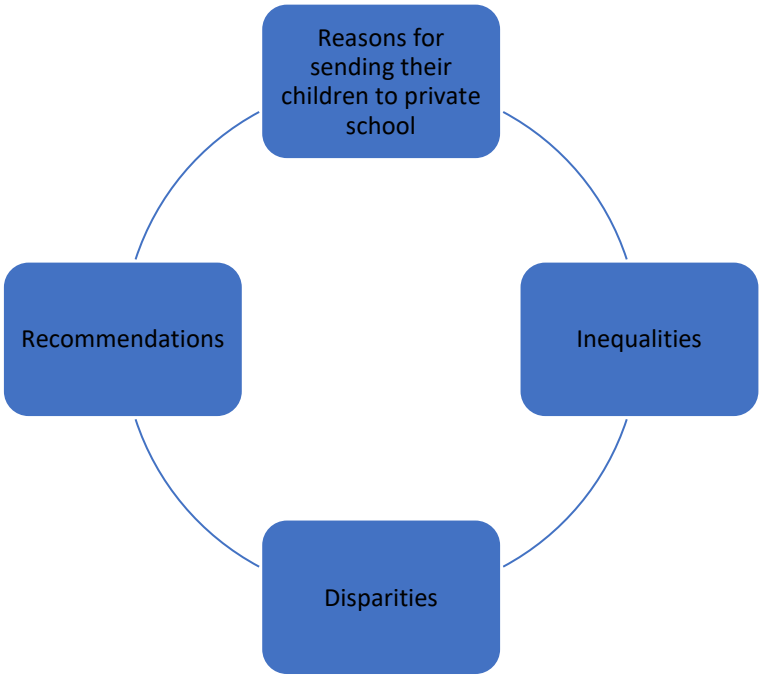
the natural flow of the interview, and researchers may pose unplanned queries to further delve into the interviewee's responses (Robson and McCartan, 2022). In this study, although the researchers had a list of questions, the sequence of these questions was altered based on the flow of the interview. Additionally, unplanned questions were asked to further elaborate on the responses provided by the interviewees. Therefore, the data collection instrument employed in the research is semi-structured interviews.

In this study all participants were coded with the letter P (P1, P2, P3…P17) to anonymize the participants. In this research, interviews were conducted online with P1, P5, P6 and P8 and face-to-face with other participants. The interviews were held between August 1, 2022, and September 30, 2022, and lasted 30-60 minutes. The data obtained from the participants were analysed with the content analysis method. Content analysis is a method employed to categorize and interpret to discern underlying patterns, themes, and interrelationships (Krippendorff, 2018; Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, the data was summarized and interpreted according to themes determined based on the research questions. To ensure the external validity of the research, interview questions were neutrally directed to the participants, and the answers were transcribed without any intervention. To ensure transferability in the study, rich descriptions were used, and the findings were directly quoted from the teachers' views.

Findings

According to the research questions, the opinions obtained from the participants were analysed by dividing them into themes. The themes are given in Figure 2 below, and then the themes and codes are interpreted.

Figure 2. Themes



Reasons for Sending Their Children to Private School

The reasons for not sending their children to public schools could be classified into two categories such as "push away from public schools" and "pull to private schools."

Push away factors from public schools.

The physical condition. The first reason that pushes away their children from public schools is "the physical condition" of schools. According to the participants (P2, P7, P9, P10, P12), the state does not allocate sufficient budget for education, therefore the opportunities of public schools are decreasing and the physical inadequacies of public schools (crowded classrooms, cold and dirty classrooms, inadequate educational equipment in the classrooms, hygiene problems in the toilets, etc.) cause parents to choose private schools. P4 stated

that reducing the budget allocated to education over time is part of a conscious privatization process. P5 said that the state left its welfare state role aside and that almost every field from education to health was privatized in Turkey. In this context, P16 drew attention to the fact that private school owners are private company owners, and P7 evaluated the current process as a neoliberal process. P7 stated that together with neoliberal policies, the state sees public services such as education and health as a burden, tries to remove this burden, and considers every student who leaves the public school and enrols in a private school as a profit for itself. P2 underlined that social, cultural, and artistic activities that can be done in private schools cannot be done in public schools due to limited financial resources and that these activities are seen by the state as a luxury in public schools. All the participants, except P15, stated that the physical conditions of private schools are better than public schools, and this situation is effective in the preference of private schools. Expressions such as "There is no heating problem, the buildings are new" (P5, P7, P17), "Classes are not crowded, there are toilet paper and soap in the toilets" (P2, P3, P6, P7, P10) came to the fore. P7 stated that cleaning services in public schools were privatized and transferred. According to P7, the fact that the school must cover the cleaning expenses and the number of cleaning personnel in the schools is low increases the hygiene problems in public schools. The statements of P8 regarding the hygiene problems in public schools are remarkable.

