Views of Teachers and Academicians about Alternative Education Applications in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore the views of teachers, academicians and graduate students about alternative education/school applications and applicability of these applications in Turkey. The current study is a qualitative study. The data were collected through focused group discussion and interviews and semi-structured interview form was used. The sample of the study consisted of 25 individuals including 13 academicians at Yuzuncu Yil University and 2 graduate students in Education Sciences, and 10 teachers working in Van province. The data were analyzed by descriptive analysis technique. With respect to the findings, alternative education is a new concept for the participants and they have complication for this concept. Also, the participants have different views about the applicability of alternative education in Turkey. In this respect, alternative education applications have the potential to cause great discussions.

Introduction

Throughout history, people have taught their children wishing to transfer their knowledge, experience, values and culture. Consecutively flourishing social events and gradually changing needs of individuals have entailed the necessity for collective education. Therefore, the culture transfer function of education has been accompanied by the concept of schooling. With the collective education, schools have become educational organizations where systematic, regular educational activities are done.

Schools form a system that offers education to those who are wished to be taught by producing experiences to make them learn new behaviors or eliminate unwanted behaviors in accordance with predefined educational goals (Adıgüzel, 2006). Schools, as organizations evolved from planned learning efforts (Balcı, 2007) and as institutions which train people for different roles in social life (Nalçacı & Bektaş, 2012) are organizations for some, businesses for others and families to some others. Traditional schools have social, political and economic duties such as a good citizen and qualified employee, cultural transmission, to ensure the innovation and sustainability of the community (Aydın, 2012, p. 3; Ergün, 1994, p. 76; Lunenburg, 1995).

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The process of social change and transformation started in the mid twentieth century and accelerated due to information Technologies and globalization in the third quarter of the twentieth century has caused critical discussions on the current education system and schools, in classical terms. The fact that schools, in classical terms and "cultural transfer" spread by schools, are planned with an attempt to adapt predefined and predesigned behavioral and cognitive patterns to new generations has caused arguments about the traditional role of schools in changing economic and social conditions (Çankaya, 2011).

The following arguments lie in the heart of these discussions: Students are taught in a parrot fashion, they avoid problems as they do not know what to do when encountered with daily issues and they have difficulty in coming up with original ideas to solve any problems. However, no systematic solutions to those problems have been offered. According to Güven (2005), this case is the outcome of systematic educational policies ongoing for years. When considered in terms of the assigned meaning to education, discussions on schools will become more meaningful.

Ertürk (1998) defines education as "the process of creating persistent behavioral changes through individuals' own lives". Sönmez's (2004) definition of education is "a system which is arranged and put into practice to change people's behaviors in the desired way"and Durkheim's definition of education is "a process when adults fit rising generations for the society" (Durkheim & Fauconnet, 1950) and they are similiar to that of Ertürk. What "desired" and "behavior" in these definitions of education mostly agreed by researchers mean has the potential to enlighten discussions on education and schools. The word "desired" is derived from "to desire" and it is linguistically passive. Briefly, it is an expression that sees individuals as passive receptors and makes them obliged to fulfill wishes defined by some others (Güven, 2005). The term "behavior" indicates behavioral theory. Behavioral theory is a considerable part of education systems as a popular approach in that it soon produces outcomes. However, according to Öngel (2003), in behavioral theory, (materialistic-immaterialistic) rewards for those who display desired behaviors or punishments as a result of unwanted behaviors make individuals change into those who simply act with reward expectations or fear of punishment in time by depriving them of natural enjoyment caused by the process or outcome of their actions. People who unnaturally act with a reward expectation or fear of punishment come to schools as "learning robots".

According to Aydın (2012), schools in historical process have become bureaucratic mechanisms as they are great social institutions that are multilevel and complicated and they employ full time professionals. Schools, in this aspect, mean "pupils who have gained student status" (Açıkalın 2012, p. 5). When asked about schools, students most frequently use the metaphor (simile) "prison". They consider themselves as prisoners, teachers as guards and school principals as wardens (Aydın, 2012, p. 7). In such an atmosphere, teachers spend most of their time and energy to control students and make them obey rules.

However, education is life itself and a natural process which cannot be restricted to bureaucratic lines. Miller (2010) claims human intelligence is ultimately creative, original and spontaneous. According to the researcher, when people are compelled to conform to overwhelming beliefs of countries or societies with the help of schools, they become less free in mental and spiritual terms and their capacity of improving and changing is restricted. Ken Robinson, who gave a speech at a conference held by Technology Entertainment Design (TED, 2006) shared the following story about the applications of the current education systems which sabotage the creativity with the audience:

> "I have recently heard a great story, which I like to tell others. It's about a little girl in painting class. A six year old, seated at the back row painting and if you ask her teacher, this little girl hardly paid attention to the class. Except that day. That day, she was almost fully concentrated on her work. Her teacher was astonished, went to her and asked: 'What are you drawing?'. 'I am drawing God' replied the girl. 'But no one

knows what God is like' said the teacher. And the girl answered: 'No problem, they will learn in a minute'."

Ken Robinson points out that most children, when grown-ups, lose that creative capacity and become people who are afraid of making mistakes. According to him, the worst thing in the current national education systems is a child's "mistakes" and they teach children making them gradually estranged with that creative capacity.

While schools provide education to meet both the needs of individuals and the society, one of the criticisms about education systems is bad habits gained in school grounds or the environment (Aydın & Pehlivan, 2000). Students deprived of natural learning environments might display misbehaviors in order to feel genuine affective pleasure.

