

UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF CHOICE IN THE PROCESS OF  
UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM IN TURKEY: A CASE STUDY AT METU

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## ABSTRACT

### UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF CHOICE IN THE PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM IN TURKEY: A CASE STUDY AT METU

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The aim of this thesis is to analyze the experience of the transition to higher education in the context of Turkey where the means of accessing to higher education is conducted via central examinations. To this end, the questions of “*What are the conditions of accessing higher education based on the central examination experience in the context of Turkey? Which characteristics of education system shape the process of university choice? What strategies do students employ and in which ways they play their roles assigned by the system of education to prepare for the exam? How do students relate their scores with choosing a university; is it really a choice?*” have been developed. The fieldwork was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with 34 students from the Department of Basic English at Middle East Technical University in order to answer those questions. Based on the interviews, the study aims to complicate the concept of university choice to show how both socio-economic backgrounds of participants and contextual characteristics of higher education system in Turkey have been formulating and constraining the university choices in the process of transition to higher education.

The study reveals that while the experience of transition to higher education is shaped around the discourse of university choice, the system of central examination has been a barrier for students in terms of not being able to mainly focus on university choice due to the dominance of the central exam itself.

**Keywords:** university entrance exam, access to higher education, university choice

## ÖZ

### TÜRKİYE’DE ÜNİVERSİTEYE GİRİŞ SINAVI SÜRECİNDE TERCİH KAVRAMINI ANLAMAK: ODTÜ VAKA ÇALIŞMASI

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Bu tezin amacı, yüksek öğrenime geçişin merkezi sınavlar yoluyla yapıldığı Türkiye bağlamında yüksek öğrenime geçiş deneyimini analiz etmektir. Bu doğrultuda, *“Türkiye’de merkezi sınavla yüksek öğrenime geçişin koşulları nelerdir? Eğitim sisteminin üniversite seçim sürecini şekillendiren özellikleri nelerdir? Öğrenciler ne gibi stratejiler kullanırlar ve sınava hazırlanmak için sistemin onlara yüklediği roller nelerdir? Öğrenciler sınav puanlarını üniversite tercihi yapabilmekle nasıl ilişkilendirirler? Bu gerçekten bir seçim midir?”* soruları hazırlanmıştır. Bu sorulara cevap vermek üzere, saha çalışması, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Temel İngilizce Bölümü'nden 34 öğrenci ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler şeklinde yapılmıştır. Görüşmelere dayanarak, bu çalışma, hem görüşmecilerin sosyo-ekonomik koşullarının hem de eğitim sisteminin yapısal özelliklerinin, yüksek öğrenime geçiş sürecinde üniversite seçimini formüle ettiğini ve kısıtladığını göstermek için üniversite seçimi kavramını problemlileştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın sonunda, her ne kadar yüksek öğrenime geçiş mevzusu, üniversite tercihi söylemi üzerinden şekilleniyor olsa



da, merkezi sınav yapısının ve sınavın uygulanışının baskınlığı sebebiyle, sınavın kendisinin öğrencilerin üniversite tercihi yapmalarının önünde önemli bir engel olarak işlediği sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** üniversite giriş sınavı, yüksek öğrenime erişim, üniversite tercihi

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
AYT	Alan Yeterlilik Testi (Field Proficiency Test)
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
LYS	Lisans Yerleştirme Sınavı (Undergraduate Placement Exam)
MEB	Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (Ministry of National Education)
METU	Middle East Technical University
ÖSS	Öğrenci Seçme Sınavı (Student Selection Examination)
ÖSYM	Ölçme, Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi (Measurement, Selection and Placement Center)
TÜSİAD	Türkiye Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği (Turkish Industry and Business Association)
TYT	Temel Yeterlilik Testi (Basic Proficiency Test)
ÜSYM	Üniversitelerarası Öğrenci Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi (Inter-University Student Selection and Placement Center)
YGS	Yükseköğretime Geçiş Sınavı (The Transition to Higher Education Examination)
YÖK	Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (Council of Higher Education)

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It was a snowy day in Ankara in the beginning of the winter, 2011. METU always looks great while covered in snow even if this period of the year coincides with the finals of the term. It is nice to take a walk in the forest which has various kinds of tree species. For that day, I was on my way to dormitory after the Calculus final exam and had no energy to enjoy the beautiful view of METU. It was a very hard day and I was so tired of taking exams, which lead me to question about whether the department of Elementary Math Education suits me or not. Beyond being successful at the exams, it was more like feeling that there were too much requirements which I could not relate with myself. It was like I was just trying to survive within the given framework of what should be done to be successful. This is not to say that I was successful but it was also not the main focus. Rather, the hard one was trying to stop myself to think about whether I made a mistake while I drew the path of this higher education destination for myself or not. The reason why thinking on it was not comfortable was that I thought that all the efforts to make decisions for universities and the departments should have been finished after I passed the university entrance exam. Another reason why I felt uncomfortable was that this final situation was reflecting itself as something non-compensable because university entrance exam, for me, was the final touch on all my efforts in educational field. Although I considered what I was experiencing something unusual and different, this had happened to me before. When I focused the whole process starting from the preparation process for university entrance exam to that day, I realized that this was not the first time for me to focus on what should be completed by not thinking about consequences. The feeling was familiar with what I felt during the preparation of

university entrance exam which I studied too much to make the best choice for me even if I did not have an answer if one would ask me what I was studying for.

That period of my life always reminds me of my mom's saying: "We will do everything in our power to keep you study, but there is no guarantee because it is totally up to you. If you have enough motivation to study, you can guarantee a good future just for yourself. It is your choice: Succeed or Not Succeed" which reflects itself in our daily life practices like warning the little brother to be silent and inviting guests rarely. Apart from all these, my parents used every means available and provided me with additional supports such as private tutoring and taking courses from a private teaching center. I was trying to do my best for the exam. However, it is hard to say that I was aware of what I was doing all these for. The process was like an obligation which one-if it is reached to the final year of high school- has to concentrate on the possibility of being successful at the exam. Therefore, I was doing so but then I realized that I exactly knew how one should study for the exam but I was not sure about how one should decide where to study next. Although I have entered one of the top ranking universities in Turkey, I have still had that same feeling.

There was one more thing that bothered me. When I explained what I felt to my family and my friends, they seemed like they understood me but their emphasis was on the 'fact' that this was my choice, but I did not feel that it was at all. Thus, there should be someone responsible other than me for this outcome. At that time, I could not express the situation with the words and concepts which will be operationalized in this study but the issues of university entrance exam and university choice in the context of Turkey - beyond my particular experience- should be understood within the structure in which they emerge. In this sense, I deem it necessary to put emphasis on the structural factors that one cannot easily make them clear as the determinants of their 'choices'. In my case, there was a university experience even if I was not sure about it, but there are also educational experiences that ended before reaching the door of the university. That being the case, I wanted to find the 'responsible' for my own case, and now I am questioning it



for all those who cannot get access to the university. When I thought about how I was bothered because of the discourse of ‘it was your choice’, I cannot imagine how hard it is to hear ‘you could do it if you really wanted to go to university’. That is why, after I completed my bachelor’s degree which provided me with an opportunity to see education as a practice in everyday life and also pushed me to think more about the role of education within the society in Turkey, I applied to the Department of Sociology to get a master degree regarding this issue. When it was announced, I was so happy not only because I will be doing my M.Sc. study in METU but also for the feeling of making a ‘choice’ for the first time although people around me and the official record of university entrance exam claimed that the one that I made five years ago was also a ‘choice’.

Each year nearly two and a half millions of students take the university entrance exam so that it can be said that it is still the most preferred way of making future plans in the context of Turkey. This exam is the way of entering a university for high school students based on their scores and rankings. Since students get access to universities via the central examination, it is important to present how it is approached by the society in the context of Turkey. The exam has a characteristic of affecting the whole family as a big deadline waiting at the end of the compulsory education. In this sense, the exam has the power of pushing the family and the student to reorganize their daily life practices. Even if the exam is an issue which affects the whole family, it is experienced as if the exam is totally up to the effort of students. Since the central exam is important in the transition experience, individual is considered as the only subject who is responsible for both being ready for the exam and then the choices which may seem as an outcome of a decision making process carried out mainly by the individual.

In Turkey, the dominant discourse to encourage students for the university entrance exam has been continuing to emphasize individuals and the importance of how much they want to be successful. While students are channeled to focus on the exam by the

officials, the specific ‘language’ about examination also underlines that the year of examination is the most important one among the other educational turning points.

Although it might be considered as a fact that a considerable number of students cannot access to even the exam, officials generally go around the changes on both the content and the format of the exam. In this sense, first, the discourse on exam will be presented with the aim to shed light on how officials and the media approach the university entrance exam especially on the eve of the examination week. When the head of ÖSYM give information about the content of the exam, he says:

The selectivity of the exam will be high in terms of that it will be able to distinguish between students with advanced knowledge, above average and average; between successful and unsuccessful while primarily measuring their analytical thinking abilities. If the candidate is an average student who follows the curriculum and has high reasoning and analytical thinking abilities, the exam will be easy without the need for additional knowledge. (“ÖSYM Başkanı: Formüle dayalı soru sorulmayacak”, 2017)

When it is considered how much the field of higher education is under the domination of privatization which has ended up with the marketization of preparation process of university entrance exam in the name of ‘additional support mechanisms’ serving to maintain existing inequalities among the candidates, officials continue to put emphasis on how the exam will be selective as if its current existence and structure are not selective enough.

When the concepts emphasized by the official are focused, it can be seen that the focus is on the individual and the importance of trusting oneself. Keeping calm and giving effort are the other significant factors to be successful. Also, the official underlines that those young people have a great importance for the country and the nation.

As it is known, the most important feature of our system is that it prioritizes verbal and numerical literacy and reasoning in transition to higher education. This concept is an achievement for Turkey. This exam that you have been studying for years requires calmness, self-confidence, and physical health. I

recommend that you pay attention to especially these three issues for a successful exam. When you consider your whole life, please note that life success does not depend solely on this test. Success requires positive thoughts, perseverance and patience as well as hard work. (“YÖK'ten YKS açıklaması | Üniversite sınavı ne zaman yapılacak?”, 2019)

Another expression by the head of YÖK follows the same concepts to give the key of success to the students; the fact that they need to have positive thoughts to be successful. The presented expressions reflect the system of central examination as something equipped in terms of giving equal chance to the candidate students. Thus, these discourses serve for obscuring the point by not raising the issue of equality for students in their university entrance exam experiences. The problematic of this discourse is its characteristics of normalising giving individual advices with the aim to help them stay motivated while their advantages and disadvantages in this field of private mechanisms of preparation process are already determined by their available sources. In the general framework, those expressions have effects on the factors that students relate with their successes and failures.

As regards the answers of top ranking students when they are asked about their results and the way of being successful, it seems that the dominant discourse which points individual rather than the structural factors has effects on their discourses. One of the top scoring students in 2019 explains his exam experience by giving the following advices: "They should study regularly. They must solve different questions on different topics. Their whole lives do not depend on the result of this exam. They should not put themselves under stress." He continues with saying that he would choose computer engineering; "I have not decided on the university yet. I am still studying on it. I think that this profession will be important in the future." (“2019 YKS birincileri belli oldu”, 2019)

One of the top scoring students in 2018 puts: “I studied hard to achieve my goal; I aim to study medicine. However, in addition to hard work, it is necessary to study regularly and

be disciplined”. When his choice of university is asked, he says that he will choose a university which he believes that it is the best for him. (“YKS birincisi İstanbul’dan”, 2018)

These statements which come after the announced results of the exam clearly show that the ‘successful’ students highlight how it is important to be ready for the exam. Their expressions clearly reveal that the exam is more important than making decisions for a university. In this respect, it is relevant to generate discussions on individual practices in the field of education for several reasons. One is about the experience of central examination located at the end of the compulsory education in terms of how the education system prepares students for both the university entrance exam and how they make a decision for a university based on the score of this exam. Another reason, in accordance with the first one, is the need of discussing the scope of being successful at the central exam and the transposability of this ‘success’ to the field of higher education and then to the labor market. By doing so, the study attempts to complicate the notion of ‘educational choice’ to show how both social background and specific systematic characteristics of higher education structure in Turkey have been formulating and constraining ‘choices’. It is aimed to do so by emphasizing on the fact that individual experiences and practices are structurally channeled through providing or blocking some opportunities for the individual in conformity with mainly social class.

### **1.1. Research Questions**

It is common to approach higher education with some terms pointing its institutional design which describe its organizational design and interactions within the structure of the institutions. Additionally, it is generally related to an understanding and context of the relations between labor market and economy. However, studying on higher education in a sociological manner can be possible by bringing the issues of inequality, diversity, academic profession, higher education as an institution, and policies about higher education into question. As an addition to the organizational and economic relations, this study attempts to show that individuals are the ones who internalize social

structures and the process of choosing a university and accessing higher education carry the traces of internalization of structures. In other words, I will try to develop arguments on how individuals experience the process of accessing higher education with institutionalized meanings attached to higher education in the society, how they are affected from class structure in the society and how the system of transition to university in Turkey reproduces the existing class structure in that very society.

When the words that describe the field of transition to higher education from high school in Turkey are focused, it is clearly seen that the emphasis is neither on high school nor on higher education institutions. In the context of Turkey, there is a dominant phase between these two in which students have to decide how they should prepare for the university entrance exam because the deadline of the exam is considered as a final touch on the whole efforts they have made until the exam. Thus, the transition experience from high school to higher education takes its final shape according to not only the exam itself but also how one prepares for it. It is important to include the preparation process in the transition to higher education in terms of revealing the unequal characteristics of preparation process which differ according to cumulative sources of the students.

The main aim of this thesis study is to understand the experience of university choice which is realized through the university entrance exam. The study attempts to position the concept of university choice between high school and university experience by questioning the promise of the exam in terms of its relevance with choosing a university. This study also attempts to position the individual who is regarded as the subject of all the processes into the complicated relations of structural factors; namely, the family and the system of education. In this sense, the research questions of this thesis are formulated as:

- What are the conditions of accessing higher education based on the central examination experience in the context of Turkey? Which characteristics of education system shape the process of university choice?

- What strategies do students employ and in which ways they play their roles assigned by the system of education to prepare for the exam? How do students relate their scores with choosing a university; is it really a choice?

By problematizing the issue of “choice”, this study explores the ways in which the structure of the Turkish Higher Education system has formed university choices of students in their university choice processes. More precisely, I interrogate to what extent choices of students can be identified in the axis of high school, university exam, and university in which a university choice is often shaped by the ranking system determined by the Turkish higher education system. In this sense, this study uses the term choice as an individual practice which emerges in the intermediate step of the way towards the field of higher education. Also, the study can be considered as an invitation to rethink the term by featuring its socially constructed characteristics rather than using it in the meaning of an outcome of a process which is totally individually carried out by the individual. By doing so, the aim is to highlight that the potential of using the term choice in abovementioned way may cause the individual to be held responsible for unequal characteristics of the system of examination.

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

This thesis utilizes the extended theory of Pierre Bourdieu on individual practices to be able to address its specific research questions. Bourdieu (1986) with his concepts of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital will be the theoretical background of this thesis to understand how the structure of central examination formulate university choices of students based on the exam scores and rankings by including how they assign their resources for being ready for the exam. The reason why the theoretical framework has been formulated in this way is its capacity to enable us to generate a discussion on the structure and agency by not locating these two at opposite poles. For this study, it is important to be able to relate the experience of students with how their experiences

touch the existing inequalities perpetuated by the system of education with its contextual characteristics specific to Turkey.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

The university entrance exam and university choice in the context of Turkey have been subjected to studies in terms of the changes on the exam in years by including the changes done in neoliberal line like privatization of the field of education. On the other hand, university choice is approached mostly within the rational understanding of decision making processes. For example, Aydın (2015) explains the university choice process based on the following four models: economic models, sociological models, combined models and marketing approach. In her work, she presents the factors that have impact on the university choice process with the aim of developing university strategies in order to attract the best students by understanding their choice process. On the other hand, there are studies which show how the systems of central examination serve for maintaining the existing inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This thesis also shares the same concerns as how central exams deepen the existing inequalities and canalize the individual to some determined ends in accordance with social class. In this regard, the main aim of the study is not only to understand the experience of making university choices realized through university exam results but also to position the concept of university choice between high school and university to be able to question how its contextual systematic characteristics have been serving for formulating the experience of university choice in a way to reproduce existing inequalities.

### **1.4. Method**

Methodologically, drawing from qualitative methods based on semi-structured interviews, I interviewed 34 students from the Department of Basic English; the students who have just made decision to come to METU as their choice of university. The interview content is broadly based on the questions such as what kind of university choice process they have experienced, the factors that influenced their “choices” and how their final decisions were made. In doing so, I aimed to understand the nature of

university choice of students in Turkish education system. While in my study I argue that a university exam together with university choice process are ways of reproducing the Turkish Higher Education system itself, the thesis study takes into account of subjectivity and students' experiences. For this end, the study focuses on students with high scores to show that their choices are also formulated even though they seem they have more options and to be able to determine their higher education destinations as they wish thanks to their high scores. In this respect, the sample of the study is chosen as the students with relatively more options than the others to see how the system formulates higher education destinations of candidate students by hiding itself behind the process of university choice by highlighting that it is something operated individually via success.

### **1.5. The Organization of the Study**

In the first chapter of the study, it was aimed to present the general picture of university entrance exam in Turkey with respect to the intrinsic discourse regarding them. This chapter was formulated to introduce the research questions, the significance, the theoretical framework and chosen method for the study.

The second chapter of this study will present the contextualization of the research. An overview of the institutions which regulate the field of higher education will be provided. Also, an up-to-date overview of the exam's key features, including the preparation process, exam content/structure, and the use of exam results in determining entry into higher education institutions will be provided.

The third chapter is the theoretical background and the literature review of the thesis. In the theoretical background part, the conceptual framework of Pierre Bourdieu will be explained in detail to be able to understand the practices of the subject of this thesis study within the field of higher education. The literature part of the study firstly looks at the studies conducted in different contexts and then concentrates on the case of Turkey.

In the fourth chapter, the research design and methodology will be presented by explaining why they have been chosen to answer the specific research questions of the



study. In this part of the study, the rationale of choosing the social group, data collection process and the design of the semi-structured interviews will be explained.

The fifth chapter of the study presents the findings and their analysis. The experiences of students will be presented as four stages to be able to start with their preparation process and to include their almost one year experiences in METU. Based on these stages, how the structure of examination and institutional process of university choice formulates their final decisions will be discussed in the light of theory and literature provided in the third chapter.

The sixth chapter of the study offers a general overview of the study and summarizes the findings and the analysis. Also, the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TURKEY**

Before arguing in detail if we really should call “university choice” as what students in Turkey make throughout the university entrance process; to better make sense, it is significant to touch briefly on what higher education means for governments and why it is vital for them. As knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy, having an educated populace means power on the market in today's world. Accordingly, the more the government pledges to spend the money in furtherance of its education policy, the higher number of advantages it can have in such a competitive world.

To support this claim, a World Bank study entitled *Globalization, Growth and Poverty: Building an Inclusive World Economy* (2002) represents how 24 developing countries that integrated themselves more closely into the global economy experienced higher economic growth, a reduced incidence of poverty, a rise in the average wage, an increased share of trade in gross domestic product, and improved health outcomes. In the study, it is stated that these countries simultaneously raised their rates of participation in higher education. In fact, the countries benefited most from integration with the world economy achieved the most marked increases in educational levels. In his study, Gök (2016) defines higher education institutions as the mechanism for economic growth and transformations in cultural, political and social context (De Meulemeester & Rochat, 1995; Blackstone, 2001; Johnstone, 2004; Gyimah-Brempong, Paddison, & Mitiku, 2006). Through its role in domestic constituencies, building institutions and nurturing regulatory frameworks and governance structures, higher education is significant to a

country's efforts to increase social capital and to promote social cohesion. Therefore, it can be inferred that higher education is an important determinant of economic growth and development.

Like those countries mentioned above, Turkey has been also endeavoring to achieve its goals through its education policy. In the next section, it will be discussed deeply to see the reforms and changes that had and have been done in order to modernize and develop Turkish higher education and, after all, how structural higher education's functions have been designed, what forces the educational system are driven by, and the institutions and organizations shaping the system. Additionally, while conceptualizing students' university choice, it will be inevitable to discuss access issue and the factors that affects access. Moreover, in this study it will be shown how students in Turkey who wish to attend a higher education institution try to act in such a structural and shaped environment and what they have made as her/ his choice.

## **2.1. Institutions that Regulate the System**

As it is known to all, education is a system and pre-school, primary and secondary education, higher education are subsystems of the education system. According to this approach, sub-systems affect the next level of system, since an output of the sub-system becomes an input of the next. From this point of view, a student who is the basis input of the higher education is an output of secondary education (Arslan, 2004). In this sense, the institutions that shape the whole education system in Turkey is briefly explained below.