> When my child came home from school, he immediately wanted to go to the bathroom. I asked one day, and he said that the toilets in the school are very dirty, and he could not use it. This was one of the reasons why I sent him to private school. I wanted my child to be comfortable." (P8).

The statement of P10 who said, "I have been teaching in high schools for nearly 30 years and I have never seen toilet paper in any student restroom where I worked," is also noteworthy. P16, on the other hand, drew attention to another aspect of the problem and stated that the situation was even more difficult for

female students. “There are different situations for female students. I wanted to have toilet paper and sanitary napkins at least for the emergency needs of girls in every school I went to, but it never happened” (P16).

Lack of school services. The second reason, which pushes away their children from public schools, is “lack of school services”. Participants (P2, P4, P5, P12, P13, P14, P15 and P17) stated that they work in a public school, and they could not find a place to leave their children while they are at work. For this reason, the participants said that they had to enrol their children in a private school starting from kindergarten. For example, P2 emphasized that although she wanted to send her child to a public school, she had to send her to a private school because she could not find a public school suitable for her working hours. Participants (P5, P6 and P8) stated that their children could stay in private schools until their working hours finished without any nutrition and safety problems with studies and activities, but this opportunity was not available in public schools, so they sent their children to private schools for this reason. P12 and P14 stated that depending on the address-based registration system, the schools their children must go to and the schools they work in are in separate places, and therefore they want to enrol their children in a private school close to the public school they work at. In Turkey, students enrol in public schools close to their home addresses, according to the Ministry of National Education Regulation on Pre-School Education and Primary Education Institutions; this is compulsory.

In terms of “lack of school services”, all the participants mentioned that the absence of free hot home-cooked meals in public schools, and the necessity for children to consume ready-made foods from the school canteen, are the factors leading them to send their children to private schools where school meals are available. The reason P7 sent her child to public school she stated that

> one of my children is in a private school and the other is in a public school. The reason why I still send my child to public school is that school has a cafeteria. The other is my child in a private school because I could not find a public middle school with a cafeteria". About school meal P3 said, "Nutrition is important in private schools. The child eats hot food daily. There are no meals in public schools. The canteens are also in bad condition and there is no serious health inspection in the canteens."

P5 said, "Private schools have breakfast, lunch, and snacks. You don't have to worry about nutrition, and in public schools, the child eats whatever he/she finds in the canteen," thus revealing the importance of the situation and the need for an urgent solution.

Regarding "lack of school services" participants claim that the pandemic process also had an impact on sending their children to private schools. P8 said,

> *It was after the pandemic, we went back to schools, there was no mask, disinfectants were running out but not renewed, and we were teaching in classes of 45 people. But my son, who was in private school, had turned into a class of 14. I went and looked, there were masks and disinfectants, the toilets were clean.*

According to P8, parents who observed this situation preferred to send their children to private schools because they were concerned about their children's health. P6 interpreted this as "Private schools turned the crisis created by the pandemic into an opportunity." P5, on the other hand, stated that at the very beginning of the pandemic, the private schools that his child attended switched to distance education, while public school students could only switch to distance education in the next year, and the situation of not being able to do distance education continued in the first months.

Lack of academic offerings. Another reason which pushes away their children from public schools is "lack of academic offerings". The first reason regarding "lack of academic offerings" is the low quality of foreign language education in public schools. P1, P11 and P15 stated that they wanted their children to have

quality foreign language education. P11 and P15 stated that foreign language education has been taught in private schools beginning from the pre-school education, foreign language lessons are taught by native speakers, and children also get speaking and writing training in foreign language lessons. P5 expressed that the number of foreign language hours was reduced in public schools at a time when foreign language gained more importance, whereas there were more foreign language lessons in private kindergartens than in public schools. P4 and P6 added that foreign language education is better in private schools, the number of foreign language course hours is higher, and second and third foreign language education is given to those who want it.