Complaints and annoyance about traditional schools have led both parents and education officials to new trend seeking and alternative applications (Aydın, 2012, p. 27). Miller (2010) argues that people tend to great passions rather than being mechanical parts of a massive system, groups of parents, educators and even students call tecnocrasy (education prescribed by experts) into question and alternative schools have flourished in the USA and other countries as they demand suitable learning atmospheres. Almost two centuries ago, in the early years of modern schools, humanist educators such as J. H. Pestalozzi from Switzerland, F. Froebel from Germany and A. B. Alcott in the USA argued against trends that made learning mechanical and applied pedagogies based on genuine, protective relationships, freedom of research and the innate quest of meaning and goals. With that movement in education, "successful educational experience for all" perspective influenced the development of alternative schools. Alternative school applications rapidly increased, especially in the USA in the late 60s and early 70s (Aydın, 2012, p. 35).

Laws in the state of Oregon in the US define alternative education as all educational alternatives offered to students who fail to meet educational standards or have performances higher than the standards (Aydın, 2012). So, still being parts of the state system, state alternative schools are those which are different from traditional approaches and academically foster and support students who fail in traditional academic environments (Coeyman, 2000). According to Aron (2005), alternative schools are comprehensive educational environments offering surroundings different from regular schools in terms of policies, rules, educational objectivity and staff and sources designed for the needs of students (Dündar, 2007). Learning focus in alternative schools is rather based on individualized programs. In this sense, alternative schools offer learning environments to those who suffer from adaptation problems in regular schools.

Alternative schools that are based on individualization, supportive relationships and democratic structures in education have a variety of educational approaches, goals and student profiles. Lange (1998) divides US alternative schools into three. Alternative schools in the first group are popular schools mostly preferred by the society where education programs are generally thematic, and different contents or teaching strategies are practiced. The second type of alternative schools constitutes a practice which, in a sense, compels students who are given a second chance before expelled from schools. Alternative schools, in the third type of this categorization, are those to which students who are thought to be in need of academic, affective and social rehabilitation and improvement attend. M. Reimer and T. Cash (2003) generally list educational characteristics of alternative schools as follows:

- Not crowded (Maximum capacity: 250 students),
- Maximum number of teachers; 10 students per teacher on average,
- High expectations of school staff about students' academic achievements,
- Clearly defined mission and discipline codes,
- Learning programs specific to expectations and learning styles of students,
- Flexible curriculum according to community participation and demands,
- All tendencies focused on academic achievement of every student.

As it is seen, alternative schools have student-centered structures. They claim to guide students by stimulating their inborn interests and enthusiasm with the help of individual projects and efforts (Aydın, 2012, p.33). C. Franklin (1992) suggests the following nine features that influence effectiveness of alternative schools: small size school structure, supportive environment, individualized programs, multi-chance option, autonomy and democratic structure, considerable participation in management, well-defined standards and rules, goal-oriented social services, social responsibility and regular assessment (Dündar, 2007).

It is considerably highlighted that alternative schools serve youths under risk although there have been various contradictory reports in the literature about goals and targeted groups of alternative schools (Aydın, 2012, p. 37). As a matter of fact, according to Desman (2000), the purpose of alternative schools is to help train students who have affective and academic problems. Also, Raywid (1999) suggests goals such as lowered juvenile delinquency and prevention of violence and destruction in schools, prevention of dropouts, eradication of racism in classes, and increased school effectiveness make alternative schools embraced by the society.

Alternative School Applications

It is useful to sum up principal alternative school applications in the worldwide so as to understand the issue well and to make a comment the views about alternative education/school applications in Turkey within a broader perspective.

Homeschooling is an alternative school application that includes educational activities for children under parental supervision (Reich, 2005). Homeschooling, which was approved especially in the US in the 1990s, started when parents took responsibilities for their children's education and taught them at home (Aydın, 2012), as well as religious concerns and parents' beliefs that they could teach their children better than schools (Thomas, 1988; cited by Farrell & Ryan, 2013). The starting point of this education was the demand by government officials employed out of country, officers and missionaries to teach their children who lived away from them and the demand by parents of children who were suffering from health problems that hindered school education (Özkaya, 2013).

In homeschooling, children are systematically taught at home and do not go to school. Parents are their teachers and they bear all the responsibility. They decide what to teach and how to teach. Therefore, responsibilities of parents increase and some criteria are sought in homeschooling for children (Aydın & Pehlivan, 2000). Homeschooling is permitted if parents are interested in children, and if they notice state officials of such a wish of the family one year before homeschooling by a letter of intent and make right arrangements for assessment again one year before homeschooling. İn some states, accreditation or teaching certificates are also needed. Parents may send children to state schools at the same time, enjoying the double-register system. They have access to teaching sources and materials at program offices, libraries and book sellers. Parents who arbitrarily get their children registered at legal distance learning programs might use text books, programs and learning materials of those institutions (DNPE, 2013). Different types of tests or portfolio assessment by a certified teacher are used for the assessment of academic achievement.

Charter schools are state schools that function based on charters between a state institution authorized to sign charters and a group of families, teachers, school administrators or other shareholders who wish to create different alternatives and options in the state school system. Officials who sign the charter expect schools to increase students' academic achievement to the desired level over a period as agreed. Members that certify charters are agencies authorized for charters, charter sponsors or charter authorities (Aydın, 2012). These members have the authority to renew charters if they find school performances satisfactory by monitoring and assessing whether long established charter schools have made progress in accordance with the defined goals as well as the authority to certify applications of charter schools.

Charter schools aim at offering parents and students educational opportunities that are beyond traditional rules and system restrictions in the state scool system, providing accountability by changing the school system into a performance based mechanism rather than rule based and starting a competition in the state school system in order to make necessary moves to improve all state schools (http://ericadr.piccard.csc.com; cited by Aydın, 2012; NEA, 2001; MSDE, 2003).