### **2.1.1. Ministry of National Education (MEB)**

In Turkey, Ministry of National Education is the foundation that regulates the education system through Basic Law of National Education, Law no. 1739, in which higher education is defined as a merit-based education level based upon academic aptitude and proficiency. It is responsible for the supervision of public and private educational institutions, agreements and authorizations under a national curriculum. Based on the

curriculum which students in Turkey were taught throughout their basic and secondary education, students take a central exam to be able to involve in a higher education institution in Turkey. As it is inferred from the information above, it is mandatory to complete high school education to take the exam.

On the grounds that Ministry of National Education (MEB) determines and shapes the curriculum and so the education system, it can be claimed that it plays a vital role in the students` life. However, it is not the only institution that does that. It is mentioned above that after completing secondary education, students who wish to continue their higher education, take a test, and this is carried out by “Measurement, Selection and Placement Center” (ÖSYM) within the legal framework of the system. The content of the test is based on the students` prior learnings. In this regard, ÖSYM is the other significant component in students` life with its determination of the content of the exam or question type and through their placement process. Below, it is clarified how university entrance examination used to be carried out before ÖSYM and how it selects and places students with their scores today.

### **2.1.2. Measurement, Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM)**

Through its responsibility for both the structure and the content of the university entrance exam every year, ÖSYM is the other institution that has a vast responsibility in the system and students` life. So far, there has been many changes in both Turkish education system and evaluation system. The past versions and current version of the exam will be discussed in detailed on the last section, but in this part after mentioning a brief history of ÖSYM, its duties will be clarified.

Until 1960`s in the republic period of Turkey, the several faculties accepted to applicants from high school graduates without any exam because of less of high school graduate. In this improvement process of higher education, the high school maturity examination was enough to access to the faculties of universities. However, students had to run from city to city within the country to participate in the exams, failure to attend one of the exams,

which may coincide with the same day and hours, led to significant complaints between the candidates and their parents.

From the 1960s onwards, some universities first organized entrance exams for themselves. Afterwards, some universities started to act together. The increase in the number of candidates required the preparation of multiple choice question and objective tests in exams, and the use of informatics methods and tools in applications such as applying, scoring, selecting and placing, reporting the results (Arslan, 2004).

In 1974, the Interuniversity Board decided that university entrance examinations should be conducted from a single center and on 19 November 1974, the Inter-University Student Selection and Placement Center (ÜSYM) was established. Student selection and placement procedures for universities were carried out by this center until 1981.

In 1981, the Center was transformed into a subsidiary of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) under the name of Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) with articles 10 and 45 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547. 6114 dated March 3, 2011, the Institution has been transformed into a public institution with administrative and financial autonomy and a special budget. The academies had been transformed to universities and the educational institutes had been transformed to educational faculties and; the conservatories and vocational schools were connected to universities. Therefore, the higher education institutions were gathered under a single roof and Council of Higher Education has become the only institution responsible for all higher education system.

In the context of transition to higher education today, the exam consisting of multiple-choice tests related with the main courses taught within the curriculum of high school program is prepared by ÖSYM.

Another duty of ÖSYM is to place students in universities based on their exam scores according to the relevance between the ranking of the university and the score of the

student based on the preference list prepared by the candidates. After taking the exam, ÖSYM declares the scores and students make a list and put order the universities and departments according to their scores in the period named by ÖSYM as University Choice Period. The process of placement operates according to who attempts to choose which university and which department. Also, the order of the preference list is important because the system places the student who has the highest score among other students who want to go to the same university and the same department. If more than one student wants to go to the same university and the department, the system places the highest score to that university.

Finally, the other institution that features in the students' life, is Council of Higher Education (YÖK). It is responsible for the supervision of universities in Turkey. YÖK mainly focuses on the strategic planning of higher education, the coordination between universities, and establishing and maintaining quality assurance mechanisms. In the following part, YÖK's roles will be reflected in detail to see clearly how it regulates the higher education system in Turkey.

### **2.1.3. Council of Higher Education (YÖK)**

As understood from previous paragraphs, Turkish higher education system has been at a crossroad for a couple of times. First, establishment of modern Turkey in 1923, marked a turning point in Turkey's higher education. Kemal Atatürk, the first president of Republic of Turkey, initiated fundamental reforms in 1931 to renovate higher education. Establishment of YÖK was another remarkable change in Turkish higher education system. In 1981, as a result of military coup, the Law on Higher Education (Law No. 2547) where the legal framework for the sector was provided, established YÖK and made provision for establishing private, so-called 'foundation' universities (TÜSİAD, 2008).

Basically, Council of Higher Education (YÖK) supervises the higher education system in Turkey, for instance, student quotas are controlled by YÖK. It is an autonomous

institution that is responsible for the planning, coordination and governance of higher education system in Turkey in accordance with the Turkish Constitution and the Higher Education Laws.

The law is still effective today, even though there have been many amendments; such as the one in 1992 (Law No. 3826), changed the rectors' election procedure to allow for nominations by the respective universities but without intervention by YÖK. In this regard, this change was significant for its political implications. However, this has been overturned later. The changes were not limited to only that.

Cited in TÜSIAD's report entitled Higher Education in Turkey: Trends, Challenges, Opportunities (2008), YÖK defined its structure in its website as followed:

The Council of Higher Education is a 21-member corporate public body responsible for the planning, coordination and supervision of higher education within the provisions set forth in the Higher Education Law. Seven of its members are academics elected by the Inter-university Council, seven are appointed directly by the President of the Republic, giving priority to former rectors, and seven are appointed by the government, mostly from among senior civil servants, each for a renewable term of four years.

The president of the Council is directly appointed by the President of the republic from among the Council members. The day-to-day functions of the Council are carried out by a nine members executive committee, elected from among its members. There are two other main administrative bodies in the field of higher education. These are the Interuniversity Council, which consists of the rectors of all universities and the one member elected by the senate of each university, and the Turkish University Rectors' Committee, which is made up of all university rectors and five ex-rectors. The Minister of National Education represents higher education in the Parliament and can chair the meetings of the Council but has no vote. Neither decisions of the Council nor those of the universities are subject to ratification by the Ministry.

With its 38-year history, YOK has been a matter of countless debates for many reasons such as being authoritarian ruling over universities and unstable. Its structure and scope

of applications have been changed many times. It is criticized that it has been always under the influence of governance, president of the republic, the political atmosphere of the country or president of the council of higher education (Gür, Çelik, 2011). Although the discussions are still ongoing, the common sense is that higher education system in Turkey should be reformed.

## **2.2. Briefly Higher Education in Turkey**

It is important to understand briefly higher education in Turkey in general before proceeding to the issues in higher education in Turkey.

YÖK defines HE in Turkey in its website as follows:

In Turkey, universities decide upon their own academic calendars; however, academic year generally starts in September and ends in June. There are winter and summer breaks. Summer school is also available at some universities.

Turkish universities offer five programs:

Associate degree programs: They take 2 years. Vocational high school graduates can qualify for associate degree programs without taking any centralized exams.

Bachelor's degree programs: They generally take 4 years. Specialized bachelor's degree programs, such as medicine (6 years), may be longer.

Graduate programs: Universities in Turkey offer a wide range of graduate programs. While master's programs take about 2 years (non-thesis master's programs generally take 1½ years), doctoral programs take about 4 years.

Post-graduate opportunities are also available in universities in Turkey. Duration depends on the program and university.



The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (TYYÇ): It developed with reference to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning was adopted by the CoHE in 2010.

According to YÖK statistics, Turkey has a total of 207 higher education institutions including 129 states, 73 foundation universities and 5 foundation vocational schools. While state universities are funded by the state, foundation universities are not, although they are founded under state's observation and examination. Between secondary education and higher education no school type or stage exist.

### **2.2.1. Problematizing Higher Education Field in Turkey**

Following proclamation of the republic in Turkey, Turkish educational system tried to be modelled on the Western systems. However, because of Turkey's politics-controlled central system and its practices, westernization movement was not operated precisely over the long run. Lack of a clear, up-to-date vision and well-established future strategies results in instability.

The fact that Turkish Higher Education system should be reformed has been argued by many critics for many years, HE in Turkey has not made great strides in tackling the issue. A study points out that the cost of not initiating higher education reform in Turkey increases day by day for both the system and the country (Çetinsaya, 2014). Below, Turkey's Higher Education problems are categorized in three different aspects and analyzed accordingly. Firstly, access issue is going to be argued, along with the political interventions especially made in the last two decades in HE are going to be reflected, last but not least, expansion of HE in Turkey and quality is going to be revealed.

### **2.2.2 Fundamental Issues in Accessing Higher Education in Turkey**

Demand-led growth of enrollment rates in higher education systems across the world do not specifically mean that all segments of societies are equally able to benefit from higher education. In spite of various policies and projects run by governments or other

legal organizations, inequality in access to HE still is valid point in many countries. Similarly, inequity in access has crippled Turkey’s HE system for many years. For that reason, Turkey has introduced some strategies by increasing the numbers of universities and student enrollments. However, increased number of HE institutions led to more demand in HE and can be evidently claimed that expansion in number of universities still neither totally meets the demand nor ends the inequality in access among students. To understand this clearly, below table provided by YOK statistics shows total number of applicants, total number of placement and their percentage by year of 1980 to 2018.

**Table 1:** Percentage of Total Number of Placements to Total Number of Applicants between 1980 and 2018.

Year	Total Number of Applicants	Total Number of Placement	Rate (%)
1980	466,963	41,574	8.9
1981	420,850	54,818	13.0
1982	408,573	72,983	17.9
1983	361,158	105,158	29.1
1984	436,175	148,766	34.1
1985	480,633	156,065	32.5
1986	503,481	165,817	32.9
1987	628,089	174,269	27.7
1988	693,277	188,183	27.1
1989	824,128	193,665	23.5
1990	892,975	196,253	22.0
1991	875,385	199,599	22.8
1992	977,550	260,268	26.6
1993	1,154,571	324,432	28.1
1994	1,249,880	345,907	27.7
1995	1,263,379	353,300	28.0
1996	1,398,768	386,372	27.6
1997	1,398,367	421,453	30.1
1998	1,355,707	394,432	29.1
1999	1,478,365	414,341	28.0
2000	1,407,920	414,647	29.5
2001	1,471,197	455,913	31.0
2002	1,817,590	614,125	33.8
2003	1,593,831	506,637	31.8

**Table 1** (continued)

2004	1,897,196	574,867	30.3
2005	1,844,891	607,994	33.0
2006	1,678,326	590,533	35.2
2007	1,776,427	626,425	35.3
2008	1,645,416	833,532	50.7
2009	1,450,582	786,677	54.2
2010	1,587,866	763,516	48.1
2011	1,759,403	789,169	44.9
2012	1,895,478	865,631	45.7
2013	1,924,547	877,787	45.6
2014	2,086,115	922,275	44.2
2015	2,126,681	983,090	46.2
2016	2,256,367	961,864	42.6
2017	2,265,844	825,397	36.4
2018	2,381,412	857,240	36.0

As seen in the table, only 8.9% of the applicants were placed in higher education institutions in 1980. A year after that, the percentage increased 4.1 points and reached the rate of 13%. It kept increasing until the year of 1987. In 1987, the total placement fell from 32.9 percent to 27.7 percent. The decrease in number continued until 1990, after that the percentage of placement increased gradually. After the year of 1994, it tended to both decrease and increase slightly and this continued until the year of 2007. By year of 2008, the placement rate reached 50 per cent, which means one in two students applied for the exam is placed into a HE institution. In 2009, the placement rate reached its peak with 54.2%. Following years the placement rate tended to decrease gradually. Finally, in 2018, the percentage of the applicants placed in higher education institutions was 36.0. Comparing the years of 2009 and 2018, there was a sharp decrease in the percentage of students' placement. However, the number of students placed in 2018 was higher than the year of 2009. It is because the number of applicants reached its peak of 2,381,412 in 2018, while it was 1,450,582 in 2009 when the placement percentage was highest of all times. In the light of the information provided by the table,

it is clearly seen that the demand in higher education is increasing year by year, yet only 36 percent of them can be placed in HE institutions. Therefore, counting the number of new education institutions cannot be evaluated as a way of decreasing the access inequality among students. In Turkey, some studies argue this topic by suggesting new reforms and renovations should be initiated in all levels of education system in Turkey.

One study points out that the quality of secondary education in Turkey is a problem on its own (Arslan, 2004). The common idea between students and parents of that there is no precise system in secondary education, causes them to look for other alternatives for preparation to the HE exam. Private teaching/training centers are applied as an alternative way of learning by paying a remarkable amount of money. As a result of that, the private teaching centers conduct their activities as if they were another formal education sector, which they are not. High schools almost mean only the place where the attendance is compulsory to get only the secondary education diploma in order to participate in a HE institution, whereas private teaching centers becomes the key to involve in higher education (Arslan, 2004). From this point of view, it is clear that students prepare for the test based on the necessities and context of the exam, only if their parents can afford the cost of the private teaching centers and/or one-to-one private lessons, whereas the ones from lower-income families or living in suburbs or villages cannot access any of these alternatives and have to do with only what they have. These socio-economically disadvantaged students are forced to compete in unfair conditions, as a result of that, in general these students can only access the HE institutions or departments where the others do not want to enroll.

Another study highlights that access issue in HE becomes more and more problematic in Turkey and indicates that common sense in Turkey regarding this issue is that structural reforms and permanent solutions based on secondary education reform and vocational and technical education (Güvenç, 1992).

In the light of these information, the studies are generally agreed upon that the foremost problem is university entrance process before evaluation of higher education system. First, university entrance exams indirectly cause inequality between socio-economically disadvantaged students and advantaged groups. To take an action towards this problem, AKP government has attempted to schematize the private teaching centers, which is end up with that most of the private teaching centers convert to private high schools, resulting with even more expenses for the families who send their children to these school for a better preparation for the exam. Second, the transition from secondary to higher education through exams is a vital problem for students, for the reason that mentioned central exam is only testing limited knowledge and abilities of students but not paying attention into students' scientific interests and their talents or type of intelligence. In this context, Arslan (2004) suggests as follows:

- The education system should be organized within the system integrity.
- To guide the students to higher education or profession should start in basic education. Consequently, the guidance services should provide in accordance with scientific principles as in developed countries. In the transition to higher education in the medium and long term, the student's success, performance, interests, intelligence and abilities should be the basis instead of a few hours of exams.

In conclusion, despite of the strategies, the law amendments and studies with their suggestions, in the given circumstances, it is a fact that there is a central exam trying to evaluate students success in a couple of hours. The exam is conventionally called as 'three-hour marathon' and the students struggle to compete and survive in this marathon; although not all students compete in the same conditions- some are a couple of steps ahead for the reasons mentioned above; and their success measured depending upon their performance in the marathon.

### 2.2.3. Expansion of Higher Education

The expansion of HE in Turkey has gained momentum with the increased demand for higher education similarly the trend raised across the world. In a study released in 2006, it is reported that between 1923 and 2004 the number of universities multiplied from 1 to 78, student enrollment went up from 2,914 to 1,820,994; the annual number of graduates raised from 321 to 282,911 and the number of academic staff increased from 307 to 78,804 (Mızıkacı, 2006, p. 48). A more recent study draws attention to the sharp growth in the total number of students enrolled in various levels of higher education in the past two decades in Turkey. It is also pointed out that a great number of this growth has been seen after 2005. As mentioned in the previous part, this sharp increase led to an even stronger demand for higher education. In the study it is also reflected that the AKP government introduced a comprehensive higher education strategy in 2007, by increasing student enrollment by expansion of both state and private universities to meet the demand (Habibi, 2017). In below tables, changing both total university numbers (state and private) and private university numbers in Turkey starting from 1980s are indicated.

**Table 2:** Total Number of State and Private Universities in Turkey by 1982 YÖK

University Numbers in Turkey							
1982	1987	1993	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
27	29	70	89	93	194	221	207

**Table 3:** Private University Numbers in Turkey by 1984

Private University Numbers in Turkey						
1984	1993	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
1	3	19	28	68	91	79

In the light of the information provided by the tables, it is seen that first private, so-called foundation university in Turkey was established in 1984, whereas there were 27 state universities in Turkey before the first private university was founded. By the year of 2015, overall university numbers in Turkey reached its peak of 221, 91 of which are private universities. By 2019, private university numbers scaled down 79; 5 of which were private vocational high schools, hence, overall number of universities reduced to 207.

Naturally, along with this rapid expansion, various issues and concerns about its magnitude and effect on quality has been triggered. Some criticized the topic of rapid expansion by contriving the term ‘signboard university’ (Özoğlu, Gür and Gümüş, 2016). Others argued that rapid expansion in numbers of HE institutions, regardless of proper and satisfactory infrastructure and/or planning, could inevitably impair the quality standards and result in a collapse of the HE system (Parlak, & Kaynar, 2005). Similarly, it was analyzed that the quality of universities does not parallel to the growth in Turkey’s higher education system despite of the multiplied number of universities in Turkey. Furthermore, it is highlighted the newly opened universities without precise planning encounter extensive problems in terms of academic, finance and administration (Arap, 2010).

The rapid expansion in numbers of the universities led also to demand for lecturers, academic staff in the universities. In the first paragraph of this part of the study, the increased number of academic staff was mentioned. This dramatic increase is argued by some in terms of not carrying out the necessary applications and mechanism in the process of recruitment. According to critics, critical thinking started to lose its effect in the education process. Consequently, the production of knowledge, innovative thoughts impeded in the higher education institutes. Lastly, Gök (2016) summarizes the topic stating that:

The big picture of the system in Turkey is that stakeholders are mostly unsatisfied with the current politics-controlled central system and its practices. HEIs, as a result of unplanned rapid expansion, are in turmoil in terms of daily operations, from individual faculty members' teaching and research responsibilities to executive structures and the governance of an HEI. The system, having undergone such massification, is failing to respond to the needs of society and the country as a whole, and its institutions are suffering from unplanned policies and save-the-day strategies, resulting in unpredictability (p. 165).

### **2.3. University Entrance System**

As it was mentioned in the previous sections, secondary education diploma and score of university entrance exam are mandatory requirements of accessing higher education in Turkey. The exam is designed for senior students in the level of high school. After getting the secondary school diploma, students need to take the University Entrance exam to start university education; in other words, there is a central exam placed between the experiences of high school and university, applied at the same time in all cities in Turkey.

In the context of transition to higher education, as it is reflected in the previous parts, one of the main institutions is Student Measuring, Selection, Placement Center (ÖSYM) responsible for both the structure and the content of the university entrance exam every year. The exam consists of multiple-choice tests related with the main courses taught within the curriculum of high school program.

Another bullet point that affects the examination and score system is that there are different types of high schools within the system of education in Turkey like science high schools, social sciences high schools, Anatolian high schools and vocational high schools. Science and social science high schools have their own specific curriculum and students enter these high schools by accepting their specific curriculum from the very beginning. It is already determined which courses students will mainly take and the professions they may prefer is also up to their curriculum accordingly. On the other



hand, according to the educational structure of an Anatolian high school, students make a choice on their departments in the level of high school. After the first year of high school in which all students take same courses within the same curriculum, they have to decide what they will study for the next three years. The alternatives are quantitative, qualitative, equally weighted and foreign language departments. All these departments have different curriculums; and this differentiation, in practice, operates as a kind of limitation in terms of the possible professions they may select. In other words, it is also a kind of early stage of higher education choice as same as with the other types of high schools because main courses and the possible professions students may select are different under each of the departments. At this point, Ministry of Nation Education of Turkey (MEB) plays a vital role as a means of being the institution regulating and applying the correct approaches, methods or techniques into the system so that MEB could provide equal opportunity to every student in turkey in the university entrance system.

Basically, the exam and getting a score are placed in very middle of accessing higher education in Turkey. The ranking of a university has been formed according to who goes to that university. Here, it is necessary to understand which students wants to go to which universities for what reasons to make sense of the system, which will be argued in following chapters of this study.

### **2.3.1. The Past Versions of the Exam and the Preference System**

To understand the current exam, it would not be redundant to mention past versions of it. Moreover, it will help come to realize the meaning of the exams in Turkey`s higher education. Below table by 'Gazete Bilkent' briefly defines how central exams in Turkey applied from 1974 to 2018.

**Table 4:** The University Entrance Exam in Turkey by Years

1974-1975	1976-....-1980	1981	1982-....-1998	1999		2000-....-2009	2010-....-2017	2018
2 Sessions (morning & afternoon)	1 Session	2 Sessions (in different months)	2 Sessions (in different months + High School GPA)	1 Session (ÖSS)	CANCELLED EXAM	1 Session (ÖSS)	2 Session (in different months) YGS (The Transition to Higher Education Examination) LYS (The Undergraduate Placement Exam)	2 Sessions TYT (Basic Proficiency Test) AYT (Field Proficiency Test)

In 1974 and 1975 which are beginning years of ÖSYM, the university entrance exam was carried out as in two sessions, one of which was in the morning and one in the afternoon. Following this, the university entrance exam was applied as only one session which used to be carried out in one day in between 1976 and 1980.