In terms of “lack of academic offerings” P1 and P8 stated that public school students had to go to new private courses constantly for their different educational needs (sports, music, drama, foreign language, preparation for central exams, etc.) and in this context, they mentioned the increased costs for public school students.

> My child was going to public school, but he was also attending a foreign language course” (P8). “Today you have to pay separately for sports, cultural and artistic events. Instead of paying separately, we sent our child to a private school where we can get all of them (P1).

Additionally, as can be inferred from the participants' expressions such as "There is ice skating" (P11), "There is a swimming pool" (P1, P2, P3, P8, P9, P15), "They have trips abroad" (P9), " There are drama lessons” (P17), participants prefer private schools where their children can engage in various activities simultaneously.

Regarding “lack of academic offerings” P8 stated that her daughter, who was preparing for the university entrance exam, was not able to choose the courses that would be useful for her in the exam, so she transferred her child to the basic

high school, which has the status of a private school. Similarly, P10 has stated that due to the closure of preparatory courses for university entrance exams he sent his child to a private school to ensure his success in these exams. Furthermore, P5, P7, and P17 stated that the establishment of basic high schools, which had the status of private schools and required payment for education, as well as the primary objective of these high schools being to prepare students for university entrance exams, are factors contributing to the preference for private schooling. P1, P5, P7, P8, P10, P12 and P16 also claimed that the establishment of basic high schools was a step in the privatization process.

Regarding “lack of academic offerings” P1 stated that he preferred a private school for his child to go beyond the human type desired by the government and for her versatile development and to be able to discuss every subject freely. P3 stated that she preferred private school because she wanted her child to grow up in a better socio-economic environment, with students at their socio-economic level. These two participants send their children to private schools because they believe that private schools contribute more to their children's cultural capital.

School population. The last reason that pushes away their children from public schools is “school population”. Due to the increased number of immigrants who came to Turkey after the war in Syria, the participants sent their children to private schools. Besides, there are Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Turkey who came because of the unrest in the Middle East. P1, P3, P13, P15 and P16 drew attention to immigrant students in the regions where their children had to go because of the address-based registration system. They stated that they did not want their children to study at the same schools as immigrant students, whom they claimed to have come from a non-modern culture and lifestyle, and therefore they sent their children to private schools rather than public schools. P3, on the other hand, they stated that immigrant students who do not speak Turkish claim to cause disciplinary problems in schools also negatively affect

their learning processes, and claimed that besides herself, the families around him send their children to private schools because of immigrants.

Pull factors to private schools.

It has been revealed that some of the participants' reasons for sending their children to private schools are related to “pull to private schools”.

Spoils system. Some of these reasons can be coded as “spoils system[1]”. For example, participants stated that Law No. 6287 on Primary Education and Education and the Law on Amending Certain Laws in 2012 had indirect effects on the increase in the number of private schools. According to P4, P6, P7 and P8, after this legislative change, the school alternatives for the students who will continue to high school have decreased. After secondary school, students who could not get into the project schools, which were accepted as "qualified schools" and accepted students with a central examination, had to enrol in İmam Hatip high schools which offer religious education or vocational high schools. The parents of the students who did not want to go to these two schools had to choose private schools. P11, on the other hand, stated that since a significant part of the project schools are also İmam Hatip schools, families and students do not prefer these schools even if they are more technically equipped. According to P11, especially parents who have a secular worldview and different beliefs from the government in power do not send their children to these schools, and they must choose private schools. P1, P4 and P5 claimed that there was no qualified, scientific education in project schools due to the favouritism of the current conservative education union close to the government. P1, P4 and P5 said that to be able to work in these schools, it is not important to be a good teacher but to be a teacher close to the current neoconservative government. P14

added that although their children got in the project school, they had to choose private school for these reasons. P4 and P14 claimed that project schools are schools that accept students by examination, but the number and the Ministry limits quotas of the project schools so that students can go to private schools.