Paideia schools, in 1971, were established via a group of parents who wanted creative and individualized education for their children, by purchasing a building which hosted 141 students (The Paideia School, 2015). In these schools, decision making activities such as multicultural democratic education, debates, school-community participation, citizenship obligations, role teaching and human rights disposition are largely applied. Paideia schools are mentioned in some sources under the Socratic Method, and as the name suggests they are based on the assertion that students' academic achievement will be high when children are taught by the Socratic Method and they will improve critical thinking skills. That is why Paideia school teachers are experts in "Socratic Dialogues" (Gezer, 2012).

In Paideia schools, "didactic teaching method, including conferences, content reading, audio-visual aids, performance and presentation, and "academic coaching" method, which includes facilitative activities in student projects offered by teachers or out-of-school experts are employed. Also, seminars have an important place in Paideia schools. According to Billings and Roberts (2013), frequent reading, writing and thinking environment provided by speaking and listening skills in these seminars is the key to attract students' attention.

Montessori schools constitute an alternative school application that primarily attaches importance to the needs of students and individual differences. Dr. Maria Montessori, the founder of the schools, had her own educational approach explained by the concept of "prepared environment" for multi age groups (0-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-14) based on natural learning disposition of a child (Aydın, 2012, p. 57). In Montessori schools, natural dispositions of children in the current age group (like game playing) is taken as the basis for creating a learning environment and children are free to choose activities. Morover, Montessori teachers who are specialized use 'constructive materials' rather than texts. Pupils are given opportunities to gain individual autonomy with learning by experiencing and doing. For example; when a child gets hungry, (s)he goes into the kitchen and makes breakfast and eats (Seldin & Epstein, 2003, p. 14).

Magnet schools, developed at metropolitan US universities in the 1970s to decrease racial discrimination and isolation of minorities from the society, are alternative school applications based on teaching students in schools where personal interests of students are highlighted (DE, 2004). Every magnet school follows a particular educational philosophy or a special program and attracts students who are interested in these. Magnet schools are different from traditional school models in three aspects (Aydın, 2012, p. 131): The first feature is that it has a particular theme or a teaching method based integrated program. The second is that students who live out of school enrollment area may enroll at these schools. The third feature is students and parents choose these schools. Magnet schools, which aim at integration rather than discrimination, generally employ collaborative teaching methods, multicultural studies and small group debates.

Summerhill schools (School of Freedom) were established by Alexander Sutherland Neill in England in 1921. The aim of Summerhill schools is to provide children with opportunities to build their own personality and lifestyle themselves. According to Neill, authority, discipline and punishment should not be the components of education, but autonomy, full democracy and self-management should. If a child grows in a free, democratic environment where students make decisions, (s)he reaches her/his stride (Gezer, 2012, p. 158). Some students start these schools at the age of five, some at fifteen. They generally stay at the schools until 16 (Neill, 2000). In these schools, courses are selective and children decide whether to participate in lessons or not. The schools, which give particular importance to students' wishes and interests, do not have a grading system or exams.

However, specific studies for higher education exams are done at high school level (Gezer, 2012, p.158). Bullying, vandalism or other anti-social behaviour is dealt with on-the-spot by specially elected ombudsmen, or can be brought to the whole community in its regular meetings (Summerhill, 2015).

There have been various alternative school applications in education in the world, especially in America, and these applications are gradually increasing. Yet, the concept of alternative education/school is new to Turkey. In Turkey, most alternative school studies have employed document research methods. The research is important in that it will contribute to the alternative school literature as an experimental study. In this context, the purpose of the study is to explore the views of teachers, academicians and graduate students about alternative education/schools and their applicability in Turkey.

Method

The research is carried out by a qualitative method. The research data were collected by focus group discussion and personal interviews.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 25 individuals. In the study group, a total of 13 academicians of Yuzuncu Yil University were included: 1 professor and 6 associate professors at Faculty of Education, 2 assistant professors and 1 instructor at Faculty of Letters, 2 professors and 1 associate professor at Faculty of Theology. Also, 10 teachers in state schools in the center of Van province and 2 graduate students at Yuzuncu Yil University were included in the study.

Table 1. Faculties and Departments of the Academicians in the Study Group

Academicians	Faculties	Departments
A1	Faculty of Education	Preschool Teaching
A2	Faculty of Education	Biology Teaching
A3	Faculty of Education	Literature Teaching
A4	Faculty of Education	History Teaching
A5	Faculty of Education	Literature Teaching
A6	Faculty of Education	Educational Sciences
A7	Faculty of Education	Chemistry Teaching
A8	Faculty of Letters	Turkish Language and Literature
A9	Faculty of Letters	English Language and Literature
A10	Faculty of Letters	English Language and Literature
A11	Faculty of Theology	
A12	Faculty of Theology	
A13	Faculty of Theology	

As it is clear from Table 1, out of 7 participants at Faculty of Education, 2 were at Department of Literature Teaching, 1 at Department of Preschool Teaching, 1 at Department of Biology Teaching, 1 at Department of Chemistry Teaching, 1 at Department of History Teaching and 1 at Department of Educational Sciences. 2 of the three participants at Faculty of Letters were employed at English Language and Literature, and 1 at Department of Turkish Language and Literature. Moreover, 3 of the participants were employed at Faculty of Theology.