Until 1981, the students in university entrance exams had been subjected to a test which had four fields that included scholastic aptitude test, science, social sciences and foreign languages. Additionally, the success results of ÖSYM exams had been taken into consideration except students' success of high school in that entrance process to universities.

In 1981 once again, the exam which has two sessions had been started to apply for entrance universities and the first part of the two sessions of exam that named ÖSS (the student selection examination) were done in April. The second part of this sessions of entrance exam that defined as ÖYS (the student placement examination) were applied to students in June. The talent measurement had been targeted by The Student Selection Examination (ÖSS), the other session that defined as The Student Placement Examination had been used to measure knowledge.

In the applying process of the new system, one more discrepancy was integrated to this just new system in 1982. This innovation was that the high school grade could affect to enter the universities additionally. This new system had been named High School Grade Point Average (OBP). According to this High School Grade Point Average system could

act upon on entrance to universities. In the sequel of this system, the right of answering for specific tests which students want to choose had been gained by students with the second innovation.

In 1999, the university entrance exams that had been done as two sessions for so many years had been become only one session once again. By this determination, to apply ÖSS (The Student Selection Examination) without making any change in content had been decided since 1999. In this context, the students would be charge of curriculum of sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Since therefore, almost over knowledge that had been learnt in high school were become wasteful until to another innovation on university entrance exam system in 2006.

In 2006, the curriculum of university entrance exam had been changed and the all course subject in high school had been included to ÖSS (The Student Selection Examination). Therefore, the students were supposed to common tests which were prepared to aim talent measurement and field tests which included the all high school curriculum.

In 2010 once again, the exam system with one session had been come back to apply to enter the universities. The first session had been defined as YGS (The Transition to Higher Education Examination) and the second session had been named LYS (The Undergraduate Placement Exam). When examining the new system as contextually, YGS (The Transition to Higher Education Examination) preparing to measure talents showed similarity with ÖSS (The Student Selection Examination) in context of measurement of skills.

Finally, following 2017 the central examination system has taken its final form. In the next section, YÖK Atlas information system which is a confidential reference source will be explained briefly, before proceeding to explain the current version of the exam.

YÖK Atlas Software/Program was improved aiming that university applicants could achieve their university preference term by more knowing choices while they are

making university and profession preference. YÖK Atlas is not a preference robot to access higher education institutions. This software named YÖK Atlas is a confidential reference source which includes several compliable and shareable cooked data which is contained by YÖK in related with accessing to higher education.

This YÖK Atlas software/program is of benefit to students who are in the process of access to higher education, families of those students, educators in high school level, directors of education, academicians and researchers.

This database includes data that was prepared by the Council of Higher Education according to statistical data of university entrance exam and results of it. This database has two sections of higher education system. These sections include Higher Education Input Indicators and Higher Education Process and Output Indicators.

### **2.3.2. Current Version of the Exam: Higher Education Institutions Exam (YKS)**

In the basically presented context of the structure of high schools in Turkey, the current design of the exam called Higher Education Institutions Exam (YKS) has two phases occur in two days within the same weekend. In the first day, students take a general exam which is called Basic Proficiency Test (TYT). The content of the first phase exam is common for each student regardless of their departments. Turkish, social sciences, basic mathematics and science tests are included in TYT. In the second day, students except the ones in language department are responsible for tests according to their specific departments which are included in Field Proficiency Test (AYT). Turkish language and literature, social sciences-1, social sciences-2, mathematics and science tests are included in AYT. All tests of all departments take place in the same booklet thus students can answer questions in other tests if they want to have score in that specific department for any reason. On the same day, the language department students take the Foreign Language Test (YDT) and YDT includes German, Arabic, French, English and Russian tests.

After the exam, the basic three components of the process which are the students, ÖSYM and the universities start working to get ready for university choice period. After students take the exam, ÖSYM declares the scores of students. In the process of calculation of students' scores, their high school GPAs are also taken into consideration and high school GPAs affect students' scores in a certain extent. Based on their scores, students' searches for both universities and departments according to the ranking list of universities prepared and provided by ÖSYM. Universities attend this process by organizing events in which students may help from students and academics about their university and the department. Apart from that, universities and their departments have a slight quota for the top scoring students of high schools. Moreover, scholarships are available for the ones who listed private universities among their first five university choices and placed one of those five universities. Additionally, the ones placed into their first choice out of their university lists, are provided with the scholarships.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The structure of access to university and the meaning of higher education in the context of many countries and cultures have always been an important field of study over years. Upon consideration of the current debates on how one gets access to higher education, this study attempts to problematize how individuals make decisions by considering their educational background. By doing so, how the structure of the field of education has been formulating their choices will be contextualized. As related with the concepts included in the research interest of this study, the issues of education, choices and individual will be discussed in social theory to provide a comprehensive background to be able to discuss the specific research question of the study.

In this part of the study, theories on education and the approaches enables us to generate a discussion on the concepts of individual and their practices, specifically the practice of ‘choice will be presented. In line with this background, the issue of accessing higher education and making educational decisions will be approached to understand it sociologically. After that, the existing studies will take place in the field of higher education studies both in Turkey and in other countries to represent both the significance and relevance of educational choices in the current higher education debates.

The theoretical framework of the study first presents the discussion on education in the field of sociology. How education has been one of the main concerns of social theory and in what aspects of education has the social theorists operated it to understand the ‘social’ are the main questions will be answered while presenting the theories on education. My main focus, in doing so, is to understand and present how different theories approaches the education in terms of its relations with inequality and how those

theories problematize the relation between individual and society. Presenting the journey of education in studies of sociology hopefully helps to locate the specific issue of this thesis into the large domain of social theories.

This study attempts to discuss educational choices from the lenses of the sociological understandings of class, structure-agency debate and individualization. Upon consideration of these approaches, it is one of the main aims of this study to have a sociological understanding of accessing higher education in Turkey.

### **3.1. Sociological Approaches to Education**

Studying on education sociologically is to focus on educational structures, processes and practices. This means that appropriate sociological questions and methods are used to understand education and the relationship between educational institutions and its components both at the micro and macro levels. Furthermore, sociology of education cannot be reduced into sociology of schools and schooling. Sociology of education is about the relationship between education and society. It is about how formal and informal educational institutions, processes and experiences are shaped by and in turn contribute to shaping wider social relations, structures, experiences, values and identities. In a broader sense, it is about how educational processes are implicated in the reproduction of social inequalities.

As a form to link individual to society, in Durkheim's view, there is an attempt to define the conditions of existence of a society and education is served as a compulsory organ to turn individual being into a social being (Durkheim, 1965). The conditions of existence of a society rest upon the fact that social being is shaped with respect to a system of education which sustains homogeneity among those social beings. According to Durkheimian ideas, education is considerably related with the notions of social order, social solidarity and social cohesion. Considering society as a whole with its differentiated subsystems is the very characteristics of structural functionalism. According to this view, society is conceptualized as an entity existing above and beyond

individuals. In this kind of society, social institutions are the ones to transmit objective and scientific knowledge to individuals. Therefore, inequalities in the educational field are not different than inequalities in society. The system of education does not produce inequalities inherently. Functionalist theory regards education as a fundamental organ for the survival of society that is composed of different parts with different roles. In this view, education and its components are designed according to what society needs. The existence of this design is to claim that society is something homogeneous and this design is suitable for everyone. This is to claim that education has power to equalize all participants even if all have different social backgrounds because education –in this view- emerges as an outside power to make people equal. When we look at what we have, we see that education can be operated as a useful and functional institution even though participants of education experience inequality in their lives. As an extension of functionalist approach, Parsons (1965) argues that school, as a major agency of socialization, is a true reflection of society because of its uniqueness of being the only institutional place that teaches skills and roles. Parsons sees the schools as neutral places organized to provide students with necessary skills and knowledge they will need to function in the wider society. He also looks at schools as venues that pave the way to equal opportunity that facilitates the promotion of students' standing in the social hierarchy (Giroux, 2001). Differences in educational attainment are acceptable because, even though students are born into unequal cultural or material conditions, education has the ability to erase these differentiations, based on the proposition that those who do well in school are highly rewarded (Parsons, 1965). These “natural” outcomes do not change the fact that schools are organized to disseminate opportunity to all members of society equally and that every society has such “common culture”.

Taking education as a system not responsible for inequalities mean that it is not possible to problematize education itself when persistent inequalities are the point in question. Functionalist view operates as if it has universal validity in a world which is independent from local human reality. Therefore, in this study, functionalist approach will be



considered as the reference point of ideas that legitimates itself by seeing the people being responsible for the consequences in educational experience or normalize the fact that there will always be people who cannot experience education equally.

Critical theory on education is also crucial to criticize functionalist view on the basis of capitalist relations in educational processes and outcomes and to bring new aspects to the discussion of education. Marxist critiques on formal education pay attention to the relationships and similarities between forms of schooling experience as well as the labor process and the reproduction of class relations within classrooms and schools. They criticize the idea that schools transmit shared values, rather they see the education system as transmitting the values of the ruling class. Marxists have also criticized the idea that schools are meritocratic, arguing that meritocracy is a myth, because in reality, which schools may treat pupils the same, class inequalities result in unequal opportunities. In this view, education is considered as one of the greatest instruments of social change.

In this sense, Althusser interprets ideology around the concept of reproduction in which education plays a crucial role by preserving the continuity of dominant ideology (Althusser, 2010). About the reason of education for being in society, Althusser assesses the educational system as a core element of reproduction of ideology. If education has such kind of characteristics in itself, its possibility to move individuals beyond common sense is inherently limited by the dominant ideology's possibility about moving beyond commonsense.

Drawing on the theory of Althusser, Willis (1977) also asserts that schools are the very reason of social reproduction as state institutions for ideology. As Willis (1977) shows in his study focuses on working class kids and their educational ends, Willis argues that school culture is different than the culture of working class and the kids do not see the system of schooling as something to get qualifications and they see it as something for

middle class. With the arguments summarized briefly here, Willis conceptualizes the system of education in which working-class kids get working class jobs at the end.

Another debate on education is about knowledge and power. The prominent of this debate problematize the value/knowledge hierarchies which are inherent in accounts of social reproduction. They emphasize that school knowledge is highly linked to inequality and oppression. In his work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1975) broadly discuss about purpose of education and design of educational processes by aiming to reveal the fact that “the educational space functions like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding” (p.147). In this context, Foucault problematizes education as a modern form of power which operates as that individual is dominated through social institutions, discourses, and practices in modern rationality which functions as a coercive force. In this sense, the relation between inequality and education is embedded within the dominant power structure by revealing itself in its modern form because the modern form of teaching and education operates as there is one knowledge superior to one another and the knowledge in schools is the knowledge of the powerful.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction is relevant to this study in terms of both the current debates on education and on individual. In Bourdieu’s view, system of education is approached as a reproduction of the structure of the power relations within a social formation in which the dominant system of education tends to secure a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu’s attempt can roughly be explained as focusing on social and cultural constants, how those have been continuing to remain as constants and how those constants are being reproduced. This being the case, in the claim of the fact that education generates different opportunities according to class positions and reproduces inequalities among society, education is taken as a system which distributes capital from one generation to another. In this respect, education as a system does not promise equality since the system of education and its existence are bound to capitalist system, which is unequal. According to

Bourdieu (1996), it is likely to remain so given the intimate association between the perpetuations of class privilege via education.

As a whole, I am of the opinion that the theories presented above puts that the role of education operates as means of reproducing inequality. Through historical and sociological analyses theories demonstrate that the role of education has been functioning to serve for reproducing existing inequalities through a system that corresponded to the dominant groups in societies. As an argument on theories on education part, it must be put that considering the system of education as something totally planned and controlled from the outside is to interrupt the possibility of the educational field to be turned into a field of struggle. Problematizing educational field by identifying individuals as the ones out of control about themselves and the ones not able to be conscious of being controlled from outside is to understand education in a deterministic way. Potential strategies of struggle performed by active participants of the educational field cannot be excluded from the discussion. Also, how structure functions in a way which formulates the potential of agents to perform should be included into the discussion. In this sense, it can be said that the main issue of this particular study is grounded on the structure agency debate in a more general framework.

### **3.2. Sociological Approaches to the Concepts of Individual and Individual Practices**

Along the same line, related with the specific research question of the study, the sociological understanding of ‘choice’ will be developed on the basis of theories which approaches it as a subject matter. Understanding the notion of choice sociologically will be operated to make sense of the main concern of the research questions by including its institutionalized meanings within the structures. By this way, meanings of using the term ‘choice’ will be both discussed and then decontextualized to understand the higher education strategies of the students and to ask whether students’ strategies can be addressed within the sociological meaning of choice? The study aims to include the efforts to conceptualize how one makes a decision.

This study aims to discuss what one should make sense of the notion of choice in a sociological manner in order to position the strategies for university entrance exam. To this end, along with the theoretical background, the question of in what aspects is choice a sociological concept will be raised to give a comprehensive picture about the operationalization of the term within the study. The discussion on the concept of choice will be presented in company with how social theories approach the ‘individual’ as the one who is the operator of those specific choices in a specific field. Different understandings of individual in different theories are directly related with the how one considers the nature and the source of choice within the discussion. When individual is located in theory of social, its location within the space where it makes choices will be also located. In this way, understanding how individual acts in the domain of education and within educational field will be hopefully possible by emphasizing educational choices and their sociological understandings. Specifically, young people –senior high school students- are the main focus of this study in terms of how they decide what they will choose as a higher education destination.

According to the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, decision-making is conceptualized as reflexive and immediate which emerges as the product of one’s experiences and knowledge originated from capital resources within a particular field (Bourdieu, 1977). Motivations and dispositions about a choice come into existence in a structure formed by the beliefs and understandings of an individual so that the concept of habitus is introduced to include these dispositions. In this sense, habitus frames the tendencies to act in a situation or a field. According to Bourdieu (1990a), habitus is conceived to be ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations...’ (p. 53). Bourdieu considers habitus to be producing a wide collection of potential activities, at the same time empowering the individual to produce transformative and obligatory lines of action. He explains that:

Habitus is a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 87).

In addition to the possibilities and the potential provided by habitus, Bourdieu's explanations on it have always an emphasis on how it inclines individual towards specific way for acting:

The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behavior, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted  $\frac{1}{4}$  this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 77).

As an explanation of *habitus*, Reay (2004) argues that habitus is the key of Bourdieu's methodology as an attempt to go beyond dualisms of agency-structure, objective-subjective and macro-micro so that habitus should be operationalized and understood as the conceptual tool to link with practice with capital and field.

To continue with the components of the equation, it is also important to focus on how Bourdieu explains capitals and their functions emerged in the practices of individuals.

In his theory of reproduction, Bourdieu introduces the concepts of cultural and social capital to express his understanding on how unequal characteristics of the distribution of advantages perpetuate and deepen existing social inequalities in society. By doing so, Bourdieu drew on examples from educational practice by focusing on both compulsory education and post-compulsory education. He argues that school, as a field, needs familiarity with the dominant culture on the basis of its structure and its content. Students from middle class backgrounds who are capable of being in harmony with the criteria of school to declare them as successful and they have intrinsically knowledge about required strategies for doing well. These strategies are not something to apply in practice in an organized order or by purpose; they are not applied consciously into

practice. Rather, they are experienced as a feeling, an approach, or a belief that they will succeed in the end. On the other hand, working class peers do not have the feeling of competence for the behavior expected of them because the culture of school even with the language used in the school is not something cognizable for 'them'. Here, the basic and significant difference for these two social group is whether someone describe 'being successful' thanks to educational processes within the boundaries of universe of possibilities or not. Working class students, Bourdieu argues, have less access to constituent parts of dominant culture and this is the actual reason of that they are seen as naturally unsuccessful on school tasks by themselves, by their peers and by their teachers. This then has some influences on the ways in which they evaluate their chances to do well in school, to continue in educational process or to leave it. About the issue of accessing higher education, Bourdieu (1976) argues that educational disadvantages accumulate and then affect the characteristics of decisions about higher education.

As for Bourdieu's theory of practice, he explains well both characteristics of structure and where individual meanings take place within the given structure. Bourdieu sees 'social field' as a "locus of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1975, p.19) which represents power relations where practices of individuals are based on existed resources which are valuable for each specific social field so that individual practices are not arbitrary rather they are constructed through gained positions. About the issue of that each specific field values different levels of existed resources, Bourdieu introduces and builds the relations of four types of capital, namely *economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). While Bourdieu clearly distinguishes these four types of capital, his understanding on capitals is based on the idea of their convertibility. In this sense, these four can be converted and should be considered with their potential to be exchanged against others. While Bourdieu uses the term capital in a broader sense by challenging with its associations with only economic sphere, he emphasizes that economic understanding of capital is not enough to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless the capital is reintroduced with all its forms (Bourdieu, 1986). Based

on this understanding of capital, cultural capital is the one which is especially transferred by family and educational processes. Education can be considered as the institutionalized form of cultural capital in terms of what one has as the institutional qualifications. In its institutionalized form, cultural capital takes the forms of certificates and diplomas which show one's academic qualifications and the efforts for competing with others.

Bourdieu's social capital describes one's whole relations in social in terms of what kind of social relations a person has and in which ways these social relations operate as a kind of resource. Bourdieu (1986) states that one's network of potential resources can be considered as one's relations with family and group membership. Bourdieu explains social capital in a way which enables a person to gain access to both material and immaterial resources via the existed network of social relations. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as to have existing or potential social relations within a network of institutionalized or acquaintance based social relations. He explains it, in other words, by stating that having social capital through a membership in a group provides each member a capital support or reputation of being in that group (Bourdieu, 1986: 249).

Symbolic capital is how a specific kind of capital becomes a value for a specific field via acknowledgment of usefulness of capitals within the frame of existed rules of that specific field. Indeed, symbolic capital can be considered as a qualification made according to a kind of judgement of somebody else.

Based on these understandings of capital, Bourdieu generates the discussion of social inequality and he stresses that the existence of social inequalities perpetuates and maintenances through forms of capital mainly on the basis of economic capital and its combination with other types of capital. The discussion of inequality, for Bourdieu, must be explained by locating it within the reproduction of capital. In this sense that emphasizes the combination of capitals to reproduce inequality, capital cannot be described with only economic explanations. Thus, Bourdieu aims to extend the use of

the term capital by applying it in a wider system of exchanges within the complex networks of social fields. Bourdieu explains the term capital in detail to understand the forms of symbolic capital by emphasizing that forms of capital such as cultural and social can be conceptualized as ‘transubstantiated’ forms of economic capital (Moore, 2008, p.102).

Bourdieu explains the idea of ‘habitus’ to state the processes through which these wider structural inequalities are seeped into the individual level. It is an ‘acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted’ (1977, 95); which is considered as a set of values and dispositions that is derived from individual experience, familiarities and mainly the process of internalizing external constraints, possibilities and potentials. These what individuals already have directed them to act within situations differently by allowing them to improvise but they are mostly shaped by social structures where an individual’s subjectivity plays within the objective probabilities through the habitus. As Brooks (2008) puts, the condition of that an individual’s habitus fits with that of the university (or other educational institutions) is the precondition of being successful and acquiring the values of educational institutions in specific cases in which they will be evaluated by whether performing well or not.

Habitus and accordingly our dispositions have effect on our decisions and accordingly our practices. The interactions of the outlined is given by Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) as ‘[habitus x capital] + field = practice’ which clearly shows how each component of the given equation has effects on each other on the basis of what an individual has accumulated until the time the decision is made. About the explanation of Bourdieu which is stating that the decisions come with an immediacy, Swartz (1997, p. 197) puts that ‘the concept of habitus permits Bourdieu to stress that educational choices are dispositional rather than conscious, rational calculations’. However, knowing what to calculate and what is needed to be conscious of while making a decision are still represented within the given equation through the explanation of the term disposition.



About understanding how dispositions operate while making a decision, Bourdieu (1990a) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (2007) puts that capitals can replace dispositions while making a decision. As it can be seen from the conceptualization of Bourdieu, decision-making or making a choice corresponds to the notion of practice which arises from dispositions. In this sense, this study will be using the notion of choice by emphasizing its characteristics within its relations with habitus, field and capitals.