Religionization. Another reason, which pull the parents to private schools, is "religionization". P1, P4 and P6 stated that with the change in the law in 2012, two elective religion courses were included in the curriculum, and in addition, the compulsory religious culture and ethics course hour, which was one hour a week, was increased to two hours. According to P1, P4 and P5, one of the reasons for parents to go to private schools is the religionization in these public schools. P5 stated that the number of elective religion courses increased, and science-based courses decreased, and that the elective religion courses (Prophet Muhammad's Life, Fundamental Religious Knowledge, and Koran) were placed in the curriculum by the school administration, as if obligatory. P11 stated that he talked to the private school administration his/her child attends about religious lessons and that he/she mentioned to them his/her personal boundaries on teaching religion. However, in public schools, parents could not interfere with the content of religion lessons. P4 and P6 claimed that students in public schools could be exposed to the discourse of racist and religious teachers, but parents could object to this in private schools. P6 supported this claim by saying,

> There is a commercial transaction in a private school. Think of it like a business, it is a business. You give money and decide what to buy. If you do not like the teacher, the world view, you can change the teacher. You do not have such a choice in public schools.

Allurements of private schools. "Allurements of private schools" can be evaluated as one of the reasons for participants to send their children to private schools. The first one is the scholarships provided by private schools. Many private schools in Turkey hold exams to scholarship and offer scholarships to

students based on their scores. For this reason, public school teachers prefer private school (P1, P5, P6, P8, P14, P16 and P17). P6 claimed that the scholarship exams of private schools are a strategy applied for students to come to private schools and stated that students are given scholarships from 20% to 100% according to their success in the exam. The second allurement are mentioned by P4, P6, P7 and P10 and they said that the marketing for private schools also steers parents towards these schools. P7 stated that marketing for private schools is seen everywhere, and that private schools conduct remarkable promotional campaigns. P7 claims that in the advertisements they say that they will take children on trips abroad, and they use different teaching methods than the teaching methods in public schools, P4 stated that some private schools will give full marks to students in the exams, stated that activities would be provided such as playing an instrument, teaching a foreign language with native speakers, drama education, swimming education, etc. advertisements were made that there was no class repetition. The last allurements are mentioned by P4, P5, P7, P10, P16, P17 and they said that the education incentive that the state started to give to families who send their children to private schools or want to send them to private schools since the 2014-2015 academic year also increased private schooling. According to P4, parents and students were directed to private schools with educational incentives.

Education and training incentives. The fourth reason which pulls the parents to private schools is “education and training incentives given to private schools”. Due to the ease of opening private schools in Turkey in recent times, the proliferation of private schools and increased accessibility to them have also led to participants sending their children to private schools. P7, P13 and P17 mentioned that private schools, which were very few in the past, now exist in the neighbourhoods, and in a way suitable for every budget. For instance, P8 stated

that they enroled their child in a small private school located close to their home for this reason.

The consequences of the existence of private schools

In the study, the consequences of the existence of private schools on the education system were investigated according to the opinions of the participants. Participants emphasized “the social segregation” and “inequality of opportunity” in this regard.

Participants first (P2, P9, P10 and P15) drew attention to “social segregation”. P2 stated that a discriminatory and marginalizing language is formed in private school parents and students, and it is expressed as if it is a privilege to say, "*I am studying at a private school, my child is studying at a private school*". P9, on the other hand, drew attention to the segregation by saying that her daughter attending private school only knows the world that belongs there, that students in private schools avoid making friends with students in public schools, even despise them, consider themselves rich and prestigious, and that they have a separate world: "*Just because of this, one day I took my daughter to poor neighbourhoods, showed her a person who scavenges garbage, I said, look, there are people who live like this.”* (P9). P10 stated that the students studying in private school position themselves in a different place than the students in the public school and stated that the students in the public school experience that they see themselves in a lower position in terms of status compared to the students studying in the private school. P15 stated that the students in private schools also experience discrimination among themselves and claimed that private schools also support this. P15 stated that the child of a very wealthy family in the class bullied his child, and upon his complaint, the class of the

bullying child was not changed, on the contrary, it was suggested that his child's class be changed.

Another point that the participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15 and P17) drew attention to is the opportunity inequality between public and private school students. P4 claimed that inequality exists in every field and in every period (from the founding years of the Republic of Turkey to the present day, but of course it has increased even further after the 2000s) in Turkey, but the existence of private schools deepens the inequalities in the field of education. P10, on the other hand, emphasized that there is inequality for students to receive education according to their families incomes, adding that this also means "social and physical opportunities according to income", and asked the following question*:* "Why should some students receive education in better conditions because their families' economic situation is better, but some students cannot have a good education because of their family's economic situation is worse. This is inequality*"* P6 stated that inequalities were reflected in children's physical characteristics (external appearance and physical characteristics), P7 emphasized that privatizations led to inequality in all areas, P1 said, "Children of families with money can get a better education. It is a serious inequality that other children are deprived of these while they receive good physical conditions, receive a good language education and go abroad to camps." The statements of P2 are as follows: "While students in private schools use clean toilets, eat hot meals at school, prepare for central exams in uncrowded classrooms, public school students are deprived of these, this is a serious inequality."