Table 2. Branches of the Teachers in the Study Group

Teachers	Branch
T1	English Teacher
T2	English Teacher
T3	Science and Technology Teacher
T4	Physical Education and Sports Teacher
T5	Mathematics Teacher
T6	Classroom Teacher
T7	Art Teacher
T8	English Teacher
T9	Computer Teacher
T10	Physical Education and Sports Teacher

As it is clear from Table 2; 3 of the teachers were English teachers, 2 were Physical Education and Sports teachers, 1 was a Science and Technology teacher, 1 was an Art teacher, 1 was a Classroom teacher and 1 was a Computer teacher. Also, 2 participants who were post graduates were students of Educational Sciences.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The research data were collected by focus group discussion and personal interviews. Focus group interview, as a method that requires to define conditions of research specific groups as they are (Karasar, 1994; Morgan, 1988), provides an environment that encourages participants to trigger one another's wish to think and speak and thus explain their own perceptions about the issue more clearly and sincerely (Kitzinger, 1990).

The focus group interview is usually used for the new study in social sciences. With this method providing information about the views, lives, experiences, tendencies, ideas, feelings, attitudes and habits of participants (Çokluk, Yılmaz & Oğuz, 2011; Memduhoğlu & Topsakal, 2008), it is tried to gather in-depth and multidimensional data concerning with the views of participants about alternative education/school.

The data were collected by focus group interview with a group of 8 teachers (11-12 July 2013). The interview lasted nearly 90 minutes and tape recorders were used on the consent of the participants during the interview. Also, those who refused focus group interview (2 teachers and the academicians) and the participants later included in the study group (post graduates) were personally interviewed for almost 20 minutes each. 2 of the 17 participants who were personally interviewed gave their views in writing as they did not accept tape recording during the interviews.

The participants were also asked to fill in the semi-structured interview form during both the focus group interview and the personal interviews in order to avoid data loss in the study. Then, the recordings and the information in the semi-structured forms were deciphered and the participants' views were encoded and written. Accordingly, the teachers were represented as T; the academicians as A and the graduate students as GS and each participant was given a number besides the code.

"Descriptive Analysis" technique was used for data analysis. Thus, the main categories were defined as the questions in the interview form. The data is submited within three activity digits (reduction of data, presentation of the data, inference and verification) (Türnüklü, 2000) so as to reflect the view of the participants dramatically (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In the presentation of the data, the criteria of intensity (different views), explanatory (themes compliance), diversity and extreme examples are taken into account for quote selection (Carley, 1992; cited by Finney & Corbett, 2007; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1; Ünver, Bümen & Başbay, 2010). Then, the descriptions were reviewed by induction.

Validity and Reliability

Certain precautions were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the study. Expert views were taken during the preparation of interview questions and the form and the questions to appear on the form were carefully written according to the general purpose and the sub-goals of the study. After question writing, the participants stated in the pilot study with a group of teachers and field experts and 2 academicians to have content validity that they found the questions sufficient in number, clear and understandable. Moreover, basic information about alternative school applications was provided at the beginning of the interview and the participants were given enough duration. When the participant views went beyond the scope of the questions and they were not clear, the participants were asked some other questions to have explanatory answers. In the study, to provide internal reliability, consistency between opinions were examined while to provide external reliability, encoded recordings were encoded by two investigators and they were analied and confirmed.

Findings

In this section, the findings obtained from the study are presented under subheadings that include the questions which the participants were asked.

Expectations and Demands in School Education of Children

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Do you think expectations and demands of individuals, parents and different social groups should be regarded in school education? If so, why?". Nearly all of the participants agreed with the idea that expectations and demands of individuals, parents and different social groups should be regarded. Some of the participants also added (T6, T8, A8, A10, A11, A12) certain conditions were needed in regarding those expectations and demands.

The participants highlighted the fact that education was a social concept (T2, A4) and thought that regarding expectations and demands was a human right specifically of parents (A2, A3, A6) and that they needed to be the primary decision makers in children's education (T5, T10, A10). One of the teachers (T4) said regarding expectations and demands would build a basis for education and some problems would arise without that. One of the participants (A5) who emphasized diversity and individual features (T1, T7, A9, GS1) expressed the following opinion: "I think, in today's multicultural, colorful world, educational programming and planning in consideration of needs, family expectations, children's individual differences and skills will be most beneficial".

As well as their views about regarding expectations and demands, some of the participants added that parents were not well informed in Turkey (T6, T8), demands could not be shaped only by parents (A8, A10) and that basic principals in education were to be maintained (A11). Moreover, one of the academicians (A12) thought Turkish schools and teachers were not at a desired level to meet needs. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"Expectations of individuals, parents and the society must be considered because they are those to whom education is applied (T2)."

"Education is a social phenomenon and human beings are social creatures. Education relates to the social environment in which people live. Therefore, expectations of parents and groups must be considered (A4)."

"They are to be considered because above all, children belong to their parents, prior to the government. Parental demands for raising their children must be paid attention. Parents need to be the primary decision makers in children's education (A13)."

"They must absolutely be considered because education regardless of the needs of the society and expectations cannot achieve its goals. Unless we have the ideal of training productive people by taking common grounds, values and experiences of the society into account, the society plants the seeds of alienation with all those trained, alienated people (GS1)."

Parents and Societies' Right to Raise Children

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Do you think parents and social groups should have the right to raise children according to their own values? If so, why?". Most of the participants stated that parents and social groups had the natural right to raise children according to their own values. On the other hand, some of the participants (A5, A9, A11, L1, GS2) thought parents had to be partly granted the right.