Another important concept Bourdieu uses is *doxa*. As cited in Deer (2008, p. 120), “*Doxa* is a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). In Bourdieu’s understanding, *doxa* means knowledge shaped by people’s their own vision and experience of the world and it is emphasized that those opinions or beliefs are linked to *field* and *habitus*. To relate *doxa* with *habitus* and *field*, Deer (2008) puts;

*Doxa* is the cornerstone of any field to the extent that it determines the stability of the objective social structures through the way these are reproduced and reproduce themselves in a social agent’s perceptions and practices; in other words in the *habitus*. The mutual reinforcement between *field* and *habitus* strengthens the prevailing power of the *doxa* (p. 121).

Based on this understanding, *doxa* has the power of being unquestioned shared beliefs and the potential of being symbolic power which is embedded in other forms of capitals and in institutional social relations. While institutionalized social relations categorizes by creating different markets of symbolic power, *doxa* is something internalized by social agents who do not question the legitimacy of it. About the relevance of the term with this study is about its operationalization within theory of practice. The term is significant to ask the question of “what is taken for granted” to enable us to understand the reality which is unanimously unquestioned (Bourdieu, 2000). In the field of education with its contextual structures, the term will be operated to make sense of individual explanations in terms of how the mutual relation between *field*, *habitus* and *doxa* has affected the ways of perceptions of social agents.

While Bourdieusian understanding of individual practices is considered as the main framework of background theory of this study, it is also important to mention theory and literature on individualism which is considered as the new type of socialization in contemporary society. In this sense, In Beck's 'individualization thesis', he conceptualizes the practices/lives of young people through understanding them as 'choice biographies' (1992). Key of this statement is that young people experience being young differently and in contrast to previous generations because they are within relations of the type of education they seek and the desire to balance leisure, the nature of their relationships they have with friends, parents and partners (Brooks, 2008). Following the statement, the expanding characteristics of making choices cause to expanding responsibility which is significant for them to feel and experience the decision making process individually. As a result, choice comes to be experiences as an individualized process in which there is not much which belongs to collective and cumulative baggage. Beck conceptualizes individual and individualization as a form of releasing from traditional class ties, familial assistance and as something perceived as being somehow alone in situations related to one's own future. Being alone here should be understood as a kind of feeling a responsibility about making a choice among the existing resources to build an individual fate. About individualization, Beck discusses how the implications of social structure on it have changed in terms of existing hierarchy which coordinates the organization of wage labor by focusing on both Marxist class theorists and Max Weber's sense to make clear the issue of individualization as a new kind of internalizing of social structures. He puts that individualized lifestyles obligate people to turn themselves into the center of their individual life plans to survive in the near future.

As it is also relevant to this study, Beck includes education within the discussion of individualization by conceptualizing it as one of three dimensions of the labor market while the others are mobility and competition. In regard to show how educational processes lead individuals to draw a route in an individualized way, he puts:

Depending on its duration and content, education makes possible at least a certain degree of self-discovery and reflection. Education, furthermore, is connected with selection and therefore requires the individual's expectations of upward mobility; these expectations remain effective even in cases where upward mobility through education is an illusion, since education is little more than a protection against downward mobility (as to some extent happened during the period of expansion of educational opportunities). For it is after all only possible to pass through formal education by individually succeeding by way of assignments, examinations and tests. Formal education in schools and universities, in turn, provides individual credentials leading to individualized career opportunities in the labor market. (Beck, 2002, p. 32)

If educational processes are inherently regulated by selection, individual expectations, assignments, examinations and tests, then the question should be about the over-emphasis of the literature on individualization because of the fact that all the system of education is based on making differentiation according to scores in a world of numbers. It seems that the structure has more effect on the future plans of young people than individualized decisions even if the individual does not experience it by including structural explanations. While this argumentation on individualization has also had extensive impact in the field, other scholars continue to put emphasis on structural inequalities as the reason of perpetuating social inequality and shaping young people's experiences in many important ways like their educational choices and their strategies about work and future relatedly with the educational choices. This kind of understanding was attempted to be presented above by emphasizing on concepts which are used by Bourdieu to make sense of how structure has still effects on decision making process of individuals. At the same time, there are also theories which attempt to mediate between these two understandings of decision making process (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). These studies do this by describing the field where individuals are making choices as a kind of combination of both an individual's position and progress in society which are not only determined by their cognitive and social skills but also by their economic class, gender and ethnicity. This understanding does not apply only to the process of decision making. From this point of view, it is also argued that young people's connections and

relationships to the school have turned out to be individualized and that the divisions based on social class which were at one time the way to understanding educational experiences have relatedly turned out to be weakened (Furlong & Biggart, 1996).

As Beck (2002) states, the processes are experienced individually and this causes young people to conceptualize their experiences as they do not have some pre-formed ties with their family, friendship and other social relations, it is a fact that the clear picture of the situation is pointing individualization rather than patterns of structural effects but structural inequality has been continuing to perpetuate the existing inequalities. In this context, how Beck understands individual and individualization is considered as an explicit picture of how individuals locate them and what they have when they are in the relations of social space in general. However, the core of this study is rather related with looking beyond the conditions that have caused the picture to emerge in this way. In the light of ongoing debates on educational decision making process, the position, for this thesis study, is to look beyond educational choices in the structure of higher education in Turkey and to discuss to what extent their experiences can be conceptualized within the sociological understanding of choice in the light of the theories which stress that social structure is always there to pattern young people's choices although young people think that it is their huge responsibility to build their individualized and specific educational experiences. Thus, the concepts relevant for the specific problematization of this thesis study which is to understand the social dynamics behind their university choice process in the general framework, are the concepts of cultural and social capital and their specific combinations which will be operationalized in this study to make sense of the structural traces which has penetrated into these 'individualized educational experiences'.

Based on the lens of this thesis study, individual practices and their consequences mainly include structural effects in their very nature and how they shape individual needs to be revealed to understand the conditions of both structure and individual in the educational domain. In this sense, how Bourdieu locate individuals and their approach to

the specific social space in which they are involved to speak on how they develop strategies based on their dispositions. As Bourdieu explains in detail, it is not something expected for an individual to acquire the totality of dispositions even in the level of idea because of continuous dynamism of field and habitus. As Hilgers (2009) concludes it is impossible for any single agent to know a field completely through the dynamic nature of a specific field in itself; agents can only adopt abilities as much as they can. The possibility and the result of adopting abilities may give them a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 66) but this does not point getting the whole. In case the habitus is understood as something purely deterministic, Bunn (2017) highlights that it is not something to correctly give the complete realization of possibilities:

Habitus alone never spawns a definite practice: it takes the conjunction of disposition and position, subjective capacity and objective possibility, habitus and social space (or field) to produce a given conduct or expression. And this meeting between skilled agent and pregnant world spans the gamut from felicitous to strained, smooth to rough, fertile to futile. (Wacquant, 2013: 194)

Following this, agents can be considered with their potential to have ideas about possibilities and developing strategies to shape them but they cannot fully estimate them. In accordance with this potential, agents act in a specific field by performing the act of improvising to find out new strategies which will mediate between their strategies and requirements of a specific field. The field of education -because of expansion- have become increasingly unstable and its participants now need a greater improvisational practice if they are (of course) willing to feel that they are able to balance between their competences and the social demands.

Before proceeding to the studies discussing the issue of educational choices, it was attempted to portray the existing theoretical efforts on the issue of both individual and individual practices in general. About how this study handles its subject, it has to be put that this study considers the approaches which locate the individual as a subject with the feeling of responsibility of building its unique experiences by not pointing and

attributing its reasons to the structure. However, further to that, this study approaches the individual and its practices –which are specifically educational choices for this study- by looking from the lens of theories which locate the individual practices in the complicated networks of relations created by the structure. This study aims to pinpoint that structural inequalities are still continuing to formalize individual practices by even affecting their choices in the field of education.

As a conclusion for theory part, this study draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice to answer its specific research questions which focuses on the issue of educational choices in the context of existing higher education system in Turkey. For this end, Bourdieu's understanding of structure and agency will be operationalized to answer the question of how higher education system itself has been formulating young people's educational destinations while they experience the process of transition to higher education at the final year of high school in which they will face with university entrance exam at the end of it. For this end, the theory part of the study considered the forms of capital and the discussion of how capitals are valued within a specific structure was generated. About the sociological understanding of choice, it was attempted to position the very reasons of choice within the structure where individuals play for doing the best by optimizing what they have as a resource. About individual Bourdieu explains, with the concept of habitus, how the existing structural inequality is transferred to the individual level through personal experiences, external boundaries and possibilities.

### **3.3. Sociological Understanding of Higher Education and Higher Education Choices**

This study aims to locate the problematization of making choices while accessing to higher education in general and to question as to what extent the individual experiences about accessing to higher education and making a decision on a university and a department within the context of higher education structure in Turkey can be discussed by naming it as 'choice' specifically by presenting the theories on both education and the concept of individual.

In addition to sociological understanding of education, one reason why higher education must be sociologically understood is that higher education is now the new minimum among the levels of educational practices. This is based on the fact that the definition of 'compulsory' education is continuously changing with respect to its exchange value in the future plans of young people. From the point of view of students, Tomlinson (2008) puts forth how students perceive the role of higher education credentials for graduate work. In the study, it is stated that higher education students are oriented to see their learning experiences as investments and advantages in the labor market by emphasizing the characteristic of academic credentials which is significant dimension of employability. This orientation is made by governments by calling upon the claim of that higher education credentials have importance at both social and individual level because they are still crucial for economic development. While having advantages within the system of higher education by seeing it as an investment is associated with being able to access to opportunities in the labor market, the required question must be about who are the ones with advantages in higher education and who are the ones have capacity of turning their advantages into possible opportunities in the labor market. Also, focusing on educational choices means including accessing to higher education, transition processes within educational levels into the discussion. In this respect, both the efforts to reach the school gate and the experiences within schooling need to be revealed to understand the nature of educational choices. Therefore, this questioning is required in terms of why the field of higher education must be understood in a sociological way.

In sociology, accessing higher education has been the subjects of many studies. In this part of the study, the relevant studies which focus on the issue of access to higher education will be presented. Also, the studies concentrate on educational choices of individuals will take place to make sense of how the decisions were made by relating the issue with social backgrounds of individuals. For this end, the existing literature on the issues of accessing higher education and making educational choices will be presented

to draw a meaningful path from existing literature to the handling of the issue in the way this study attempts to do. In a general framework, these issues can be considered as the discussion of social inequality arises and perpetuates through educational experiences.

As it is not new to link social class with discussions of higher education in terms of exclusion and inclusion, there is a huge literature on the relation between social class and both accessing higher education and higher education experiences (Ball, Reay & David, 2002; Brooks, 2003; Reay, 2004). These studies mainly focus on how existing class structures are reproduced by structures of higher education systems through the ways of accessing and experiencing it in different contexts. Studies focusing on student experience have pursued these questions further, questioning how structures shape the actions and behaviours of students, both in their decisions to progress to HE and their experience of participating in it.

There are also various studies which focus on the relation between cultural and social capital in particular educational contexts of different countries to understand access to and choices about higher education. The commonality is as same as with the studies on inequality and education, accessing to higher education and choices about higher education are directly related with socioeconomic background of individuals. Within this understanding, the studies aim to show that aside from inequalities experienced in educational processes, inequality begins long before the school gate. Likewise, since this study problematizes the transition and access phases of the educational processes within the whole system of education in Turkey, it is also important to see how the issue is handled in the context of other countries.

The general framework of the attempts to understand higher education sociologically addresses the issue in many ways. In addition to access and choice issues, it is important to provide literature by including studies that deal with the issue from different perspectives in order to make a holistic meaning in higher education. The main aim of this part of the study is to present studies that contribute to the sociological



understanding of higher education, which is considered as a personal experience in individuals' lives. In this way, it will hopefully be possible to talk about how structure affects them and shapes their choices while individuals think that they are making their own choices. Also, the literature on the issue of higher education is critical to figure out the characteristics, limitations and possibilities of higher education as a field in which all strategies and practices are realized.

About the relation between educational process and class differences, researchers emphasize that education and its operations inherently include inequality. As a characteristic of educational process and how this characteristic operates in practice, "Class inequality in education is endemic to the education process as currently constituted" was put by Lynch and Lodge (2002, p.37).

Having access to higher education and its relation with socioeconomic background of its participants has a significant importance in the field. Studies focus on both the general profiles of participants and the different characteristics of accessing higher education and the differentiated meanings attached to accessing higher education. In this sense, these studies try to make sense of the relation between accessing higher education and the influence of social class. Bourdieu's understanding has been subject to many studies attempting to generate discussions on education in this way because his theory and analytical tools enables to conceptualize how individuals have and develop different strategies in the field of education. In this part of the study, the studies have the use of Bourdieu's understanding and the studies have critiques on it will be presented.

In addition to his wider theory of practice, his conceptual tools are also employed to understand accessing issues within higher education. The concepts of habitus and cultural capital introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) have become remarkable for exploring and understanding inequality between groups and for also making sense of parents' participation in educational process. Brooks (2003) puts that educational choice can be considered as class strategies of middle class parents because they try to transfer

their class status to the new generation thanks to their advantaged positions in the educational field. In addition to this understanding, the situation should be understood in the light of the fact that it is an advantage in itself that parents try to involve in the future plans of new generation. It is because parents have knowledge about higher education which is already an advantage in itself when it is compared to another social group which is excluded from the discussion because of they do not have a set of sources to transform into output in the higher education field.

In the study which focuses on the expansion of higher education in the context of UK, Blanden and Machin (2003) put the question of whether the expansion of higher education has been equally distributed among different segments of society or not. In their analysis, changes over time in higher education participation and attainment between people from richer and poorer family backgrounds were emphasized to demonstrate what the expansion really means in practice in terms of both accessing and taking advantage of it. The study shows that the distribution of advantages and the possibility of accessing higher education are still determined based on income in general. As Brooks (2008) argues in her study on access to higher education exploring the influence of cultural and social capital on university choice, she employed the conceptual tools of Bourdieu to examine the educational experiences of people in terms of how they are engaging with the system of education and how they are making decisions about both for institutions and the field of study. In her work, she concludes that Bourdieu's theoretical framework has an explanatory characteristic to put class, gender and ethnicity playing the role of shaping choices about a university in different cultural contexts.

About the fact that forms of capital can be converted to one another, Reay (2004) attempts to show how cultural capital operates as a tool for middle-class families to continue their advantages. She emphasizes on the collaboration between cultural and economic capital by focusing on how these two reinforce each other to generate educational profits while cultural capital can also operate independent from economic

capital for the same end. In the study conducted by Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001), how the issues of class and race interrelate in the higher education choice process of ‘non-traditional’ students who are described as ‘young and mature students who as recently as ten years ago would have been unlikely to be applying to university’ (p. 855). Their negotiation process through higher education choices is concentrated to examine what kind of mechanisms operate to reproduce existing inequalities within the higher education sector. Along with experiences of the students, Reay argues that perceptions of students on ‘good university’ to choose are also classed and racialized in terms of students’ considerations about choosing the university where other people will be like them so that both choices and experiences in higher education are not the same experience for everyone.

About the relation between educational choice and white urban middle classes in the context of UK based on three cities, Crozier et al. (2008) questions how education contributes in white middle-class identifications and identity formation. As it is stated in the study, school choices are generally justified by referring to family educational background and education choice policy creates middle-class identities in which there are complex relations of familial conflicts, tensions and desires about choosing the ‘best’ for their child.

About the relationship between social class, cultural capital and undergraduate study, in the context of Bangladesh, Nahar (2013) analyzes institutionalised cultural capital embedded within the class structure, and its role in determining choice of universities. He argues that the study shows that institutional cultural capital and institutional habitus are more considerable than family habitus in terms of enabling working class students to choose top ranking universities in the context of Bangladeshi educational system.

Since the structure of the HE system within a particular country may have impacts to understand specific situations, practices, positions and rules, this section of the study will focus on the studies and research on higher education system in Turkey. Higher

education in Turkey has been the subject of many studies from many different fields of study in academia. Its historical roots and transformations in time, its economy, its structure, how it is experienced by its participants in practice, its organization and its relations with politics are the issues covered in those studies. As the specific interest of this study, transition to higher education is one of the other significant issues in Turkey. The requirement in practice to enter a university is through taking the university entrance exam in Turkey. The system of both the examination and entering university in Turkey will be presented in detail in the study. One reason why this study focuses on transition to higher education is that the structure of it has continuously been changing for years and this fact needs to focus on university access in Turkey because one of the few fixed things about its structure is that it always changes. Upon consideration of this fact, the results of its changing characteristics will be discussed in the rest of this study in detail.

With regard to the importance of this experience, there are studies which focus on the university entrance exam in Turkey. Since the examination and the transition have many different components and stages in itself, these studies differ in terms of both the way they deal with the subject and the content they focus on. Along with the presentation of those studies, I aim to put forth the academic efforts shown so far and to explain the specific content and approaches of this study.

In Turkey, preparation for the examination has its own structure in itself. It is very common for students to prefer private teaching institutions together with the school. With this, it is also very common for many studies to discuss the relationship between the exam and those private teaching institutions. When the existing studies are examined, it can be clearly seen that there are a variety of important focuses. One aim of this part is to reveal how the issues of higher education in Turkey approached and problematized.

By challenging the dominant neoliberal discourses which handle the issue of access and choice-making as something rational and individual, it is a responsibility for this study to tell how existing structure of inequalities continues to reproduce its own conditions by both providing and limiting access to choose an educational path in accordance with the existing possibilities and limitations of being in different social contexts (Tarabini & Ingram, 2018).

As an econometric study which includes the concept of risk in the discussion of choice, Caner and Ökten (2008) examines career choices of university entrance exam takers in Turkey by focusing on the circumstances in which decisions are made for choosing riskier career or less risky career and they concludes that parental income and self-employment status are the important factors to affect these choices. Caner and Ökten (2012) examine the distribution of benefits of publicly financed higher education in Turkey according to different socioeconomic backgrounds of students based on a dataset from a nationally representative sample of university entrance exam takers and find that students from more educated families have more chance to be successful at entering university.

Çelik (2018) designs a qualitative longitudinal case study to understand how the concept of institutional habitus has effects on high school choices of students from working class backgrounds. While he mentions general tendency to reason educational choices is about students' exam results and socio-economic background, he emphasizes that the relations of how students perceive institutional habitus has also effects on school choice.

Since the exam is the way of entering a university, transition to higher education is the most determining educational experience shaped around the exam for senior high school students in Turkey. The reasons behind the fact that the transition has a determinative characteristic can be regarded as the structural design of the transition phase and the meanings attributed to getting a higher education degree by its participants. Upon consideration of the meaning attached to higher education in terms of future plans of

young people in labor market, Bozkurt (2018) focuses on understanding ‘self’ in the transition process from higher education to work by asking how self has been formed within possible opportunities gained through the departments they graduated from.

In this part of the study, it was attempted to demonstrate why field of higher education needs to be sociologically understood in terms of accessing it and making choices within it by locating the individual into the complicated relations of different contextual designs. In line with the research questions of this study which involve the question of how the structure formulates individual experiences, it was aimed to include the studies attempting to understand the experiences of students in different educational contexts.

To conclude, this study will use the concept of choice in terms of the outputs of capitals and dispositions that occur within the habitus, in other words, the cumulative collective baggage that the individual reorganizes by associating them with a specific field to go beyond the misleading meritocratic discourse based on neo-liberal understanding of educational practices and choice which obscure the reality about structure which is to reproduce existing inequalities on the ground of legitimate image of education system.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Although HE includes different experiences, upon mentioning the transition to higher education after graduation from high school, the audience generally assumes that the university entrance exam is the issue. The dominance of the exam is so obvious in the context of Turkey while transition to higher education from high school has many different stages in itself. Studying on educational choices within the process of transition to higher education actually needs to approach it as a whole by understanding it within the sets of experiences starting from primary school to high school. Also, the experiences of students are mostly determined by their family background as it is stated in literature review part. Under this kind of circumstances, the method of a study which attempts to complicate the reasons and consequences of higher education destinations needs to have the characteristics of positioning individuals in a comprehensive structure of education system.

As it is stated in the previous chapter, students make a list of universities and departments after they get their exam scores. According to other students' scores and lists, students are placed to a university and a department based on their scores and rankings. Since this study also attempts to problematize the discourse of choice which does not coincide with this system of applications and placements, there is a need of qualitative study to include individual experiences of participants of the system. Based on their experiences shaped around the exam which they will face at the end of the high school, it is possible to understand the field of higher education in the context of Turkey in terms of its determinative characteristics and the consequences of these characteristics.

#### **4.1. Research Design**

Since the study aims to problematize the issue of educational choices, it is firstly important to locate when educational choices are emerging to be made within educational processes. Educational processes consist of stages; students experience these stages in practice by completing the previous one and proceeding to the next one. Within the processes of completing and proceeding, students are both evaluated according to the criteria of completing the previous stage and expected to make decisions about the next stage. This very moment of both being evaluated and about to pass to another stage, students have to draw a path for new educational stages. In this respect, choices emerge within different contexts of transition experiences that take place in educational process. This effort to locate the timing of making choices in educational field enables us to have the picture of educational field as well. When choices are located in this manner, it becomes possible to approach the field of education as a domain which consists of different stages where students are responsible to play in a way to make new decisions for proceeding to new stages. While this continuous responsibility for making educational decisions realizes itself in the level of individual experiences, structural factors become diluted on the basis of discourse which is a huge power in itself to shape the educational field.