Disparities exist between public schools and private schools

In the study, the disparities exist between public schools and private schools according to the participants' views were determined. The disparities between

private schools and public schools can be examined under the codes of disparities related to students, teachers, and administration. With respect to the student, variances observed in private schools the lack of training to acquire positive behavioural changes such as solidarity, love, friendship, and sharing (P10), the disregard for disciplinary issues such as bullying, (P10 and P15) the artificial inflation of academic grades (P1, P4, P7, P9, P14 and P16), and a lenient stance on student absenteeism (P4 and P10). The comparative evaluation of P10 on this matter is remarkable.

> In public schools, when a child makes a mistake, we ensure that the child acknowledges that mistake, however in private schools, the child's mistakes are ignored so that the child can continue to attend school and enrol next year, and the child is constantly pampered. The absenteeism of these students is also ignored. Because the child is not perceived as a child but as a customer there. Private schools are selling you the hope that your child will succeed. In addition, they market it quite effectively. Their marketing strategies are very impressive.

Lastly in private schools' students may experience inferiority complexes against students who are richer than they (P9) are.

For the teachers, disparities can be listed as follows: Some participants have expressed that the quality of teachers working in public schools is better than those in private schools (P10, P11 and P14). P10 explained this situation with the words "Experienced teachers don't work in these schools; they employ teachers who couldn't get assigned to the public schools." Consequently, as mentioned by P11, there is teacher circulation in these schools, as teachers work for short periods. On the other hand, participants mention that teachers working in private schools experience job insecurity (P17), concerns about the renewal of their contracts (P14), and the necessity of constantly changing schools (P4). As seen, according to participant views, there are disparities arising from the employment patterns of teachers in public and private schools.

Finally, the disparities pointed out by the participants from an administrative perspective are as follows: seeing students as customers (P1, P4, P6, P9 and P10), parents having to pay additional fees (P4 and P10), the fact that these schools are only focusing on the central exams (P4 and P10). P9 and P10 said that they were promised unlimited studies/additional lessons when enrolling their children in private schools, but that successful students were already admitted to these studies to increase the success of the school. P14, on the other hand, stated that private schools' promises of trips abroad, swimming pools, tennis, etc., which are said during registration are only part of their advertising campaigns and that they are very unlikely to be fulfilled.

However, there was no consensus that the education given in private schools is better than public schools, except that foreign language education is better. P1, P3, P8, P14 and P17 claimed that private schools were more successful in preparing for central exams.

Recommendations of the participants for strengthening public education

The recommendations of the participants for strengthening public education can be examined under four codes such as "building/physical changes in the school", "changes in school services", "academic changes" and "state policy changes". The first one is "building/physical changes in the school" can be listed as follows: Keeping the toilets clean and putting toilet paper in schools (All Participants), physical deficiencies of schools should be eliminated (All participants), new schools should be built to reduce the number of crowded classrooms (All Participants), schools should have sanitary napkins for female students (P16), the number of cleaning personnel should be increased and there should be permanent cleaning personnel for each school (P17).

The recommendations about “changes in school services” are: Switching to school lunch (All Participants), class sizes should be reduced (All Participants), schools should have health personnel (P16), the number of students per teacher should be reduced (P1, P8 and P17), free health screenings should be done in schools (P10).

Participants mentioned recommendations on “academic changes” can be listed as follows: Improving foreign language education and focusing on speaking and writing (All Participants), more socio-cultural activities should be done in schools (P1, P5, P7, P8, P9, P11and P14), a secular and scientific education (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7 and P13), compulsory religion lessons, which are offered as optional but imposed in public schools, should be abandoned (P1, P4, P6 and P7).