Those who had positive views thought particularly parents were to teach children cultural values (T2, A3, A6, A7, A10, A13) and this was one of human rights (T3, A1, A2) . One of the academicians (A2) said parents needed to be informed to enjoy such a right they had. One of the teachers who expressed a negative view (T10) thought value judgments could change from person to person and children had to be trained in consideration of the government, and parents and social groups should not be given such a right.

The participants found upbringing by parents and social groups according to their own values partly positive and stated every country had different family structures (A11), and added parents and social groups needed a balance to keep society away from chaos during this upbringing (T9, A5, A9, GS1). One of the graduate students (GS1) expressed the following opinion: "Common values of the society must be considered but providing educational opportunities for every family is pretty hard. It is not right to restrict individuals to family values and judgments, proving them non-governmental entities". In addition, one of the participants (GS2) stated when parents enjoyed their right, governmental control and supervision was needed not to cause any child abuse. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"Yes, parents must make necessary decisions in children's education. Raising children according to their own world view is one of the basic rights of a family (A13)."

"Yes, parents should be granted such a right but it should be accompanied by some governmental supervision to avoid child abuse (GS2)."

"Yes, there must be such a right because there is the freedom of beliefs, so I think parents have the right to raise children by teaching them their own value system (A6)."

"There must be such a right because every family has a set of cultural values to teach. However, while granting families this right, we should remember that the society has its own structure. Family is a sub-group of the society and values gained in the family should not be against the society, or contradictory with social values (T9)."

Meeting Expectations and Demands in Education in Turkey

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "To what extent do you think education in Turkey meets expectations and demands by regarding them?". Most of the participants (T3, T4, T5, T7, T8, A3, A7, A11, A12, GS1, GS2) stated these expectations and demands were not met while some of them (T1, A1, A2, A5, A8, A10, A13) said they were hardly met. Also, some participants' views supported the idea that expectations and demands started to be met recently (T2, A4, A6, A9).

Those who did not think expectations and demands were met in education thought that there were programs in application stipulating a framework defined by a particular group in the system (A3), the prevalent idea was training people into prototypes (A12) and that changes suddenly occurred in the system without consulting parents or social groups (Ö4). One of the teachers said the following (T7): "Every year in our country, there are national education councils but the ideas created by people from different geographical regions are left to the hands of a particular group of people or the governmental declarations".

One of the participants who thought expectations and demands were hardly met (T1) expressed the following: "There is largely a single-centered education system although there are parent-teacher associations and non-governmental organizations in educational life. Parent-teacher associations do not mean that parents have a strong voice in education". Furthermore, some of the participants (T2, A4, A6, A9) stated expectations and demands started to be met by the recent selective course applications. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"Only a few expectations and demands are met because there is an overwhelming, ideological education based central system. The system meets a number of social demands but it is far from fully meeting basic needs of individuals and social expectations (A1)."

"There is not an opportunity yet to meet parental expectations although they are partly met in the context of selective courses. Thus, I think there must be a variety of selective courses, which I find right and humane (A13)."

"I do not think they are fully met; although there seems to be parent-teacher associations and non-governmental organizations in educational life, there is a system imposed by the single centered structure in education. Parent-teacher associations do not mean that parents have a voice in education (T1)."

"I do not think there is an idea to meet the people's demands. Training prototypes in one model is the overall plan (A12)."

State-provided Schooling and the Unified Curriculum

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "How do you find state-provided schooling by The Law on Unification of Education and the compulsory unified curriculum application in those schools?". Nearly all of the participants thought it was contrary to human rights and democracy and every individual had different features and the unified curriculum would not address to everyone.

Some of the participants (T8, T10, A1, A2, A3, GS2) considered the unified curriculum application in schools was a violation of human rights above all. One of the participants (A5) emphasized the conditions of our times and expressed an opinion in the following way: "During periods of foundation of countries and states laws like The Law on Unification of Education can be adopted, which is natural for development, but it is necessary to break the rigid models under the current conditions and have a variety in education". Some of the academicians (A5, A6, A8, A11) suggested that different alternative schools including various curriculum applications should be established by both the government and parents and the government should play a supervisory role for such schools.

One of the participants who found state-provided schooling and the unified curriculum application positive (A4) thought the government had to have power by law like The Law on Unification of Education to avoid chaos in education. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"We are not prototypes by creation so why should we be compelled to become prototypes? Unified curriculum means 'Hasan, Ali and Fatma must be the same, they must always think the same and they have to take the same steps in one direction'. I think this is problematic (T3)."

"The current system, when considered in the context of human rights, is contradictory with many clauses of human rights and unified education is against human nature. Everyone is special and unique (A1)."

"I think state-provided schooling is really problematic. Schools can be founded by private or legal persons but the government should be obliged to supervise (A6)."

"Governmental control mechanism is essential for avoidance of chaos and conflicts in education. Bearing this in mind, I approve unified curriculum application in authorized educational institutions (A4)."

Educators' Information about Alternative Schools in the World

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "How much information do you have about alternative education/school applications in the world? (Religious schools, Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, Homeschooling, Summerhill schools, Charter schools, Paideia schools and so on.)". Nearly the half of the participants (T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T10, A2, A4, A8, A9, A12) said they did not have enough information about alternative school applications. Only one of the participants (T2) thought (s)he was well informed about alternative school applications and did research on homeschooling and Summerhill schools.

Those who were partly informed about alternative school applications (T1, T2, T8, T9, A1, A3, A5, A6, A7, A10, A11, A13, GS1, GS2) knew most about homeschooling (9 participants) and religious schools (7 participants). The other participants partly knew Summerhill schools (4 participants), Montessori schools (3 participants) and Waldorf schools (1 participant). Moreover, two participants (T8, A11) considered distance education as an alternative school application, one (L2) considered minority schools and another (A2) vocational schools and they stated they were informed about them. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"Frankly, I am partly informed about religious schools and homeschooling (T1)."