The aim of the study is to understand the structural factors that shape educational choices by revisiting individual experiences of students. For this end, the study was designed with the aim of understanding the field of education by including structural and systematical factors based on how these factors realize themselves in experiences of university entrance exam takers. Methodologically, this study place emphasis on the understanding of the institutional field where the choices of students are realized. In this respect, the study is designed to make sense of how structure of education system frames the experiences, strategies, perceptions and even feelings of students while they are studying for university entrance exam. To understand these structural factors, it is important to design a study that has potential to reveal characteristics of structure while



the exam takers develop their strategies according to their specific social conditions. In this context, the study positions the exam within a transition experience. If the positioning of the exam was not approached in this way, it would not be possible to include the systematic issues that formulate the choice. Also, this would serve for an understanding of choice based on independent, single and individual explanations. Structural understanding of making educational choices is only possible through including and presenting structural characteristics of education system that students face when they are preparing for the exam. Based on this understanding, the qualitative study is preferred to see how structure realizes itself in the experiences of individuals and formulates their choices at the end of the process. Therefore, it is necessary to go further than how structure expresses itself with its systematic and legal explanations as it is presented in previous chapter. Also, it is significant to go further individual explanations while being a participant of the field of education. Rather, the responsibility of chosen method is to enable us to understand the complicated relation between these two by not locating them at opposite poles. The study should be revealing the way of students perceive the structure and how they develop strategies as reflected in their higher education choices.

#### **4.2. The Rationale of Choosing the Sample**

Upon consideration of the fact that there are more than one transition experiences which are connected with each other via ‘educational choices’ based on central exam scores, this study focuses on the specific period in which senior high school students are studying for the central examination (YKS) and about to make choices through higher education. In the context of Turkey, students take two different central exams on their way to higher education. The first one is for transition to high school and the second is for higher education institutions. The reason why this period is specifically chosen is about its characteristics of being the most important ‘final’ decision for students and their families because it is considered as a process that the entire educational investment will eventually turn into something at the end of it. One difference of higher education

choice from high school choice is about its scope as an experience in terms of the sets of possibilities as a destination. When one is within the experience of transition to high school, it generally ends up with a high school in the city where the student is already living. The schools which are likely to go according to the result of the exam are more or less obvious in the process. As a reason of this, families do not see this process as a process that the individual carries out entirely. This difference was not put here to claim that high school choice is less effective than higher education choice in one's life. Rather, the aim is to show that high school choice can be conceptualized within the framework of making a higher education choice in the end. In this context, the very characteristic of higher education choices is that people locate it at a very end of a long way of educational process. While high school choice is seen as an important 'first' step for being a student of a top ranking university and desired fields to study, higher education choice is the very reason of going those top ranking universities which is more of the issues of career decision and future plan.

In the context of central exams in Turkey, this study aims to go beyond how one make decisions of where to study based on the experiences of students who can be considered as 'successful' in YKS. The reasons why a group of successful students was selected to understand the conditions of accessing higher education are sociologically significant for two reasons. The first one is, in accordance with sociological understanding of higher education field, that accessing higher education requires to have different types of sources and capital to operate in the specific field of higher education. Based on the fact that there is a ranking system for both universities depending on the success of the students who choose that university and candidate students with their exam scores, the umbrella questions are: "who are the ones with high scores?" and "which universities do they choose with their high scores?" Second reason of focusing on 'successful' students is to be able to go beyond the choice discourse in line with the research questions. Since the application process is based on scores and rankings, high scores and being at the top enables students to have more options to choose. Getting a set of options to choose is not

only based on the exam itself but also related with the process of preparation so that the experiences of the students who did well on the exam include the determinative characteristics of the application and placement system in Turkey by assuming that they have more effective preparation process than the others. If one aims to understand how this process of decision making emerges while the structure continue to formulate it, there should be both the effective process of studying for the exam and a set of options achieved at the end of the process in which those decision makers draw a path to have their options based on their scores. While the system already limits the sets of possibilities of students with low scores, this study aims to show that choices of students with high scores have also formulated even though they seem to have more options and to be able to determine their higher education destinations as they wish thanks to their high scores. In this respect, the study focuses on students with relatively more options than the others to see how the system formulates higher education destinations of candidate students by hiding itself behind the process of university choice by highlighting that it is something operated individually.

The sample chosen for this study is the students of Department of Basic English at Middle East Technical University (METU). The participants had to attend the prep school for one year before starting to study at their departments. The students took the YKS-2018 and METU is where they chose based on their scores almost one year before than this research is conducted. The reason why this group of students was considered as successful is based on the ranking of METU among other universities in Turkey. In this respect, the success of students will be put by presenting the data from YÖK ATLAS which is the software developed by YÖK with the aim of compiling and processing ÖSYM data which gives how many questions students answer correctly and the results of the exam by presenting scores and rankings of students. Based on this data, YÖK ATLAS provides the information of the latest student placed in a department of a university. The results taken from YÖK ATLAS give the information about the departments of the participants. This information will be presented by being compared

with the country-wide success average of same departments. With this, it is aimed to show that METU is one of the top ranking universities in the context of Turkey and students in METU can be similarly considered as above average.

Participants were selected from two faculties which are Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences among the five which are Faculty of Architecture, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Engineering. Faculty of Engineering (FE) consists of thirteen departments; Aerospace Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Food Engineering, Geological Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, Mining Engineering and Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineering and Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS) consists of four departments; Business Administration, Economics, International Relations and Political Science and Public Administration. The reason why these faculties are selected is that the departments have the highest rankings when they are compared to the other faculties. Also, this selection is compatible with the fields which are chosen in high school. While the faculty of engineering requires Math-Science score type (MF) to be placed to departments of engineering with quantitative score (SAY), the faculty of economics and administrative sciences requires Turkish-Math score type (TM) to be placed to the departments of economics and business administration with equally-weighted score (EA) in accordance with the fields in high school education. Since one focus of the study aims to emphasize the general picture of students in one of the top ranking universities in Turkey based on a success definition depending on YKS, it is relevant to select these two faculties to show the strategies of students when their rankings are high in comparison to others. However, this does not necessarily mean that these two faculties will be compared in terms of making a choice for the departments and faculties. This is an indication to give a broader view of the sampling by including two different faculties.

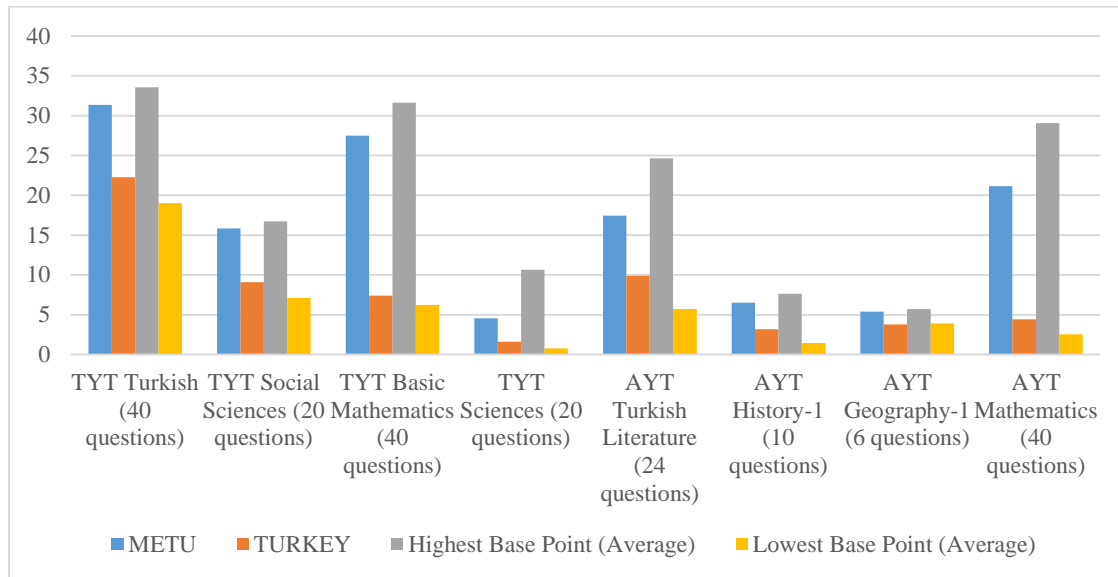
**Table 5:** 2018 Data on Rankings and Scores of Departments in METU: FEAS and FE ("Puan ve Sıralamalar: ODTÜ Aday Öğrenci", 2019)

Faculty/Department			YKS-2018 Lowest Score and Ranking		YKS-2018 Highest Score and Ranking	
FEAS	Score Type	2018 Quota	Score	Ranking	Score	Ranking
Business Administration	EA	90	435,173	3928	528,769	66
Economics	EA	90	418,065	8612	536,038	32
International Relations	EA	75	408,871	12794	483,883	641
Political Science and Public Administrations	EA	80	393,598	22535	437,876	3480
FE	Score Type	2018 Quota	Score	Ranking	Score	Ranking
Aerospace Engineering	SAY	85	496,824	6706	529,231	1057
Chemical Engineering	SAY	100	441,426	28485	492,062	7970
Civil Engineering	SAY	180	455,534	21669	502,307	5347
Computer Engineering	SAY	110	519,508	2176	549,460	53
Electrical and Electronics Engineering	SAY	195	518,965	2267	552,411	15
Food Engineering	SAY	85	406,069	48285	437,092	30690

**Table 5** (continued)

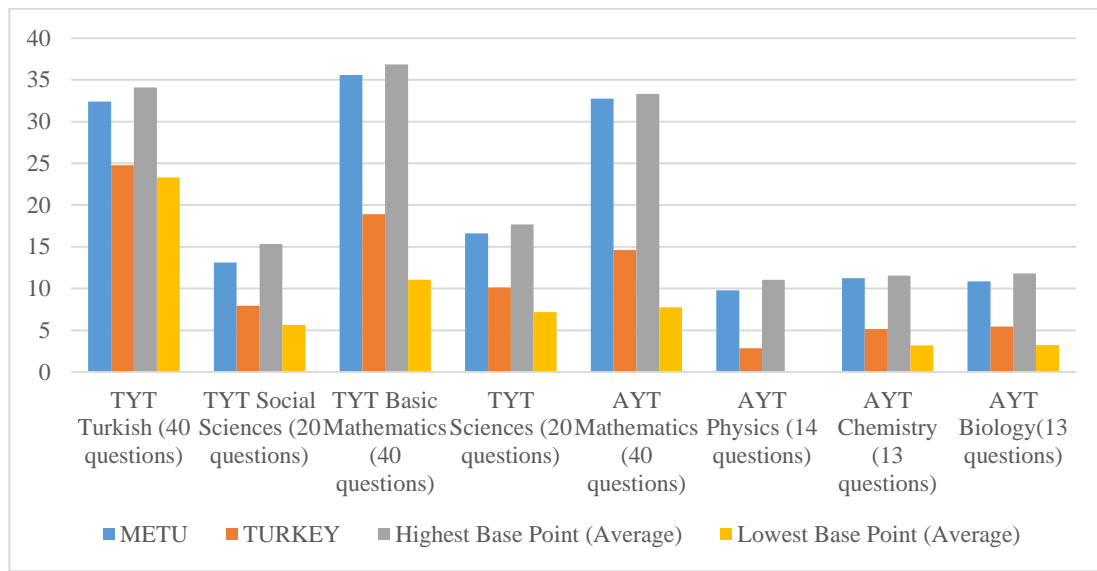
Industrial Engineering	SAY	95	499,248	6132	524,826	1535
Mechanical Engineering	SAY	190	503,228	5126	527,956	1191
Metallurgical and Materials Engineering	SAY	80	454,079	22329	493,395	7623

Below there are two figures which are created with the aim to show the numbers of net answers of those placed in METU, students across Turkey, the students placed in universities where the base points are the highest and the students placed in universities where the base points are the lowest. The results in YÖK-ATLAS software were used as a source to create the figures.



**Figure 1:** Number of Net Answers of Students Placed in the Departments Included in FEAS.

Figure 1 shows that how many net answers that the students have. The FEAS departments included in the figure are the departments of the participants of this study.



**Figure 2:** Number of Net Answers of Students Placed in the Departments Included in FE.

Figure 2 shows that how many net answers that the students have. The FE departments included in the figure are the departments of the participants of this study. The figures clearly show the place of METU which is one of the top ranking universities among the other universities in Turkey through the net answers of students who took the YKS-2018. This clearly indicates that these students can easily be regarded as successful amongst other students taking the same exam in Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.3. Data Collection

The data collection method chosen for the study is semi-structured in-depth interview technique. I conducted 34 interviews with the students who have been experiencing their

<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about the participants of the study, see Appendix B.

first year at METU as prep school students. The interviews aimed to capture the perceptions and strategies of participants as they make their way into the ranks of universities. The interviews were recorded upon permission of the respondents and were transcribed by myself. Interviews lasted about fifty minutes to ninety minutes on average and took place in the social sciences building in METU.

As a limitation of the study, it was not possible to find respondents from all departments in METU because the sample asked for an interview with snowball sampling technique. After finding some respondents, the process was continued by asking the respondent whether it is possible to announce the study to friends. The criteria were about the faculty and the city where they have been living before coming to university. As it is stated before, the faculties are FEAS and FE while the criterion about city is to find respondents from Ankara, İstanbul and the other cities. The reason why İstanbul and Ankara were specifically chosen is about the distribution of top ranking universities in the context of Turkey. Together with universities in Ankara such as Ankara University, Hacettepe University, Bilkent University and METU, the universities with relative rankings are in İstanbul such as Boğaziçi University, Koç University, Galatasaray University, Sabancı University.

Although the plan was to conduct interviews with 36 students, it was not possible to reach the planned numbers of students for each criterion. The departments of the participants included in the study are all the four departments of FEAS which are Business Administration (1 participant), Economics (2 participants), International Relations (3 participants) and Political Science and Administration (5 participants), and nine departments of FE which are Aerospace Engineering (3 participants), Chemical Engineering (2 participants), Civil Engineering (3 participants), Computer Engineering (2 participants), Electrical and Electronics Engineering (6 participants), Food Engineering (2 participants), Industrial Engineering (2 participants), Mechanical Engineering (2 participants), Metallurgical and Materials Engineering (1 participant).



The ‘other cities’ reached within the study are Antalya, Balıkesir, Bolu, Bursa, Eskişehir, İzmir, Kocaeli, Konya, Kütahya, and Ordu.

**Table 6:** Number of Participants

	Female	Male	Female	Male	
	FEAS	FEAS	FE	FE	
Ankara	2		3	5	10
İstanbul	2	3	3	3	11
Other Cities	2	2	3	6	13
Total Number	6	5	9	14	34

Before the interviews, students answered demographic questions which will be presented in this part of the study to discuss on them in the next chapter. In this part of pre-interview process, participants were asked about the type of high school they graduated from, educational and occupational background of their families.

**Table 7:** Families’ Educational Background

	Primary School	Secondary School	High School	Two-year Vocational High School	Bachelor’s	Master	PhD	Total
Mother	6	2	9	2	18	1	2	34
Father	1	3	5	3	14	4	4	34

**Table 8:** Types of High School Participants Graduated From

Types of High School	Anatolian High School	Science High School	Social Science High School	Basic High School	Private High School	Total
#	18	5	2	1	8	34

The time period for data collection was also important. When the interviews were conducted, the participants made their choices about eight months ago and they were students at METU in the meantime. The reason for the study being done at a certain time period after they came to METU is to contextualize their choices as not accomplished facts but as important experiences which have reasons, consequences and interpretations. For this purpose, it is attempted to locate the study within their multidimensional experiences of transition to higher education when students were in their first year at the METU. Therefore, the study was conducted after about eight months -not immediately after coming to METU- in order to include students' evaluations about their choices, whether they rethought their choices and how they were related to their choices.

#### **4.4. Interviews**

Based on the interviews, it is attempted to bring to light the senior high school students' experiences on accessing higher education in Turkey where the condition of it has been established based on YKS, including their social and economic conditions and exam experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used and the questions were accordingly formulated. The sub-sets of questions for the interviews was designed to give a general picture of how the system of examination was experienced and to cover main topics such as students' considerations about higher education system in Turkey, their one year experience until YKS by including their feelings and reasons, their understanding of success and failure, and future plans in terms of universities and majors.

Before the interviews, the respondents were not informed about the main scope and research questions of the study to be more objective. The respondents were invited to the interviews by being told that the study is about a sociological analysis of their experiences on preparation process for YKS and especially university choice. To introduce the study, they were told that there are many different and important processes within their ways through access to university and that experiences are generally handled in numbers like considering how many students there are in universities and the scores and rankings of those students. In this context, it was told them that the aim of this study is to understand how this world of numbers are generated by analyzing the issue in more depth through their stories. With this, it was emphasized that their specific experiences are important to understand the general flow of university choice.

In addition to pursuing the specific research questions of this study, the interview process is organized to understand the general characteristics of how a senior high school student experience the final year of the high school which is mainly characterized by university entrance exam. This organization was important because it is a fact that the daily life of an agent is based on an infinite amount of interactions, conflicts and communications of relations. Upon this consideration, how the total one year of a student is shaped around an examination and how they perceive to be in a situation near to make a ‘decision’ will be explored to link the process progressing to the exam and the process in which they make a decision after the exam. With this, it was attempted to reach the general characteristics of being a candidate for being a university student in Turkey. Since this study attempts to understand how the system of education formulates the choices of students as its main focus, it is also important to give the main framework of how students build their set of strategies during the years of preparation. Thanks to this, it was aimed to reach the possibilities, limitations and potentials of accessing higher education in Turkey through individual experiences of its participants. These may hopefully enable us to make sense of how they and their contents reproduce another one. In this respect, I will be trying to make the very characteristics of the phase of

preparation clear before coming to the exam stage before how one prepares for something will exactly give the framework of that thing. That is why the preparation stage is important for this study. Upon the research questions and presented context, it will be attempted to understand under which conditions and within which opportunities people make decisions in the field of higher education in Turkey. In addition to the structural characteristics of the process which were presented in the third chapter, how its participants making sense of it will be clearly put to show that how the system functions and operates in practice.

The structure of interviews was prepared to reveal both the general and diversifying characteristics of preparation year based on individual experiences of participants. In this part of the study, it is aimed to link the interview questions with the broader structure of both the theory and research questions of the study before proceeding to the parts where the findings of the study will be presented and discussed. As it is both relevant for the interviews and their presentations in the study, I try to contextualize the content of the study as a process in which there are subjective meanings and strategies of individuals for 'doing well' in the exam as well as the structural designs and processing with their specific capacity to formulate the strategies and even their targets which are realized in candidate students' educational choices. To understand these complicated relations among the system and the participants of the process of preparing for YKS, the very characteristics of both structure and individualized experience were approached as interacted and nested relations.

The design of questions focuses on four main stages. The first one is the period they had been studying for the exam. In this part, how they consider accessing higher education in Turkey and what kind of strategies they developed to be successful were asked. This part is organized to see what kind of resources they had and how they reorganized the existing resources to be successful. The second stage focused on is the exam itself. In this part, YKS is located at the very end of a preparation process in which all the efforts are realized through it. Their feelings, perceptions and evaluations about the exam were

proposed to see how they evaluate the exam after all the effort they gave. The third part of questions is to cover their decision making process after ÖSYM announced the results. A set of questions proposed to understand what their criteria are when they are trying to make a decision on university and departments. After the process of ‘choosing’, the fourth part of the interview was designed to understand ‘after-choice’ process. Understanding the stage of ‘after-choice’ was important for the study because it is a period in which they are not subject to the rules of the examination system for the first time in almost one year so that it was important to ask about their perceptions when they completed each task with success.

Firstly, it was important to contextualize their experiences within the whole framework of the current system of examination and accessing higher education. This is for both describing the general characteristics of the system and locating the individual experience of taking an exam in that general framework to see to what extent the developed strategies have relevance with their higher education destinations. Thus, how YKS is operated by the system within the general framework accessing higher education will be in point. In this sense, they are asked how they relate their experience of exam and their understanding of attaining higher education. By doing so, it is hopefully possible to understand how they consider accessing higher education based on a selection via YKS in terms of making sense of what has dominance on their experiences during the process at most.