Lastly, participants made suggestions related to the state policy changes which can be listed as follows: Contract teaching should be given up and teachers who were not appointed should be appointed (P5, P8), private schools should be closed (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15 and P16), equality of opportunity in education should be ensured (P1, P5, P6, P7, P11 and P16), more budget should be allocated to education (P1, P2, P11, P12 and P13), central exams should be removed, if they cannot be removed immediately, their number should be reduced (P1and P10), the state should open more pre-school education institutions (P2 and P13), education should be above politics (P14), the state's return to the social state role and providing equal opportunities to everyone (P1, P5, P6, P12, P13and P14), giving up all kinds of systems that create discrimination and inequalities, especially neoliberal policies (P4, P6 and P7), abandoning privatization policies and expropriating all privatized areas (P2 and P7).

Discussion and Conclusion

The data obtained from the participants show that the reasons for public school teachers sending their children to private schools go beyond being a choice and become a compulsory choice or dilemma. In other words, they feel obliged to send their children to private schools for several reasons. The reasons for participants' inclination towards this choice include push away factors from public schools and pull to private school factors. The first reason that pushes them away from public schools is the physical conditions, including hygiene problems such as the absence of toilet paper in restrooms and insufficient soap. These issues often arise due to the limited financial resources of public education. Participants state that the physical deficiencies in public schools and the failure to eliminate these deficiencies are a conscious policy implemented by the state to encourage parents to send their children to private schools, and therefore they claim that they are forced to send their children to private schools.

The second reason that pushes them away from public schools is lack of school services. A significant portion of the participants stated that they had to send their children to private educational institutions for early childhood education and beyond, as there were no preschools or kindergartens in the public schools where they worked. Kırımlı (2022) points out that due to the insufficient number of state-run preschools and kindergartens, parents are forced to send their children to private ones, even if they do not want to. Kırımlı's (2022) observation is parallel to the views expressed by the participants.

Additionally, the absence of school meals in public schools is one of the significant findings that related to the lack of school services. Yıldırım (2022) drew attention to a similar problem and said that today 72 countries have a School Meal Program with the support of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), but Turkey is among the countries that have not implemented school meals. Finally, in November 2022 in Turkey, the motion of opposition

parties to give free meals to children in public schools was rejected by the votes of the neoconservative government in power and its ultranationalist ally. Yıldırım (2022) stated that the problem is not about the lack of resources, but about the unfair distribution of resources. Aksoy and Çoban Sural (2018) emphasize the importance of school meal programs and state that the implementation of school nutrition as a fundamental human right is urgently needed in Turkey. Additionally, school nutrition also plays an important role in addressing food inequality in society (Aksoy & Çoban Sural 2018). However, Belot and James' study (2011) on primary education shows a positive cause-and-effect relationship between educational outcomes and school meals. Therefore, it can be argued that school meal programs have positive results in preventing privatization of education, promoting healthy nutrition, and improving educational outcomes.

The third reason that pushes them away from public schools is lack of academic offerings. Almost all participants stated that their children's foreign language education, especially being able to speak and write English very well, is important for their future and to work in higher paying jobs, and for this reason they prefer to send their children to private schools. Oral (2010) emphasizes the importance of knowing English, especially to participate in global markets, and states that private schools either directly provide education in a foreign language or provide intensive and long-term foreign language education. The data gathered from participants indicates that public school teachers perceive foreign language education and lesson hours in public schools as insufficient. They express occasional preferences for native speakers to teach these lessons, leading them to opt for private schools to ensure a more effective foreign language education for their children. These findings are parallel to the views that knowing English is important to participate in global markets, and private schools provide this need (Oral, 2010; Uslu Çetin, 2015; Vergara, 2015).

Related to the lack of academic offerings participants have mentioned centralized exams as one of the reasons for sending their children to private schools. Uslu Çetin (2015) highlights the impact of centralized exams on the privatization and commercialization of education and argues that the process of preparing for high school and university entrance exams creates a strong competitive environment, which drives students and parents to pursue different options, leading to the emergence of various institutions such as private tutoring centers and private boutique schools. According to Uslu Çetin (2015), education has become highly commercialized due to the efforts of wealthy entrepreneurs who view these schools as a source of income and profit. Students, teachers, parents, and even schools have become part of this system willingly or unwillingly. Hursh (2000) and Rasco (2020) have emphasized those national and international centralized tests (exams) that have become widespread during neoliberal eras are a neoliberal policy and a reflection of the standardization understanding of education in line with the expectations of the neoliberal labor market. However, no evidence of discomfort with this standardization trend was found in the interviews with participants except for P4, and participants want their children to receive an education that is suitable for future job markets. It is claimed that central exams have an eliminating function, a meritocratic function (Au, 2016), which hides inequalities based on gender, ethnic identity, and socio-economic differences; and associates the success and failure of individuals with their abilities and efforts (Takeda, 2022).