"In Germany, there are restaurant management schools and vocational schools in the required fields (A2)."

"I have just learned about Waldorf schools. I know a little about homeschooling and Summerhill schools, as well. Besides, there are religious schools and minority schools in the Netherlands. The government can establish schools if there is a group of 15-20 children (T9)."

"I am informed about homeschooling in England and Montessori schools in our country, especially popular as preschools but I did not know they were considered as alternative educational institutions (GS1)."

Alternative Schools in Turkey

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Do you think we should clear the way for alternative schools in Turkey shaped by different educational demands consistent with values of parents and different social groups? Why?". Most of the participants (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T9, T10, A1, A2, A3, A5, A6, A10, A12, A13) agreed with the idea and justified that with an emphasis on drawbacks of unification, individual differences and cultural variety in Turkey.

Some of the participants (T7, A7, A8, A11, GS2) expressed that it was essential to pave the way for these applications when under certain conditions. Those participants supported alternative school applications but thought that we were to train educators, especially for these schools (A7), alternative schooling mustn't be given up to personal initiatives (T7) and that governmental supervision and (A11, GS2) a common examination was needed (A8) in order to foster these schools. Two of the participants who had negative ideas about fostering alternative school applications (T8, A9) stated that training children just like other family members was not favorable as they needed freedom (T8) and educational institutions from every social segment could cause commotion (A9). Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"These applications should be paved the way for. Variety does no harm. Every culture survives another (T10)."

"It is an obligation not a need because my child and I should decide about the education of my child. No other authority should consider this is their right (A1)."

"Everbody may have different opinions as we all have different fingerprints. We see that differences bring richness in the homeschooling and Summerhill school examples in the world. Something with positive outcomes is not unfavorable in practice in Turkey (T2)."

"They should not be fostered. If this is the case, then parents will teach children identically with themselves. How healthy is this? I am in favor of freeing children in any way but I do not approve that children must think like their parents (T8)."

Alternative School Applications in Turkey

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Which alternative schools do you think are applicable in Turkey and to what extent? Why?". When the participants' views are examined, it is obvious that there was almost an even distribution in the numbers of those who found alternative schools applicable; inapplicable; conditional and that of those who considered it an expert question.

Those who had positive views about the applicability of alternative schools (A1, A2, A4, A10, GS2) said there were large groups in Turkey with different languages, religions and cultures (A2, A4) and training prototypes in such a rich framework was meaningless (A10). Also, one of the academicians (A11) argued for homeschooling, as an alternative school application, in that it could be employed in teaching students with disabilities. Some of the participants (T4, T5, T7, A5, A8) thought it was a technical issue and research and expert views were essential to make comments.

Those who had negative views about the applicability of alternative schools (T3, T9, T10, A9, A12, GS1) said there was not enough social consciousness (A9, A12) and a cultural background (T10) in Turkey to apply this education and a non-compulsory type of education would not be applicable (T9). One of the graduate students (GS1) stated the following: "How could students be oriented to homeschooling when they are not offered a proper education system in schools? Who will supervise it? How will we know our children have gained the expected knowledge and skills". On the other hand, some of the participants (T1, T2, T6, A3, A6) stated that a social (A6), intellectual, academic and economic (A3) background was needed to apply alternative schools in Turkey. One of the teachers (T1) said: "Applicability of alternative schools depends on many economic, political, geographic and cultural variables. Thus, they are applicable where the background is good enough." Some of the participants' views were as follows:

"This will change according to many economic, political, geographic and cultural variables. Alternative schools are applicable where there is enough background (T1)."

"There is no family education. Why not? Parents need to be educated first. Every family member endlessly watches a TV series. Everybody has a TV show at certain times to watch. Nobody sacrifices their interest and takes care of children (A12)."

"Alternative schools are not applicable. If there were no compulsory education in Turkey, there would be a group of people who would never send their children to school. Some say 'Why should I pay for education after sending children to school?' (T9)."

"This is something technical. Different alternative schools in the world could be examined and adapted to our culture, social structure, background, reflections of people, their beliefs and philosophy but the most important thing here is to have a background (A6)."

Viewpoints of Educators about Alternative Schools in Children's Education

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Do you intend to send your child(ren) to prospective alternative schools in Turkey. If so, why?". Most of the participants (T3, T9, A1, A3, A7, GS1) gave conditional consent to sending their children to alternative schools although some said they would intend this. 3 of the participants had negative views.

Those who gave conditional consent to sending their children to prospective alternative schools in Turkey leaned towards probable alternative schools that would reflect their own beliefs and opinions (T1, T7, A4, A9, A10) and be applied with caution by experts (T2) properly (T4, T6, T8, A12). Some of them stated that children could have their own value system (A6) and they would send their children to alternative schools with skill based curriculum (T5, A5, GS2) if alternative schools with reasonable prices were opened (A8, A9).

Also, three participants who thought alternative schools would hinder socialization of children (A11, A13) and they would cause problems in practice (T10) said they would not like to send their children to alternative schools even if they were available in Turkey. Some of the participants' views were as follows:

> "If an alternative school can really reflect my style, I myself am intended to study at that school. Why not as long as it reflects children's personal qualities and it is not contradictory with my private and family life and culture? (T7)."

> "I would love to if there are alternative schools properly applied (T4)."

> "I do not know, perhaps I would not like it because I want my child to be related to the whole community. I mean I would like my child to meet all the colors in the society because I am one of those who think they are richness (A13)."