As the main flow of the interview process, I asked them about their understandings of higher education system in Turkey to make sense of how they perceive the field they are performing. The intention of the set of questions on the system of higher education in Turkey is to understand how they are affected by the changing nature of system of examination, where they locate the exam within their educational journey, whether they approach the system as something problematical and needs to be revised or not and what kind of regulations do they consider as necessary for the system. Also, the location of exam within their general conceptualization of reaching their goals at the end of this

process was asked since this study attempts to make sense of making choices in the given educational context based on the experiences of ‘successful’ students. In this sense, how a group of ‘successful’ student consider YKS is important to give the general framework of conditions of accessing higher education by ‘doing well’.

Including their specific backgrounds, interviews seek for how they reorganize their daily lives which are shaped around the existence of the exam to understand what they have focused during the process. In addition to their individual experiences on reorganization of their educational lives for a specific year, how their families consider their experiences was also concentrated.

On another focus of the interviews, I gave them space to tell what kind of resources they have to prepare for YKS and how they organize their sources to get a score on YKS. By doing so, I try to explore the invisible prerequisites of the current system of YKS based on the strategies of its participants by focusing on which resources are used for what.

Thereafter, it was attempted to understand how their understandings on general framework of higher education system give shape to their general understandings, feelings, and ideas towards being in a situation in which they are studying for an exam which is located at the final stage of the process.

Following how they perceive their experiences about preparation for YKS, it was also attempted to understand the concepts which they address to explain what is being successful and unsuccessful. In this set of questions, it is the aim to understand what students attribute as the possible reasons of success and failure within the structure.

As far as choosing a university was concerned, they were asked about the people who has helped them when they were trying to make decisions about their higher education destinations. Participants filled a table which includes their social circle by evaluating how much they got help from them and by explaining what the characteristics of the support were.

At the end, I proposed some questions about their experiences in METU by emphasizing whether they have been questioning their choices or not to explore how they relate themselves with what they reached. In this part of the interviews, the aim was to get some insights not only about their evaluations on their choices but also their definitions on success. Based on the fact that the people within their social circle in METU are also successful for almost one year, it was asked whether their definitions of being successful are changing or not. With these sets of questions, they are asked about what would be their answers if one asks them about the final result of all the stages after the results were announced; is it a choice to be in METU or is it a placement result made by ÖSYM to reveal their self-explanations about their relation between structural factors.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions through the theory and literature review presented above will take place. This chapter has four different sub-sections focusing on students' experiences of YKS which are differentiated according to the general characteristics of the YKS period which is also institutionally divided into stages. In this part of the study, while these four stages are attempted to be analyzed in detail, the relation between the stages and the 'whole' will be also in question. These stages also give the design of this chapter. However, the reason why I choose to present the findings based on the stages is not to claim that the stages are fundamentally different than each other. Rather, my aim is to show how the different stages of YKS experience have been serving for the same ends; to maintain the existing inequalities and to formulate higher education destinations by creating a type of 'successful' student. In this respect, the first stage is the preparation process for YKS, the second is the YKS experience itself, third one is about the 'university choice' process after announced results of their scores and rankings, and the fourth one is 'after-choice' process in which students have some evaluations on their final situation within all these complicated processes of examination. Before proceeding to analysis, I want to underline that the findings are approached in a way to reveal general characteristics of YKS experiences of participants rather than to focus on each narrative in detail; it is actually not possible because I interviewed 34 respondents and each narrative has been emerging in different contexts. The differentiated characteristics of the experiences will be discussed in light of the theory provided above to show how different structural factors have been affecting the 'picture' differently. After that, both the general and specific characteristics of the process will be presented and analyzed in terms of how



they formulate higher education destinations of students. Indeed, the findings will help us to make sense of why the discourse of choice must be problematized and understood in a structural way.

### **5.1. Preparation Process**

Under this heading, I will analyze both the general characteristics of the preparation process for YKS and the situations particular to different contexts. In line with the provided theory and literature in the study, the main aim is to locate the subject of the study within its relations to the structure. In this sense, how different structural factors give shape of the process will be attempted to analyze. With this, it will hopefully be possible to conceptualize students by emphasizing their perceptions and considerations which are shaped by different structural factors such as family, school and education system while they are preparing for YKS.

Throughout the interview process, I conducted 34 interviews and concluded that although there are particular cases, the preparation process is a pattern in terms of how both students and their families consider it as the final action to take within the rest of the educational process. The students and their families see the examination year as a different context which needs specific attention in terms of reorganizing their educational considerations and making critical decisions about how they should study for the exam and what kind of educational institutions should be preferred during the preparation process. Since the year of the exam is seen as the very moment of giving effort to do well in the exam, the general tendency of families and students is to reach the ‘true’ support mechanisms. Along with these mechanisms, interviews reveal that there is a pattern about when students and families start to be focused on YKS and to search for those support mechanisms. Most of the participants said that they started to focus on the exam at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade which is almost one year before the exam. This is to show that the whole process of high school education is not considered as the time period of studying for YKS although the content of YKS covers the four-year high

school education. This finding was important for analyzing the stages of transition to higher education which will be presented in detail.

The existing support mechanisms for YKS are private institutions in general. There are private high schools and basic high schools as the types of private and paid services in the market of YKS. Also, private teaching centers are the most preferred institutions in the period of preparing for YKS. Other than these, students may prefer to take private tutoring for the courses they have difficulties. In other words, privatization can take the shape of a high school, an additional support along with school or totally independent mechanism of one to one private lessons. To give a general picture of the situation in Turkey, it must be put that the big part of the effort in exam year is to make an arrangement of these institutions in the first place. In accordance with the literature, if one wants to make this arrangement in an effective way, there must be combinations of *capital* for both being informed about the process and accessing those institutions. In this sense, the ‘coordinator’ of the preparation process is the family with its possibilities and limitations in terms of turning the existing capital into an effective source in the period of preparation. In this process, the city, family’s educational background and family’s occupation are the important structural factors which have the potential of enabling or limiting the student to have an effectively designed preparation process.

About the schools and private institutions where the participants attended, there are different combinations created to complete the process with success. There are participants who continued their education in public schools and did not take any additional supports. On the other hand, there are participants who preferred private high schools and they were also attending private teaching institutions after school. The other type is the ones who are taking the support of both private teaching institutions and private tutoring in addition to public school education.

One of the general characteristics of the process is the reality of private teaching institutions where students take courses after school to prepare for YKS. According to

interviews, 24 of 34 students prepared for YKS by going those private teaching centers in addition to school. 9 of 34 students prefer private high schools and 6 of 34 students attended both the private teaching centers and private tutoring while they continued with public high schools. Also, there are two students who attended both a private high school and a private teaching center.

One of the most important reasons for private teaching institutions to be preferred is that the system of these institutions is based on training students for four year high school curriculum in just one year. Another is that these institutions are teaching strategically in regards to university exam content and the test techniques. Since the exam is based on the whole curriculum of four year high school education, the general tendency is to try to be prepared in the last year for both overcoming the missing chapters of some courses and recalling their knowledge in detail to be able to solve difficult questions in the exam. Another reason why private teaching institutions are preferred is about its difference from the school. Students and families consider school as a place where students take education in a way to learn the general curriculum of courses. The high school education period consists of many different courses-some of the courses do not take place in YKS-and their evaluations via written exams which are generally in the form of open ended questions. The importance of school is based on the scores of those written exams which will be important for students in addition to their YKS scores so that they also have to do well in school courses while they have to study for YKS. Since YKS is designed as a test examination, private teaching institutions are the very place of preparing for test examination for students. P19 explains his final year experience as follows:

As I learnt all the things in that year which I was supposed to learn during 4 years, I was continuously learning something new, and this was giving me a great deal of pleasure. I was studying every day for hours. I had no time to set aside for myself; still I was honestly delighted with the studying.

One design is to continue to both school and private teaching institutions while the other is to change the school and continue with private institutions which are Basic High Schools -which were private teaching institutions before and they continue as a new type of high schools- and Private Anatolian High Schools. Some students consider school as waste of time because it does not help them prepare for YKS and they are continuing their education in these private institutions where the main focus is YKS itself. There are four students who prefer private institutions among the participants and one of them explains how her family made their decision on basic high school by saying that:

In my opinion, in public schools, education is lack of devotion to its students- I mean, education is not provided properly there as it was supposed to be. My parents had already wanted me to go to Basic High School at the beginning of the grade 11. Even if I went to a private teaching center, it would be inadequate backup in terms of the exam, since the school (public school) was to no avail. (P23)

Also, participant explains why he left the public school through the relation between the school and YKS by stating that:

Actually I have been in two different Science high schools. First, I was enrolled in public Science high school, but later on I continued to private one as I thought that it made no sense to go to both public school and private teaching center. Private high school applied to both. (P29)

Although the number of students who continue to public schools is high when it is compared to the number of students who preferred private institutions, this does not mean that students in public schools use their schools as base for preparing for YKS. Rather, this means that they decided to continue their schools for some reasons differentiated according to the different dynamics. For example, the success of high school is an important characteristic not to change the school in the year of YKS. Some of the participants stated that they do not want to change their high school because it is also important for an individual to be the graduate of one of the 'good' high schools so

that they decided to continue with the same high school while they focused on preparing for YKS at the private teaching centers. By doing this, students expect their schools to help them being successful on their way to YKS by not taking too much their time. As P14 says:

My standpoint was always like this: When I asked opinions of senior students, they said that the school did not make difficulties on attendance. So, the school did its best so that the students could prepare for the exam ideally: either by holding courses for the students or by not insisting on the students' attendance who chose to go to private teaching centers rather than courses organized by the school. -Even if there are legal obligations such as " you have to be at school at 8.30 every day. You have only 10 days to be absent until the end of semester.", the school did its best for the success. So, whenever I like, I studied at the library or at home or at school with my friends. Thus, the school and private teaching center did not interfere with each other, I mean; I did not shoulder an extra burden, if you ask me why I chose to go to both school and private teaching center.

The general analysis of the preparation process is obviously based on the idea that the schools are considered as almost *useless* if one is preparing for YKS in Turkey. This situation directs students and their families to find other institutions-which are paid services- to get ready for YKS. This system of privatization turns the pre-higher education process into a marketplace where one needs having mainly *economic capital* because public schools provided by the state do not provide the feeling of having enough knowledge and support to be ready for YKS. Under these circumstances, even the first stage of the way through university becomes inequal in terms of the required sources. According to the most of the participants' experiences, the preparation process is the period in which specifically economic and cultural capital are operated. After these general and differentiated experiences, students are progressing to the stage of YKS experience itself.

There were only two participants who did not attend any private teaching centers or tutoring and continued to only public science high school. The participant (P1) stated

that he studied for the exam by not taking any extra support although the school was not enough for this. The participant (P4) explained why he did not attend private teaching centers based on economic reasons. He stated that it was hard enough to study for YKS by not taking an additional support. Also, he said that this situation had motivated him to get a good score on YKS in his first try because it was impossible for him to prepare for YKS once more and by himself. These expressions are evidently showing that being a YKS candidate in a public school is not enough to feel 'comfortable or ready' to get high scores on YKS. Even though the students achieved their goals on getting high scores, the experience of preparing for YKS is not same for them when it is compared with others'. The ever expanding sphere of private mechanisms in the process of transition to higher education has dominantly affected some by making them unsettled because they cannot attend, and others by convincing them that they are doing the right thing because they can attend.

The role of family in this process is to canalize their economic sources to create a 'safe' environment while the student is preparing for YKS. The word 'safe' here actually refers to the operability of capital in the domain of education because the process of preparation for YKS is approached as something requiring multidimensional attention. One of them is the need of 'mentor' in the process so that families try to find the best combination of support for the student. The domination of privatization in the process drives family to decrease the risk that they are willing to take and to increase the amount of resources they are willing to spend. Another reason of this is the ever changing characteristics of the system of university entrance exam. Since both the content and the structure of the exam is changing almost every year, the knowledge of how one should study for university entrance exam is blocked to be accumulated in the context of Turkey. This is another factor which extends the sphere of support mechanisms which are paid services.

The structural factors that take place in preparation process give the first shape of choices of students which continue to be shaped during the other processes. About the

position of individual in the process, it can be said that structure positions itself in the level of family, school and private teaching institutions while it positions itself in the level of feelings like being advantaged or disadvantaged. The next sub-section will focus on the analysis of how the students evaluate the exam, how they approach it to discuss their understandings on the system itself and to understand how they locate themselves and the other students into this set of structural factors. Also being successful and whether they emphasize equality in their answers or not will be discussed in relation with the discussion of unequal opportunity structure shaped around those private institutions.

## **5.2. Considerations about YKS- Higher Education System in Turkey**

### **5.2.1. The Function of YKS**

Participants were asked how they consider the exam as a means of transition to higher education. The general characteristic of the answers is that they see the exam as a kind of necessity because they think that there should be a system to determine who will go to which university. Although there are some deficiencies in the examination system, it is basically a need. Although students criticized the system of examination, the emphasis was generally about their emotional difficulties rather than that the existing structure of inequalities created by the system of education. In other words, they did not highlight inequalities that students from different socioeconomic backgrounds are facing while they are trying to access to higher education via YKS. About why the exam is somehow necessary, Participants say:

It is not nice, yet something necessary. There are millions of students and it is necessary to arrange them in order somehow, I cannot think of a better way. Of course, it is not nice to be ordered by an exam-in which even one question that you can solve can change many things- but as I said I can't think of another way. (P6)

Now, it seems to me very utopian idea that there is no exam. It is because I have no idea how come this excess demand can be met. For this reason, I do not see the point of not having an exam so realistic. Therefore, I stand for the exam,

however, I do not have a clue how we can fix the moment of the exam. This is an issue that I criticize but I cannot find any other alternatives. (P20)

The emphasis on “not nice” here is not explained in detail by P6. This expression is like a general comment on the system of examination which just gives a room for its deficiencies but the participant does not think it in detail. He focuses on the function of ranking but he does not mention what will happen after students are ranked because it is really hard to go beyond what is applied now and to suggest a new system of transition to higher education.

Also, participants generally emphasized that the exam is not for testing their intelligence but it is capable of measuring how one is able to study for a long time. As Participant puts:

I don't think it is related with intelligence or something. For me, it is more like an exam that measures the people's tendency to study. We can call it (tendency to be able to study) as ability of study. (P31)

Some of the participants stated that the questions covered in YKS were qualified questions which cannot be solved by just studying because they need interpretations rather than having the full knowledge about the question. As Participant states:

From my standpoint, rather than the examination system, the exam itself that is carried out by ÖSYM is well-qualified. Those questions and everything... The questions cannot be solved by only studying. I mean, to be able to solve some questions you need to have the knowledge and then interpret it. And this is something I like since I do not really welcome the situation of getting into a university by only memorizing the knowledge. There needs to be extra features as well, in my opinion. Otherwise, everyone can overcome. (P16)

As it can be seen from this answer, students expect the exam to be capable of revealing differences between students because it would be meaningless if each student did well on YKS. While it is so obvious that there are many students who are not accessing



adequate knowledge and possible mechanisms to support their process, some participants state that the questions in YKS should not measure the knowledge but their capacities to interpret.

About the higher education system in Turkey, the main focus of participants was the systematic changes in the process as they were preparing for YKS. While they were studying for the latest version of university entrance exam, the number of questions and the content of the exam were exempt to change so that they had to change both their strategies and approaches on the exam. They also faced with postponing the exam date due to presidential election. Under these circumstances, they are asked about their considerations of higher education system in Turkey to understand how they define the structure in which they are trying to achieve a goal. As Participant says:

The planned curriculum change 'decreased' my motivation. Hard work occurred at the same time as the change- they gave Turkish language competency high priority and my Turkish language skills were not good at that time. Because higher priority was given to the tests which I was not any good, I felt it unfair and thus demotivated. Even if I study a lot, I was in a nonsense system already. The conditions of the period... They seemed nonsense that is why my motivation for studying was 'decreasing'. So, my feelings were like that. However, later on I realized that this exam is for everyone and if I don't do this, there is no any other way. My ultimate goals regarding where to reach were obvious and those places accepted students only through the exam, which is not aptitude test (ability test). Well, what can't be cured must be endured. (P24)

The participant considers the system something beyond her thoughts and desires and she thinks that she has to continue studying for the exam because there is nothing to do. Also, she states that she tries to focus on the importance of the exam in her own life, not how system is administered, and reminds herself that there is no other way for her. As this example clearly shows, students seem to regard the system as an external structure and they have to play the game according to its given rules. Also, the system of higher education field maintains its value by presenting itself as the one and only way of future plans of students.

In line with the expectation from exam to distinguish students, one participant P19 stated that he thought that while other students focus on discussing these changes on the content of exam, he can continue to study to draw away. He concluded that he saw these two situations; the change on exam and the election as advantaged situations for him to study more.

About the higher education system in Turkey, participants were asked what they would have changed if they had the authority and the general approach is to make changes for practical solutions like extending exam duration and not measuring the four year education in one exam. Again, their emphasis on possible changes on the system is more based on the difficulties that they have faced rather than the general characteristics of the structural inequalities.

About the issue of equality, some students stress that the exam is mainly depending on *luck* but they emphasize on structural factors which create inequalities if the question of inequality is directly asked.

In my opinion, it very much depends upon luck. By luck I mean, if you study hard, I don't think you would rank much below than you expected. This is valid for anybody. Let me give you a simple example; I think there is a scala, I mean, you study and you would rank in the first 10,000 students - no matter what the interval is, depending on your luck on the exam day, it is possible that you could rank of 4900th or 80th. For me, I don't mention numbers; really, because as I said, I believe that they (rankings/ numbers) are more about luck. My desk mate was better than I was in the last one month of the exam. During the year, it was unsteady- sometimes I was scoring higher than her, sometimes she was ahead of me, but around June 15th, she was better than me. We didn't see each other for 15 days. In the exam, I ranked of 600th, and she did 3000th. So, it happened. Is ranking of 3000th bad? No, not at all, in my opinion. I wouldn't feel sad if I ranked 3000th. However, people have goals, and some universities reach their quotas before 1700, and thus with that score (ranking 3000th), you are not able to enroll in the university you aimed. In my view, it would be better if there was a system that could measure people's performances in a long run rather than doing it in one day. P14

I think that the expression above clearly reveals the focus of students while they explain the system is sometimes based on chance. The example of the participant is about one of his friends from school whose ranking can be considered relatively 'high'. This shows us that the system of examination canalizes students to focus on another group of students who are also expected to be successful. The subject of their understanding on the other students is the ones 'like them'. It can be clearly said that the reason of this is about being ranked according to their scores. They have to focus on their observations about their friends because structure of accessing higher education reduces their understanding on inequalities into the level of individual difficulties they faced. Within this kind of stressful experience, it is not likely for them to go beyond what they are experiencing which is a situation defined by the system in accordance with its very purpose of eliminating.

I posed a set of questions about the course books which are provided for each student by MEB by reminding them that these books are equally distributed for each one. The questions were about the sufficiency of these books to help them prepare for YKS. I thought that these questions may enable us to speak about there are other students with no additional resource and the sufficiency of these books can be critically important for them. All the participants answered the question by barely establishing the relevance of the book to the exam because no one used the book to be ready for YKS because it is totally irrelevant with the exam, they said.

There are also Participants who emphasizes on the unequal characteristics of the exam however they generally approach the issue in this way when I invited them to think more on inequalities created by the system. As Participant says:

The exam is definitely not equal. Even the exam fee, per se, is something problematic for many people. Also, as you said, changing this process is an additional burden to students. I took TEOG (Transition from Primary Education to Secondary Education) exam as well, and this happened like that, too. So, continuously changing the examination system causes for students not to see the

future. Moreover, this basic high school thing is a matter of a hefty sum, not fair at all. P17

This shift on their ideas is about the fact that they have to focus on being ready for the exam but they are generally aware of those characteristics of examination which serve for excluding students who cannot access higher education from the discussion.

### **5.2.2. The Definition of Being Successful**

In this part, participants' answers about the definition of being successful and the criticality of being successful at YKS in the context of Turkey will be both presented and analyzed.

About why being successful and getting a high score is critical for them, they generally highlighted that it is expected for them to be successful because it is the first step of their future plans.

It is because of social pressure, I suppose. Even if you cannot enroll in the department that you aim, in the end you will spend life one way or another. Enrolling in a prestigious university and graduating from there seems to people like job guarantee. Everyone wants you to have money in pocket and be independent. Therefore, they expect you to pass the exam, study in the department and get the job. P19

The country is small and the population is large. Everybody is an engineer, everybody is a university graduate. It is hard to find a job now and people think "I have to find a job and for this reason I have to pass the exam by ranking highest and enroll in a prestigious university". Also, for instance, people who enrolled in METU ten years before now could enroll in this university only by half study of what the students do to be able to enroll today. It is because the competition is tough today. It is linked to job situation, I suppose. P22

Although there is a general tendency of relating being successful at YKS with their self, one participant stated that being successful at the exam does not reflect something related with her personality by saying:

If we think in general, it has a great deal of effect since it has a major effect according to family and society, but in fact it is just an exam in my opinion. However, my family has also an opportunity to live abroad, for this reason they were not worried, and thus I was not stressed out while taking the exam. It is not related to my personality, it is not something that affects me. It is just an exam and I always said that if I cannot pass this one, I can take the next. P33

As it can be clearly seen, the reason why she does not relate herself with being successful is based on the opportunity of going abroad for university education provided by her family. This shows that the value of exam is differentiated according to specific opportunity structures of students.