Lastly, the increase in the number of immigrant students in public schools and the pandemic process were also factors that pushed away from public schools in Turkey. Because despite the ongoing pandemic, the existence of crowded classes in public schools continued, the necessary hygiene conditions were not provided, and medical measures were not taken. These findings are in accordance with the research conducted by Yıldız and Akar Vural (2020),

highlighting the incapacity of public schools to furnish essential distance education tools amid the pandemic.

Some of the reasons participants have for sending their children to private schools are related to the factors that pull them to private education. According to the participants, the budget allocated to public education decreased, private schools were supported with education and training incentives, and the existence of basic high schools with private school status, remained open until the end of the 2018-2019 academic year (MoNE, 2019). The evaluations provided by the participants concerning the education and training incentives and public high schools align with the assessments presented by Yüksekbulgu (2021). Yüksekbulgu (2021) emphasizes that the education and training incentives have adverse effects on the public education system, exacerbating disparities in education, augmenting inequalities in opportunities, and fostering the growth of private schools. Carnoy (2000) and Apple (2013) also emphasize that the financial support given to private schools by the state increases private schooling under the name of school choice. In addition, the low quality of the project schools, which accept students through the central examination, and the political favouritism in the project schools (Ülkütekin, 2015; Politikyol, 2016; Kadıköy Newspaper, 2016) were effective in public school teachers' sending their children to private schools. Scholarships given by private schools at different rates according to the scores obtained from private schools' exams are also among the reasons for public school teachers to send their children to private schools. Because scholarships encourage students to attend private schools (Yolcu, 2021; Sever, Yirci and Kocabaş, 2019). Participants stated that the state sees public education as a burden and tries to overcome this burden by transferring education to private companies and institutions. This situation is expressed as "load shedding" by Polat (2014, p.161). According to Polat (2014), the "load shedding" method has been one of the most common methods used in

privatization processes in Turkey. This “load shedding” situation traces to pre-school education. In the context of load shedding for instance, cleaning and security services in schools are not carried out by permanent employment, but by outsourcing and employment contracts (Boztuğ and Akyol, 2017; Arı and Engin, 2018) and schools have to pay for these services themselves.

It can also be understood from the participants' opinions that similar to global practices, neoliberal policies and conservative practices have been implemented together in Turkey. This process is evaluated as New Right and neo-conservatism, and it is claimed that similar practices are imposed not only in the field of education but also for all daily life practices around the world (Baltacı, 2004; Yaşlı, 2014; Apple, 2006; Sayılan, 2014; Cervinkova and Rudnicki, 2019; Hill, 2019). Specifically in the field of education, both privatization and religionization processes have been experienced (Ramírez, 2018; Tsui, 2022). In public schools, curricula include elective religious courses, religious culture and ethics course hours have increased (from one hour per week to two hours), and the “theory of evolution” has been removed from the curriculum in 2018 (Aylar, 2018; Önel and Derya Daşçı, 2019), leading to religionization. In this context, the fact that public school teachers prefer private schools to keep their children away from religionization and unscientific practices in public schools, and the demand for secular and scientific education leading to the increase of privatization are important data. Some of the participants in the study have expressed that they sent their children to private schools due to the religionization in public schools. However, it should be noted that not all private schools in Turkey are secular; some Islamic sects also have their private schools. According to Balcı’s report in 2018 there were around 10000 private educational institutions in Turkey, and one-third of these institutions are affiliated with an Islamic sect or community. Additionally, it is mentioned in the report that 2,480

of the more than four thousand private student dormitories in Turkey are affiliated with a sect or community (Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 2019).