> "In the current system, there is no environment that gives children an opportunity to create their own value system. Now, children are taught with particular patterns. Therefore, why should not I send my child(ren) if there are schools where liberal, unbiased, objective alternative school programs are applied, offering children an apportuntiy to build their own value systems? (A6)."

Views and Recommendations of Educators about Alternative Educational Applications

Under this sub-heading, the participants were asked the following question: "Do you have further comments and suggestions?". Most of the participants gave different opinions and made suggestions for the improvement of education.

Some of the academicians claimed such argumentative questions were beneficial for Turkey (A8, A13), they would further be discussed by the society in the future when people were free from prejudices (A3) and it was essential for academicians to give some thought to the issue and guide graduate students (A6).

Some participants (T5, A4, A5, A10, A13) thought comprehensive, educational studies based on social demands in which differences were regarded were needed. Similarly, one of the teachers (T1) said: "Individual and social expectations must be converged to one another and met in the middle with the help of realistic, rationalist and creative solutions and education programs and school models must be accordingly arranged". Also, the participants thought governmental supervision (A11) and serious budgeting (T3) would be needed in a probable alternative school application. One of the teachers (T10) stated the following: "A child is given basic education within the framework the government offers and then builds on that if (s)he wishes. Thus, we need curricula development, commissions and variety in the state system".

Two of the teachers (T4, T7) believed it would be better for education to be independent from politics and build education on an independent basis. One of the teachers (T1) suggested that expectations of individuals and the society should be equally regarded in probable attempts of alternative school applications. In parallel to this, another teacher (T2) stated the following about restructuring and applying alternative schools in Turkey: "We have fitting education. We are pushing people to fit into an imported dress without considering the sociological background, social facts and demographic features".

Another teacher (T8) who emphasized the fact that education was life itself thought it was essential to have alternative schools where children would be provided with education that could help them in any aspects of life. The participants suggested things such as transformation of private training centers into private schools and maintanence of state schools (A2) and improving vocational and art schools (A12). Also, one of the participants (GS2) brought forward the following proposal: "We must come together with educators who believe in the applicability of homeschooling and develop a feasible modeling. Then, the modeling might be submitted to the Ministry of National

Education. We may discuss advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling in detail". Some of the participants' views were as follows:

> "Education should not be restricted to knowledge. It is a "from cradle to grave" matter and in this process, children must be given environments and opportunities to develop themselves against difficulties of life in any sense and education must become multidirectional (T7)."

> "An economic background is critical. Every year, regular allocations are needed. If we talk about people, then a considerable budget is deserved (T3)."

> "Those who manage education should not think like 'I know the best of all, not others'. If we live in a society, everbody knows something and it is right to go in the direction shown and needed by the majority (T5)."

> "In my opinion, these alternative education systems might be discussed by the society, appear on the agenda and be applied probably with further democratization of Turkey and a prejudice free environment (A3)."

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The study that aimed at exploring the applicabiliity of alternative schools in Turkey concluded that alternative education could be taken as a new concept in Turkey and the participants suffered from conceptual conflicts. On the other hand, the participants generally gave views that reflected the spirit of alternative education in a sense, by highlighting individualization, supportive relationships and democratic structure in education. Additionally, the research findings brought many arguments about the applicability of alternative schools in Turkey.

The participants stated expectations and demands of individuals, parents and social groups in education had to be considered. One of the participants (T4) who thought educational applications without considering expectations and demands would cause a lot of problems said the following: "Expectations and demands need to be regarded. For example, when the new education system started (4+4+4), serious problems arose since parents and social groups had not been asked for opinions, problems are still arising because the system was not based on a proper background". Parents would like to have a voice in decision making in education but think expectations and demands in education in Turkey are not or hardly met. According to the participants' views, in education programs developed within the views of certain groups are applied to teach prototypes and with sudden changes. According to Memduhoğlu (2013, p.59), Turkey is centrally governed despite the vast lands and a great population and this centralist understanding is one of the greatest issues in administrative structuring. The problem is believed to have an influence on decisions to be taken in education and this case is parallel to the research findings.

The participants found training children according to family values a natural right and necessity. As parents would like to transfer their own cultures, values and beliefs to next generations, they want to be the primary decision makers and have a stronger voice in children's education than now. Furthermore, as stated by some of the participants, a balance needs to be maintained while parents and social groups enjoy this right so as not to cause a chaotic situation in social structure. According to Sliwka (2008), with reference to J. J. Rousseau's "Emilie", many critics who have criticized the state school system suggest we should consider (inner) innate development of a child rather than social demands. When viewed this way, it can be said that parents in Turkey, while deciding education of children, consider their own value judgments and demands much more than children's innate abilities.

According to Gezer (2012), education has become a "task of the government" in today's system where there have been state shaped curriculum and text books, teacher training programs and compulsory education. In the study, the participants who stated that state's providing schooling in Turkey and the compulsory unified curriculum application restricts the freedom of children added that everybody had different qualities and the unified curriculum could not address to everyone.

However, Pestalozzi claims that schools and teachers are obliged to provide children with an eligible environment and guidance for the development of children's natural abilities in a free way (Aytaç, 2012). According to the participants' views, it was essential to have both state provided and family provided alternative schooling including different curriculum applications and the government should act as a supervisor for these schools. Here, we must maintain a balance and this finding shows it is parallel to another finding which reveals the need for a balance in enjoying the right to teach children according to family values. One of the participants (GS1) gave the following opininon: "Common values of the society must be considered but providing educational opportunities for every family is pretty hard. It is not right to restrict individuals to family values and judgments, proving them non-governmental entities".