About the meaning of being successful, participants generally answered this by emphasizing that there is no need for competing with others; they said that they have to compete with themselves to be successful. They are also highlighting that the success means being happy with the final decision; which is not about the score, the ranking or the market values of occupations. Participants say:

Being successful in this exam... When you achieve your goals, it means you are successful. You do not necessarily achieve high rankings; you must succeed in your own ranking. To say, you do not need to compete against others, you need to compete against yourself to be successful. P16

I think it means enrolling in a university that you aimed. There is no such thing that everybody will get into Medicine or Law. If everyone is happy with the place they enroll, and that is success from my standpoint. P22

When the question of being successful is not directly asked, they answered the questions about exam by embracing the competitive characteristics of the exam. Although they emphasize on competing with themselves and being happy, these do not coincide with their comments on why the exam is necessary within a system of transition to university.

When it is asked who the successful and unsuccessful ones are, they generally explain it within individualistic understanding of situations rather than attributing the reasons to the structure. As Participant stated about successful students:

I would think that s/he did very well planning, firstly. By planning, I do not mean studying- it is important even what you eat in the last week before the exam; even the quantity of liquid that you consume matters, especially in the last days before the exam. The stress management in the morning of the exam day is also significant. Yes, you take a bunch of practice tests, but as the name implies, it is practice and your tension is never the same as the real exam. I would think s/he managed the stress well and also is a bit lucky. P14

In this expression, we can see how he relates being successful with being organized in the process and being lucky in the very moment of YKS.

The expressions are evidently related with the competitive nature of central examinations. Students make their evaluations on their preparing for YKS performance according to their advantages and disadvantages in comparison to others'. Their understandings are shaped by the very structure of central examination. Since they are trying to get high scores to have more options for making the list of universities in the process of university choice, they believe that they have to be more successful than the others because there is a rational list about success of universities which is based on the ranking of students placed that university last year. In this context, they are forced to make infinite evaluations about their positions among others. This directs them to appreciate their advantages and complaining for disadvantaged situations. The system establishes its own pool of successful students by forcing students to constantly focus on their own situations and feel compelled to adapt to the system in order not to waste of the effort made by both the family and them. In fact, creating this pool of successful students also means selecting those with valuable resources in the field of education and eliminating those who are not able to transform their resources into a value in the field.

The consideration of being successful at YKS and the type of successful students were presented to emphasize on how structure of system of education formulates their approaches on doing well at YKS. Their answers enable us to see their awareness about being in a competitive field in which they are directed to find good strategies for themselves to compete with others. Accordingly, their evaluations about YKS-2018 questions, they put emphasis on that the questions have distinctive character so that the ones who study more may distinguish themselves and have more options while they are making their list for university choice. The next heading will be on the process of decision making for universities and fields of study after they took the exam and the results were announced.

### **5.3. The Process of ‘Choice’**

The process of university ‘choice’ is another stage of transition to higher education in which students try to ‘use’ their scores effectively. The process of preparation and the exam experience are the stages of investments for this stage of decision making because students want to be more advantaged while they are trying to make decisions. This leads them to focus on being ready for YKS by not dominantly focusing on what they want. If they can get a high score, it means they will have a more comfortable choice process so that the discourse is dominantly shaped around “let us finish the exam first”.

In this regard, one important characteristics of this stage is that it is the first period of students to talk about universities and departments. Until this stage, they do not mention what they want. Although the whole point is to go to a university, they do not consider what the whole is; rather they concentrate on each specific stage separately as if they were independent because each stage dominates students’ practices and perceptions. They believe that focusing on universities and departments in the process of preparation is basically unnecessary because they have to get a high score in the first place and then they may think about universities and fields of study within the opportunities made possible by their score.

In this process, students are in a situation in which they got their scores and rankings to use them to be placed in a university. Their results rationally match up to the specific range of the list of universities in Turkey which is declared by ÖSYM in the process of university choice. Students are expected to make a list of universities-departments they want to go. While doing this, they use ‘choice guide’ of ÖSYM as a base to decide which universities they can add their lists. In general, their results are already pointing some universities and departments in the first place because they have their scores now and it is more concrete than what they want. Their desires and future plans are shaped by this list of successful universities and those departments.

The participants filled out a table during the interviews in order to be able to see the variables that affect their process of forming their preference lists for universities.



**Table 9:** The Factors that Affect the Process of Choice

	<b>VERY EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>NOT EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>NOT EFFECTIVE AT ALL</b>	<b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>
<b>FAMILY</b>	P8-P12-P21-P23	P2-P3-P5-P6-P9-P11-P13-P15-P16-P17-P18-P20-P22-P24-P25-P27-P33-P34	P29	P4-P10-P19-P26-P31-P32		
<b>MOTHER</b>	P21-P23	P2-P3-P5-P6-P8-P9-P11-P12-P13-P15-P16-P17-P18-P20-P22-P25-P27-P28-P31-P33-P34	P1-P14-P24-P29	P4-P7-P10-P19-P26-P30-P32		
<b>FATHER</b>	P2-P8-P21-P23-P27-P33	P3-P5-P6-P7-P11-P12-P13-P15-P16-P17-P18-P20-P22-P24-P25-P28-P34	P1-P14-P29-P31	P4-P10-P19-P30-P32	P9-P26	
<b>SIBLINGS</b>	P9-P13-P28-P31-P32	P1-P3-P5-P11-P16-P23-P24-P34	P29	P4-P6-P19-P26	P7-P8	P2-P10-P15-P17-P18-P20-P21-P22-P25-P27-P30-P33
<b>RELATIVES</b>	P14	P5-P6-P9-P12-P18-P23-P28	P11-P13-P15-P17-P31	P1-P2-P3-P7-P8-P16-P19-P26-P27-P34	P4-P10-P21-P22-P24-P25-P29-P30-P32-P33	P20
<b>COUSINS</b>	P13-P17-P23-P33	P8-P10-P12-P22-P26-P28	P11-P16-P18-P27	P1-P3-P6-P7-P15-P19-P34	P2-P4-P5-P9-P21-P24-P29-P30-P31-P32	P20-P25
<b>FAMILY NETWORK</b>	P7-P8-P17-P33	P3-P12-P21-P31	P1-P4-P10-P11-P18	P6-P16-P19-P23-P29-P34	P2-P5-P9-P13-P15-P22-P24-P27-P30-P32	P1-P20-P25-P26-P28
<b>SCHOOL COUNSELOR</b>	P1-P2-P22	P3-P4-P7-P9-P10-P17-P18-P21-P23-P25-P28-P31	P5-P12	P6-P15-P16-P19-P26-P34	P8-P11-P13-P14-P24-P29-P30-P32-P33	P20-P27
<b>COUNSELOR OF PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER or PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS</b>	P13-P20	P6-P8-P11-P17-P18-P21-P23-P25-P26-P28	P7-P24	P10-P12-P34	P5-P14-P15-P27-P29-P33	P2-P4-P16-P32
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b>	P14-P19-P30-P32	P1-P2-P3-P5-P6-P7-P9-P10-P11-P12-P15-P17-P25-P27-P29-P31-P33-P34	P18-P21-P26	P8-P16-P22-P28	P4-P13-P20-P23-P24	
<b>PRIVATE TUTOR</b>	P8-P33	P3-P6-P7-P12	P2-P14-P31	P9		P4-P5-P10-P11-P13-P15-P16-P17-P18-P19-P20-P21-P22-P23-P24-P25-P26-P27-P28-P29-P30-P32-P34
<b>SCHOOL TRIPS</b>	P3-P11-P17-P32	P4-P6-P9-P16-P19-P21-P24-P29-P30	P7-P8-P12-P18	P15	P2-P14-P20-P23	P1-P5-P10-P13-P22-P25-P26-P27-P28-P31-P33-P34
<b>MEDIA</b>	P3-P33	P1-P4-P8-P9-P10-P11-P15-P18-P21-P22-P23-P24-P26-P27-P28-P29-P31-P32-P34	P5-P12	P2-P6-P7-P16-P17-P19	P13-P14-P30	P20-P25
<b>OTHERS (FRIENDS, ONLINE SEARCH, METU ITSELF, MENTOR etc.)</b>	P2-P3-P4-P5-P8-P16-P26-P32-P33-P34	P1-P6-P9-P12-P15-P17-P18-P21-P24-P29-P30-P31-P32		P19		P13-P22-P25



As it can be seen from the Table 9, participants responses were distributed according to their answers about the factors included in the table. The participants coming from İstanbul, in general, regard entering a university as a maturity experience, and they claim, for this reason, that they want to make their choice of university for the ones that are far from their families. On the other hand, some of the participants from Ankara stated that they were not sure about moving to another city for university because they did not want to let the process affect their families emotionally. While they explaining their relations with their families, they said that their families were reminding them that they could make a university choice that everyone would be satisfied with by emphasizing that METU -“one of the best universities in Turkey”- is in Ankara and there is no need to go to another city for university education. The participants from other cities explains the negotiation process as a more certain process from the beginning because of the fact that they have to go to another city at the end of the process because the universities with the qualifications they want to go to are not in the cities where they live. Therefore, it is an expected end for them to move to another city so that their negotiation process does not include any suggestions of families for convincing them not to move while other students have to come to an agreement with their parents about the cities throughout the process.

While the participants locate the private teaching centers in the very center of their preparation process, they do not generally want to be guided by those centers because they say that those centers are looking for advertising and can direct themselves to some of top ranking universities-departments that do not meet their demands. In this way, the centers' key positions in the preparation process are replaced by another type of resource; *social capital*. The students want to talk to people in the universities they want to go to and learn about real life experiences. To meet this need, universities organize events generally named as University Fair, Presentation and Preference Days, Promotion and Choice Days for candidate students to meet with academicians and students to get

information about academic education, scholarships, campus facilities, laboratory infrastructure, and student clubs etc.

Throughout the process, families and students try to utilize their sources to gather information about both universities and the departments. Existing networks and social circle are operated to reach 'safe' and 'sufficient' information about universities. Thus, this stage is concentrated on reaching different sources like family network, teachers, friends etc. Students want to reach real life experiences of other people to be convinced to choose a specific university. In this sense, students were asked about whether they visit METU before and whether they have a contact from METU to ask their questions. According to their answers, I found that 15 of them both visited METU and have a contact from METU, 7 of them visited METU but did not have a contact, 6 of them did not visit METU before they came but they have contacts and the 6 of them neither visited METU nor had a contact at METU.

After the students have collected the necessary information, they try to make an optimization to convert the score they have to the most efficient university and department choice. They try to use the information in the most effective way because they basically do not want to 'waste' their scores. For example, P16 changed his list because his score was higher than he expected; so that that he preferred electrical & electronics engineering as his final decision although he was preparing for YKS aiming to study aerospace engineering during the process by emphasizing his specific interest in aircrafts since childhood. When he asked about how he was convinced to change his mind, he stated that he compared the two departments and decided that he could work in aerospace engineering jobs in the future even if he studied electrical & electronics engineering so that he decided to choose the one with higher score. This clearly shows that how the list of universities by ÖSYM presents itself as the ruler by being the most factual element of the choice process for the students.

This approach shows itself in the list of universities they created as their list of choices. Their lists generally start with university departments with higher scores than their own score. This is to try their chances because they believe that this possibility provides them more opportunity if they can be placed there because the list of ÖSYM is the very guide of the process. If there is a possibility of a university with higher score, they want to try it. The possibility, here, does not necessarily have to be a high possibility. Students generally tend not to take risks and make their list by starting from universities with higher scores than their scores, then they add the universities with scores close to their scores and they complete the list by adding the universities with lower scores than their scores. Therefore, this matter of taking risk is also working against the idea of 'choice'.

After the factors which had affected the process of university choice, students were asked about the final decisions on the list of universities that they made. About their list, the first three, the rank of their placement results and the following three preferences were asked them. When these lists of universities are examined, it can be seen that they tend to try their chances for universities and departments with higher scores because they generally think that there should be a reason for those universities to be placed at the top. Beyond all these, they are aware of that their choices about universities and departments will be important in labor market in the future so that they want to choose the best possible one. Even if it generally seems not likely to be placed to one of the first three universities in the list, they give place to these universities in their lists. As it can be seen from the Summary of Participants (Appendix B), there are 15 students who have METU as one of the first three universities in the list. The others add some universities and departments to their lists even if their scores are not enough to be placed those universities and departments. Also, students add the universities and departments with lower scores than their scores to their lists because the system place the candidates to universities and departments according to their rankings, that is, candidates with higher ranking and score are placed to that university and department among the other candidates who have that specific university and department in their lists. In this sense,

students are actually making their lists based on the placement results of previous year so that their choices are a kind of multi-dimensional estimation which needs to consider how other candidates are making their lists. The characteristics of this consideration have also been formulating by current status of professions and universities in the country. Under the existing circumstances, candidates try to estimate which university and departments' scores will change in which directions. As a result of this uncertainty in decision making process, their lists include universities and departments with lower scores than their original scores. Another determinant factor of the existence of those universities in the lists is based on whether students are planning to prepare for the exam again in the following year or not. If they do not want to take the exam again, they add a relatively guaranteed university and department to their lists.

These processes of both decision making and the formation of lists should be understood in a way in which students first try to reach real life experiences about departments and universities to choose the most advantageous one with their scores. This is actually similar with *using a gift card* to buy something. It is actually not likely to choose something whose value is lower than the value of the gift card. They want to use their cards in the most effective way. The reason why this study claims that all the process is about formulation of choices by the structure is based on the fact that it requires having some initial valuables to get one of the advantageous gift cards and following resources to be able to use the card effectively after getting it.

In this part of the study, the decision making process and the very moment of making choices were attempted to be understood through their relations with the existing structure of making university choice within the given system in the context of Turkey. As it is obvious, students approach the issue by considering the possible opportunity structure that they will have thanks to their departments and the university in the near future. While students are about to make a choice, they have to evaluate their situation among other candidates to make a realistic estimation by also considering the set of current changes in the labor market. This being the case, claiming and verbalizing it

through university ‘choice’ mean imposing the responsibility of the structure on the individual since they are not feeling as they are choosing, rather they are feeling that they are trying to optimize what they should choose.

#### **5.4. Experiences on After-Choice**

The experiences of students after they came to METU are included to the study to be able to locate their choices within a process of transition to higher education. By doing this, it was aimed to understand the choice within its consequences. This kind of understanding may hopefully enable us to emphasize that university choice should not be approached as the product of a process which is finished in itself. Rather, it should be reminded that students continue to evaluate their final situations again and again while they are experiencing the consequences of it in the first year of university education. Moreover, the expected and planned consequences of their choices have not been emerged yet which will be appeared after they graduated because the aim, with their own words, is to get a job and being advantageous in the labor market. Since the participants are the first year students in the Department of Basic English in METU, they have not even attended the courses at their departments so that the aim is just to include their first impressions and one year experiences about their choices. However, this does not mean that their very first impressions are not important. Rather, reaching to this stage is the very reason of all the efforts and plans so that this stage is important to understand how they relate both themselves with the ‘final’ picture and each stage with this ‘final’ stage.

While the whole point is the transition to university, the least thought during this process was the university experience itself as well as departmental experience. This is due to the strong dominance of the other parts leading students to complete the prior parts safely and to think less about the outcome. Upon consideration of this fact, it is likely that the criteria of students when making a university choice have changed in their first years because they had almost a year in which they made positive and negative evaluations about their experiences. Therefore, some situations and new experiences

they encounter after coming to university may make them think about their choice and consider some other criteria that they have never done before. Also, this stage is important because of the fact that they tried to reach out to the real life experiences of others through their social networks until they came to this stage and now they are in the stage where they started to have their own real life experiences of the university.

At this stage, students may be expected to be in a situation in which they are at the heart of what they have invested throughout their education but they do not seem that they are feeling in this way. They mostly stated that they are not yet in a position to comment much on the university.

They are asked about their evaluations about their choices in the first year. This set of questions covers their first impressions about being a university student for each participant, moving to another city and being far from the family for some of them. Also, they continue to make comparisons with others because they are now among the other 'successful' students in METU. In this sense, they are asked about whether their definition of success is changed or not. Also, participants approach the university as an investment not only for education but also for the possible social network will be provided through the network opportunities of the university which is explained by relating it with the success of other students. Participant explains why being in METU as the consequence of YKS experience is satisfactory for her by saying:

When I come here (METU) and study, I see there are a lot of people that can contribute me in terms of both faculty members and students. It is because people come here with a vision. There might be some saying "Coincidentally, I am in METU", but mostly people come here intentionally and by striving to enroll since the ranking is high. Therefore it has an effect on me- in terms of lecturers and people around me who will not impair my abilities/ knowledge or will not let me make no headway but will empower me to reach advance levels. (P11)



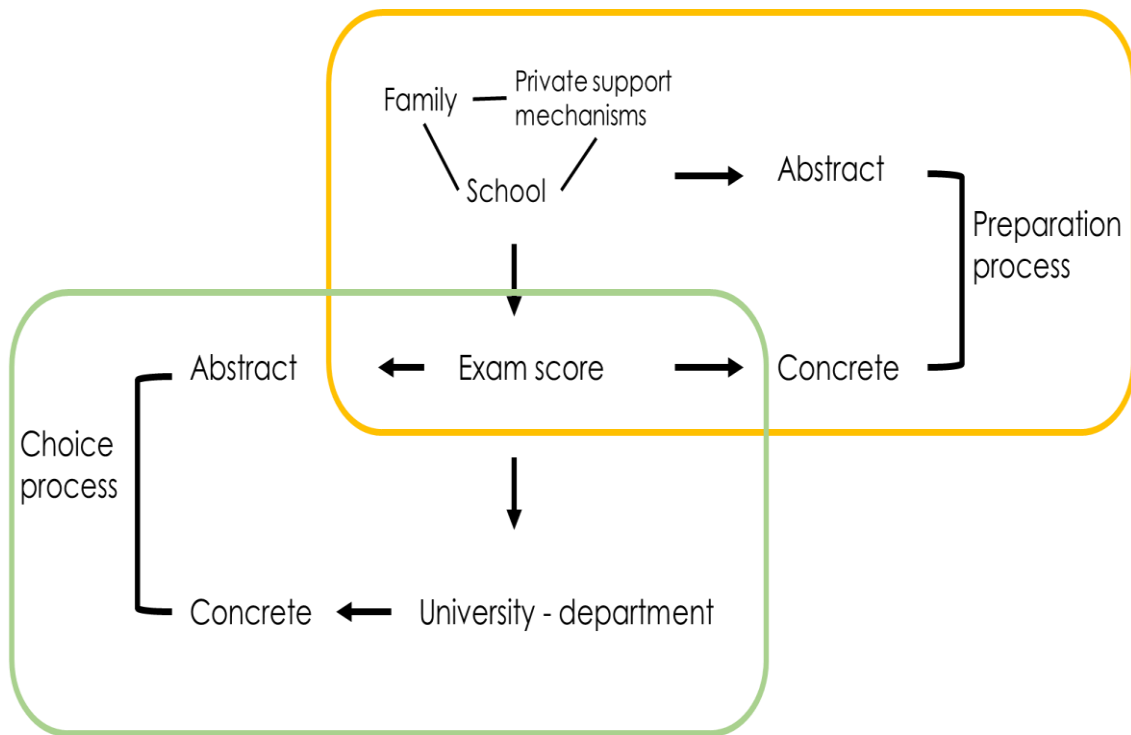
In the final part, I posed a set of questions that are concentrated on what they would give suggestions about making decision for university choice if one asked their opinions after one year. Their emphasis were generally on that they learned so much about university after they came so that they stated that it is the most important thing to be known about the university they want to choose. In this sense, the advices gathered around the need of having more information about what they will face at the university. Also, they advocated that the university should help students find what would make them happy so that students should choose those universities in which students will find their ways thanks to the visionary and supportive characteristics of the university. The stage of university education is expected to be satisfactory in terms of helping them finding their ways and evaluated according to its capacity of preparing them for the ‘real’ life.