Regarding the consequences of the existence of private schools, all participants with students studying in public schools and in old, established private schools, except for P3, stated that there are various inequalities in terms of physical facilities (non-crowded classes, hygiene, clean toilets, soap, etc.), school meals, and access to quality foreign language education between students in public schools and those in private schools. The participants also pointed out that the advantages provided by private schools, as emphasized in Sulku and Abdioğlu's (2015) research, can also turn into an achievement advantage. In their study investigating the factors affecting the success of students in public and private schools, Sulku and Abdioğlu (2015) noted that students' economic status, the characteristics of the places they live in, their families' educational backgrounds, and the educational instruments used in schools are effective on success. Sadick and Issa (2016) approached the problem in the context of the teacher, stated that there is a correlation between the physical conditions of the school and the teachers feeling good about themselves, and emphasized that teachers feeling good about themselves can also increase their performance. In this context, the participants emphasized that the physical facilities provided by private schools and the educational materials used in private schools create and can create inequalities between their own children and those attending public schools. The views of the participants parallel the findings of both Sadick and Issa (2016) and Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) that the economic, cultural, and social capital of students and their families affect the quality of education opportunities they have access to, the type of school they attend, and even the departments they choose in university.

According to the participants, there is a need for radical solutions to eliminate the inequalities caused by privatization in education and to put an end to it so

that participants can send their own children to public schools. All the recommendations are essential and urgent for eliminating private schooling. Some of the recommendations made by participants to strengthen public education, such as exemptions from address-based registration systems, are cost-free, while others are low-cost. The proposed solutions should be implemented systematically and immediately. Otherwise, it is clear that the continuation of the process of privatization of education will lead to further inequalities in Turkey.

As a result of this study, it can be asserted that participants sending their children to private schools is a consequence of the neoliberal education policies implemented in Turkey. With neoliberal policies public education has been commodified in many countries, a qualified education has ceased to be a fundamental right, and access to education has become dependent on the economic conditions of individuals (Devidal, 2012; Aksoy, 2015). At this point, school choices of families have also increased, and families have tended to choose different types of schools according to their economic status (Lubienski, 2014; Benton, 2007). The views of the participants are consistent with the views on the reflection of neoliberal policies implemented in the world after the 1970s and in Turkey as of the 1980s (Aksoy, 2015; Polat, 2014; Yolcu, 2021). However, some of the participants stated that they prefer an educational content that is compatible with the labor market for the future of their children, and these statements are in line with Apple (2006) and Aksoy (2015) emphasizing that the content of education is reshaped in line with the needs of capital in neoliberal periods. However, it is understood from the opinions of the participants that this parallelism is more intense in private schools. In other words, parents also prefer private schools for their children because they believe that the education provided in private schools is more suitable for their children to succeed in future job markets.

In this study it is revealed that the most significant reasons for participants who are public school teachers to send their children to private schools are the processes of neo liberalization and neo-conservatization in Turkey. Participants find themselves compelled to enrol their children in private schools, motivated by their preference for a secular educational environment, yet regrettably, secular education in Turkey is progressively undergoing a transformation into a commodified entity. Nevertheless, the inability of the state/the current government to effectively address critical issues in public schools, encompassing challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, hygiene problems, physical inadequacies, insufficient of foreign language instruction, and deficiencies in both school and extracurricular activities, etc., also leads public school teachers to opt for private schools. This situation results in a notable proportion of public school teachers participating in the research becoming inadvertent participants in the processes of privatization, notwithstanding their commitment to advocating for public education.

EndNote

1. The spoils system is the practice of the ruling party or faction supporting its own members, family members, supporters, etc., by removing those who previously held office and appointing their own supporters to those positions. The spoils system is the complete opposite of the merit-based system (Hatipoğlu, 2019; Çamur, 2020).

Appendix

Table 2. Information about the participants.

Participant	Numbers of Years Worked	Grade Level Where the Teacher Works	Union	Number of Children Attending School	Number of Children Attending Private School	Number of Years Attending Private School
P1	12	High School	Member	1	1	4
P2	21	High School	Non-Member	1	1	3
P3	15	High School	Non-Member	2	2	1-7 Years 2-2 Years
P4	10	High School	Member	1	1	3
P5	21	Elementary	Member	2	1	4
P6	14	Elementary	Member	1	1	3
P7	22	High School	Member	1	1	4
P8	29	High School	Non-Member	2	2	1-4 Years 2-5 Years
P9	18	High School	Non-Member	1	1	10
P10	30	High School	Member	1	1	2
P11	15	High School	Non-Member	1	1	7
P12	13	High School	Non-Member	1	1	3
P13	7	High School	Non-Member	1	1	1
P14	25	High School	Member	2	2	1-2 Years 2-4 Years
P15	7	High School	Non-Member	1	1	1
P16	11	High School	Non-Member	1	1	5
P17	13	High School	Did not Provide Information	2	1	3

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