It was seen that nearly the half of the participants were not informed about alternative school applications in the world at all and the rest were barely informed. It is observed that studies in Turkey on alternative schools have largely examined Montessori schools (Danişman, 2012; Büyüktaşkapu, 2012; Durakoğlu, 2011; Hesapçıoğlu, 2006; Miller, 2006; Oğuz & Köksal-Akyol, 2006; Özkaya, 2013; Kayılı & Arı, 2011). There has been relatively less research on Waldorf schools (Akdağ, 2006; Bayhan & Bencik, 2008; Gürkan & Ultanır, 1994; Kotaman, 2009) and homeschooling (Aydın & Pehlivan, 2000; Şad & Akdağ, 2010; Taşdan & Demir, 2010; Yüceer & Coşkun-Keskin, 2012). The reason why Montessori schools have mostly been examined is thought to be the recent spread of private preschool institutions in Turkey (Kayılı & Arı, 2011) and effectiveness of Montessori schools shown by research (Eratay, 2011). In the study, it was seen that the participants who were partly informed about alternative school applications knew most about homeschooling (9 participants) and religious schools (7 participants) while relatively less participants were informed about Montessori schools (3 participants) and Waldorf schools (1 participant). This case could be explained in two ways: Firstly, intensively felt culture, and the idea of value and belief transfer because of regional sensitivities might have caused families to search for homeschools and religious schools. The second one is that the participants might be insufficiently informed about theoretical and practical studies on alternative schools. In addition, it could be suggested that alternative education/schools is a new concept for Turkey that still causes "conceptual conflict" and the concept entails some uncertainties and prejudices when we think that a considerable number of participants considered private schools, distance education, private training centers, minority schools and vocational schools as alternative school applications. The greatest difficulty in alternative school discussions is terminological correspondence of alternative education and this term may be associated with meanings much different from those in the literature in countries where there is not a genuine alternative education (Korkmaz, nd).

According to the research findings, the participants emphasized the drawbacks of unification, individual differences and cultural variety and stated that alternative schools in Turkey had to be definitely fostered. Despite this, most of the participants could not give equally single-minded answers to the question of sending children to prospective alternative schools in Turkey because the participants thought they could send their children to alternative schools provided that alternative schools in the future would reflect their own values, beliefs and opinons and have proper practices. At this point, we can see this fact again family value judgments and decisions are the determinant factors in children's education. Moreover, some of the participants said they would not send their children to alternative schools as they would hinder children's socialization although there was frequent highlight of the concepts such as supportive environment, democratic structure, considerable participation in management, goal oriented social services and social responsibility (Franklin 1992; cited by Dündar, 2007). This could be explained with the fact that the participants said they mostly knew homeschooling and they were not well informed about such applications.

It could be suggested that those who mostly gave conditional consent to sending children to alternative schools if available in Turkey, which they considered necessary, did not yet believe these schools could be properly applied in Turkey. Similarly, the participants mostly had negative or hesitant views about the extent to which alternative schools could be applied in Turkey. In Turkey, the home of different religions, languages and cultures, alternative school applications are considered essential, but it is thought that there is insufficient social awareness, and a cultural, academic and economic background to apply such an education.

According to the participants, Turkish families are not at a desirable level to provide their children with applications like homeschooling. One of the academicians (A9) gave the following opinion: "Parents are decision makers in homeschooling. I think in Turkey social consciousness is not yet built and there is no awareness, literacy and intellectual, scientific accumulation at all". In homeschooling, certain criteria are certainly sought for (Aydın & Pehlivan, 2000) although there are some restrictions in proper education program development and application (Şad & Akdağ, 2010). For instance, in the US, parents who intend to teach children at home are expected to write a letter of intent a year before homeschooling and make necessary arrangements. Besides this, accreditation or teaching certificates are asked in some states. In North Carolina, parents or guides to teach children are to be at least high school graduates (DNPE, 2013). Akdağ (2006) states it is unlikely for underdeveloped countries to have homeschooling in families with a lot of children. Accordingly, homeschooling seems possible only when families have a certain intellectual background with a low number of children. The fact that there are no legal regulations on homeschooling in Turkey and homeschools are thought to be conflicting with the principle of unification of instruction (Şad & Akdağ, 2010) shows we need a particular background for the application of this education. In a study, Taşdan and Demir (2010) suggested that it was hard to have homeschooling in Turkey because of socio-economic difficulties, legal procedures, economic sources, teaching technology and lack of materials but there could be an alternative model only when the conditions were provided.

In the light of the findings obtained from the literature review of the studies on alternative school applications and the participants' views and suggestions, it is thought that such arguments will be beneficial for a country like Turkey, which is the home of different religions, languages and cultural components. When this variety in Turkey is considered, it is essential to do comprehensive educational research based on social demands. However, alternative school applications entail some concerns and prejudices. That's normal because according to Akdağ (2006), the paradigm that appears as alternative education models can be alleged to be a paradigm yet to come but it is likely for models which have been in use to change in interaction with the main trend in education and become alternative methods that do not pose a threat in the global world and the authoritarian educational process after losing the initial content.

In Turkey, alternative schools that are to be in practice in consideration with our country's demographic features, social facts, sociological and cultural backgrounds rather than identical copies of alternative school applications abroad will be successful. Recently in Turkey, there have been studies for closing/transforming private training centers. In this context, private training centers might be changed into charter schools that aim at providing educational opportunities beyond traditional rules and structure of the state school system and accountability of the school system by changing it into a performance-based system rather than rule based. According to Driscoll (2001), in view of the current state school system away from meeting gradually chaning needs of students, charter schools will meet the needs of all students through probable change and innovation (Aydın, 2012).

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