### **5.5. Discussion & Analysis of Findings**

These four sub-titling presented above correspond to the institutional design of the central examination in Turkey. Its design covers YKS, declaration of the result of YKS, time period for submitting preference lists and finally declaration of placement results. Within this structure of transition to higher education, what students have been experiencing at the individual level is highlighted to approach the issue in a more relational way by going beyond series of quantitative analysis which is based on numbers of both universities, placed students, scores and rankings. This world of numbers in a way serve for obscuring how students are canalized to determined ends because the ‘numbers’ are more concerning about whether someone has reached a specific end or not. In this part of the study, I will first summarize the characteristics of these stages and try to generate a discussion on the existence of the stages with the aim of pointing that the structure is responsible for formulation of university choice.

As it was presented based on the experiences of participants, preparing for YKS and feeling competent about it continuously require different types of *capital* from the very beginning of whole process. The need of being able to reach the private institutions is almost like a rule of being a ‘true’ candidate and to be able to make a choice. This

causes field of education to be turned into something other than what it promises in the first place. While it is introducing itself as a public service and a right for everyone via public schools, it is a very important finding that even one of the participants did not use the textbooks provided by the state while studying for the exam. Thus, it is gradually evolving into a system with preconditions. Upon consideration of the fact that the institutional structure for YKS preparation has shifted from public schools to private mechanisms, students and their families are exposed to this shift in a more uncertain way because the pool of requirements to feel safe during the process -not even to be successful yet because all the efforts may not work at the end- is both expanding and deepening. Thus, accessing the most efficient mechanisms become all-important because this is the way of progressing to the other stages. If they cannot create an effective preparation process, they cannot become one of the strongest candidates in the other stages. In this respect, all the process can be understood as a process of reification and concretization of sources, namely *capital*. The stages have been defined its abstracts and concretes in the level of individual experience as the result of structural design of examination. During the stage of preparation, students and families try to use their capital to turn them into a value in the field of education which corresponds to the score. When the score is deeply analyzed, it will be revealed that family background, type of school and type of private support mechanisms are embedded in it. Namely, family, school and private mechanisms are concretized as scores by operating their potentials in the stage of YKS preparation. In the process of university choice, the concrete one (score) becomes the abstract one. Therefore, the score is now abstract and it is tried to be concretize in the form of the university and department in the process of decision making.



**Figure 3:** The Operationalization of Exam Score in the Process of University Choice

As it can be seen from Figure 3, the process of university choice is divided into different stages where the exam score has different meanings. While the exam score is the output of the preparation process, it is the first product of the choice process which will be processed to convert it to a university and a department. Therefore it has to be asked about what the stages serve for. It is clear that both the process of preparation and the YKS experience itself are operated independently from the whole point which is going to university. Although students asked about what they have done to get ideas about universities before they started to prepare for YKS, they stated that their focus were compulsorily more on how they should study for YKS first. For a major part of their experiences, the deadline of YKS has been dominating their practices for going to university by delaying themselves thinking on universities because ‘there is no time to think about universities’. As a result of this, the experience of transition to higher education is not shaping around specific aims of candidates but it is shaped around the

structurally defined aims needed for completing different stages. Therefore, the system reflects itself in stages and formulates the process of going university through the dominations of those stages over the whole. The stages serve to break the link between the whole and the stages by establishing their own dominations rather than giving an idea of the 'end'. Also, building the system of transition to university on many stages means new markets and new private mechanisms to complete the stages in a safe way. The system aims to have the most successful ones who are actually the richest in terms of sources and capital. Also, those are the ones who are relatively able to use their resources in the most effective way because both the university entrance exam and the required mechanisms to prepare for it have changed over years and even during the year of examination. In this sense, being adaptive to this ever changing system also requires the candidates to both have resources and to be able to convert them by not distracting themselves about what they must do to complete the stages. In this way, the structure also creates a type of students who see themselves who are obliged to be successful because there is no other way for them. In the level of discourse, being successful does not mean having valuable sources in the field of education. Rather it is associated with being planned, well organized, motivated and lucky. As a result of this, the concept of success, which must be understood through the position of the individual within the structural factors like family background and available capital, is explained on the discursive level through contrasts which highlight personal characteristics such as being planned-unplanned or being lucky-unlucky. Based on this, neoliberal and meritocratic discourse open up new discursive levels and continue its dominance by considering the individual as the one and only responsible for the results and outcomes while the structural factors are processing at the background. In this context, this study aims to problematize using the word 'choice' to refer this whole process of formulation because the words 'choice' or 'choosing' are used to make decisions within the capabilities and aspirations of the individual. This study argues that the discourse of 'you can do it if you want enough' uses the word 'choice' as one of its tools to put emphasis on individual instead of the structural factors.

The exam is offered as an indicator of academic knowledge. Through this indicator, the transition to university is constructed by naming the process as university choice as if it was a preference process. However, proving academic knowledge necessitates the use of many sources together and having these resources and being able to operate them corresponds to a certain social group. Therefore, this process is not a process in which students choose a university. Rather, it is an optimization process that they are blocked to think about what to choose because of being preoccupied with trying to become successful enough for deserving to choose a university.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to investigate on the strategies and considerations of a group of ‘successful’ students who have just made decision to come to METU as their choice of university based on their YKS-2018 results. One of the significant attempts made in this thesis study was to provide arguments on the issue of so called university choice which is an overlooked issue located at the end of the high school education. Since students make their choices after they completed the phase of examination, one aim of this study was to see the relevance between the examination and the university choice through the experiences of those students. The design of transition from high school to university is attempted to be problematized in terms of how individuals develop strategies within the given framework of transition design. In this sense, the study provided the structural design of both the regulation of the field of higher education and the specific characteristics of the central exam. After providing theoretical background and the definitions of contextual characteristics of the transition design, the study presented its field design and related in-depth interview questions. Methodologically, the aim was to conceptualize the university choice as a continuing process, but not as an outcome of completed process. For this end, the study aimed to cover the whole process of transition experience by starting from the preparation process and coming to the days which the interviews were made.

One priority in this study was to go beyond the number which distracts us with the number of students, universities, scores and rankings. In this regard, the research aimed to understand the concept of university choice on the basis of exam experiences of students by asking how they convert the outcomes of this world of numbers that they got

via the exam to a *university choice*. Before relating the exam with the concept of university choice, the study attempted to examine all parts of the examination system in detail and concluded that these parts have been turned into new markets in which students requires to use their sources in an effective way through the private institutions which are almost compulsory to be attended if one really wants to have an effective preparation process. Upon consideration of this, it was discussed that university choice is not only depending on the opportunities gained through both the possibilities and limitations of exam score but also all possible and limited capital to get the score in the first stage.

Also, the study attempted to introduce a type of students who have exam-specific strategies and perceptions. In this sense, the definition ‘successful’ students which was based on their score and ranking was extended to a new definition of success which includes being adaptive to the changes in the system thanks to the familial background and the available resources.

Based on the fact that the university entrance exam is the means of making university choice in the context of Turkey, the way to higher education was designed with the aim of accessing universities but students’ focus cannot come to the universities and departments because of the exam itself along with its separately designed stages. In this regard, it was argued that students are obliged to leave the university choice to focus on it after the actual exam experience. First, they and their families have to convert all the available sources to a number which is the result of the exam. After they got their scores in which all the efforts, capital and their considerations of exam are embedded, they try to convert their scores to a university and a department based on the officially announced success list of universities by being stucked in the defined time period determined by ÖSYM although it is claimed that all the process and the effort from first to last exist for university choice. Also, this stage of university choice leads students to reach real life experiences of students of those universities and departments. Thus, the stage of university choice takes its final shape with respect to the limitations and

possibilities of social capital in addition to the economic capital employed in the preparation process.

In line with the main arguments of the study which are *the new definition of success, the relationship between the examination and the capital and the relationship between the examination and making a university choice*, I am led to the conclusion that having economic capital for the preparation process is experienced as feeling relatively safe because of applying the most compatible strategy with the examination system. In a similar vein, converting available capitals into values for the field of education is understood and experienced as being motivated and planned for the exam by the students. Also, it is a system that being resilient to new changes and necessities of the system is defined as “success” by the system itself; and it is a system where having social capital that makes optimization process effective by reorganizing the available sources is called “university choice”. In this sense, university ‘choice’ can be considered as a concept which carry the traces of neoliberal meritocratic discourse. Thus, it blocks us to focus on structure which distributes the advantages/disadvantages according to class positions in the experience of transition to higher education.

Around the questions of what are the conditions of choosing a university/department in the context of Turkey, how do the successful students give meaning to the university entrance exam and what kind of conceptualizations do they use to identify their experiences while they are in the periods of preparation for the exam, the exam itself and the choosing a university, the study aims to reveal who are the successful students in the universities that are listed as successful over the definition of success determined by the system. Therefore, this may enable us to understand the social conditions of success and failure and to understand the patterned conditions of being excluded or being included by the education system.

While this study locates family at the very center of students’ transition experiences, it did not include any family members in the sample. Therefore, for future studies, the



inclusion of family members would provide depth as it is shown in this research that family plays an important role in students' transition experiences of both the preparation process for the exam by allocating the available resources and the process of choice by providing family network to gather information about universities and the departments. In this regard, including family members as the ones who reorganize and allocate the available sources for increasing the possibility of success may provide how they consider university entrance exam in terms of maintaining their class positions in society or their aspirations for upward mobility.

Although the study attempted to include their one year experience in METU, participants did not attend any courses from their departments yet. For this reason, it was not possible to discuss whether their departmental choices are suitable for them so that their considerations and comments on after choice process was limited to METU. In this regard, students were invited for another research when they will be third or fourth grade students to understand their after university choice process in detail to be able to include their experiences within undergraduate education.

Also, this study choose a group of successful students, they have relatively more options than the other candidates in the general framework. However, the experiences of students whose results are relatively lower may provide us to understand how they consider the system of examination and how they develop strategies when their options are already limited by 'their results'. Also, we can see how the traces of systematic characteristics of examination reflect itself in the perceptions of those students towards successful students.

This research aimed to contribute to further research on questioning the existence of central examinations as one of the legitimate means of perpetuating existing inequalities through education and the capacities of central examination in terms of whether they promise to contribute students' university choice processes by providing an analysis of students' both previous and after experiences around university choice in the case of

METU starting from the institutional design of the system to the participants' experiences by questioning how they internalize the structure in their particular experiences. The study also attempts to redefine the system of central examination as a mental, physical and procedural barrier for students which leads students not to be focused on university choice by locating itself above the university choice and reducing the whole process into the result of the examination.

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## APPENDICES

### A. HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
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11 ARALIK 2018

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Besim Can ZIRH

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız Buse Ceren OTAÇ'ın "Yüksek Öğretimde Üniversite Tercihini Etkileyen Anlaşılması Araştırması: ODTÜ Örneği" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay 2018-SOS-217 protokol numarası ile araştırma yapması onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımla bilgilerinizi sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Tülin GENÇÖZ

Başkan

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL

Üye

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR

Üye

Prof. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI (4.)

Üye

Doç. Dr. Ali Emre TURGUT

Üye

Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK

Üye

Doç. Dr. Üyesi Pınar KAYGAN

Üye

## B. SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT	SEX	DEPARTMENT	RESIDENCE BEFORE UNIVERSITY			HIGH SCHOOL TYPE	ADDITIONAL PRIVATE SUPPORT	EDUCATION MOTHER	EDUCATION FATHER	OCCUPATION MOTHER	OCCUPATION FATHER	AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	VISITING METU	CONTACTS FROM METU	ÖSYM RANK (INTERVAL)	CHOICE LIST
			METROPOLIS CITY CENTER (İSTANBUL - ANKARA - İZMİR)	METROPOLIS CITY CENTER (250 THOUSAND - 1 MILLION POPULATION)	MIDDLE OR SMALL SCALE CITY CENTER											
P1	MALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING			KARAMAN	SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	-	PRIMARY SCHOOL	PRIMARY SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	3000 TL	-	-	1000-1500	1 BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING 2 BILKENT UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING (100% SCHOLARSHIP) 3 METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING X METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING X+1 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING X+2 TOBB ETU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING X+3
P2	MALE	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION			BOLU	PRIVATE ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	8000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	FEMALE (56) MOTHER ECONOMICS FEMALE (46) MOTHER'S COUSIN ECONOMICS FEMALE (21) FRIEND SOCIOLOGY	15000-20000	1 HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-FACULTY OF LAW 2 METU-PSYCHOLOGY 3 METU-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION X METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION X+1 ANADOLU UNIVERSITY-FACULTY OF LAW X+2 METU-SOCIOLOGY X+3
P3	MALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING			KUTAHYA	SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TUTORING	PRIMARY SCHOOL	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	8000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS	FEMALE (20) FRIEND ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING MALE (20) FRIEND ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	2000-2500	1 METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING 2 METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING 3 METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING X METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING X+1 X+2 X+3
P4	MALE	CHEMICAL ENGINEERING		KOCAELI		SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	-	HIGH SCHOOL	SECONDARY SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	SMALL EMPLOYER	-	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	FEMALE (20) FRIEND CHEMICAL ENGINEERING	20000-25000	1 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING 2 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-CIVIL ENGINEERING 3 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X METU-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING X+1 METU-MATHEMATICS X+2 X+3
P5	MALE	CIVIL ENGINEERING			ORDU	SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE	8000 TL	-	MALE (20) FRIEND ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING MALE (55) RELATIVE CIVIL ENGINEERING	15000-20000	1 METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING 2 METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING 3 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ELECTRONICS AND COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING X METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING X+1 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-CONTROL AND AUTOMATION ENGINEERING X+2 YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X+3 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-CIVIL ENGINEERING
P6	FEMALE	INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING			ESKİSEHIR	ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	EMPLOYEE	NOT WORKING	4500 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	-	4500-5000	1 METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING 2 METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING 3 KOÇ UNIVERSITY-PHYSICS X METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING X+1 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ELECTRONICS AND COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING X+2 YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X+3 GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
P7	MALE	AEROSPACE ENGINEERING			BALIKESIR	ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	CIVIL SERVANT	8000 TL	10 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	-	5000-5500	1 SABANCI UNIVERSITY-ENGINEERING SCIENCES 2 METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING 3 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING X+1 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING X+2 HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X+3
P8	FEMALE	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS			ANTALYA	ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	PhD	PhD	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE	10700 TL	10 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	MALE (50) UNCLE THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS	8000-8500	1 BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 2 GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 3 X METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS X+1 METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION X+2 METU-SOCIOLOGY X+3 METU-PHILOSOPHY
P9	MALE	COMPUTER ENGINEERING			BURSA	PRIVATE SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TUTORING	PhD	PhD	RETIRED (WORKING)	RETIRED (WORKING)	14000 TL	SCHOOL TRIP AND COMPETITION	MALE (50+) UNCLE MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	1500-2000	1 KOÇ UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING (100% SCHOLARSHIP) 2 BILKENT UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING (100% SCHOLARSHIP) 3 METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X+1 KOÇ UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING (50% SCHOLARSHIP) X+2 İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING X+3 KOÇ UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING



(Continued)

P10	FEMALE	METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING		BURSA		PRIVATE ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TUTORING	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	10000 TL	10 <sup>th</sup> CLASS	FEMALE (32) COUSIN DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY	20000-25000	1	
																2	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
																3	METU-ARCHITECTURE
																X	METU-METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING
																X+1	METU-INDUSTRIAL DESIGN
																X+2	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-NUTRITION AND DIETETICS
																X+3	
P11	FEMALE	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION		BURSA		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	CIVIL SERVANT	9000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	FEMALE (20) FRIEND DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY	20000-25000	1	METU-PSYCHOLOGY
																2	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																3	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X+1	METU-SOCIOLOGY
																X+2	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-SCIENCE OF TRANSLATION
																X+3	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
P12	FEMALE	MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	İZMİR			SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	MEDIUM EMPLOYER	10000 TL	-	FEMALE (20) FRIEND FOOD ENGINEERING FEMALE (20) FRIEND ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICAL ENGINEERING	2000-2500	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																3	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																X	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																X+1	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
																X+2	METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING
																X+3	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
P13	MALE	BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	İZMİR			SOCIAL SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	PRIMARY SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	4500 TL	-	-	1500-2000	1	KOÇ UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (100% SCHOLARSHIP)
																2	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
																3	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ECONOMICS
																X	METU-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
																X+1	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-FACULTY OF LAW
																X+2	İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY-FACULTY OF LAW
																X+3	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-FACULTY OF LAW
P14	MALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	ANKARA			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	RETIRED (WORKING)	11000 TL - 12000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	MALE ( ) UNCLE PHYSICS	500-1000	1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																3	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																X	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																X+1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
																X+2	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
																X+3	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
P15	FEMALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	ANKARA			PRIVATE SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	MASTER'S DEGREE	PhD	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	-	HIGH SCHOOL - UNIVERSITY PRESENTATION	-	1500-2000	1	METU- ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	METU- COMPUTER ENGINEERING
																3	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																X	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																X+1	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																X+2	METU- ARCHITECTURE
																X+3	METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING
P16	MALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	ANKARA			PRIVATE ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	7000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	MALE (40) FATHER'S FRIEND METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING	2000-2500	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																3	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
																X	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																X+1	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																X+2	METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING
																X+3	
P17	FEMALE	INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING	ANKARA			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	HIGH SCHOOL	CIVIL SERVANT	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	6000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	MALE (35+) COUSIN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING FEMALE (35+) COUSIN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN MALE (35+) COUSIN ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	2500-3000	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
																2	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
																3	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
																X	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
																X+1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING (100% SCHOLARSHIP)
																X+2	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-MEDICINE
																X+3	GAZİ UNIVERSITY-MEDICINE
P18	MALE	AEROSPACE ENGINEERING	ANKARA			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	HIGH SCHOOL	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	6000 TL	-	MALE (22) FRIEND MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	3500-4000	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																3	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																X	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																X+1	9 EYLÜL UNIVERSITY-MEDICINE
																X+2	GAZİ UNIVERSITY-MEDICINE
																X+3	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-PHYSIOLOGY
P19	MALE	AEROSPACE ENGINEERING	ANKARA			PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL	-	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	13000 TL	IN THE PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY CHOICE	MALE (23) YOUTUBER MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	6000-6500	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
																2	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
																3	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																X	METU-AEROSPACE ENGINEERING
																X+1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING (100% SCHOLARSHIP)
																X+2	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING (50% SCHOLARSHIP)
																X+3	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING (50% SCHOLARSHIP)



(Continued)

P20	MALE	CIVIL ENGINEERING	ANKARA		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	RETIRED (WORKING)	3500 TL	12 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	-	9000-9500	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
															2	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															3	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
															X	METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING
															X+1	METU-METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING
															X+2	METU-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
X+3	METU-ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING															
P21	FEMALE	CIVIL ENGINEERING	ANKARA		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	-	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	6000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - SCHOOL TRIP	FEMALE (20) FRIEND	10000-15000	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
															2	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															3	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
															X	METU-CIVIL ENGINEERING
															X+1	METU-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															X+2	METU-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
X+3																
P22	FEMALE	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	ANKARA		PRIVATE ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	-	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	EMPLOYEE	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	8000 TL	YES	-	15000-20000	1	METU-DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
															2	BILKENT UNIVERSITY- PSYCHOLOGY (100% SCHOLARSHIP)
															3	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-PSYCHOLOGY
															X	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
															X+1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY- PSYCHOLOGY (50% SCHOLARSHIP)
															X+2	9 EYLÜL UNIVERSITY-PSYCHOLOGY
X+3	EGE UNIVERSITY-PSYCHOLOGY															
P23	FEMALE	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	ANKARA		PRIVATE BASIC HIGH SCHOOL	-	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	CIVIL SERVANT	CIVIL SERVANT	8000 TL - 9000 TL	GRADUATION CEREMONY	MALE (25) THE DEPARTMENT OF STATISTIC FEMALE (21) THE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY EDUCATION	15000-20000	1	METU-PSYCHOLOGY
															2	METU-ECONOMICS
															3	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
															X	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
															X+1	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-PSYCHOLOGY
															X+2	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
X+3	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS															
P24	FEMALE	ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	PRIMARY SCHOOL	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	CIVIL SERVANT	4800 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS & IN THE PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY CHOICE- SCHOOL TRIP & UNIVERSITY PRESENTATION DAYS	-	1-500	1	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
															2	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															3	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-MEDICINE
															X	METU-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
															X+1	
															X+2	
X+3																
P25	MALE	COMPUTER ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		PRIVATE ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	-	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	PhD	EMPLOYEE	NOT WORKING	2500 TL	-	MALE (21) COUSIN ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING	1000-1500	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															2	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															3	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															X	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															X+1	TOBB ETU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															X+2	
X+3																
P26	MALE	MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	SECONDARY SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	SMALL EMPLOYER	4000 TL	-	MALE (20) FRIEND COMPUTER ENGINEERING	3000-3500	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING
															2	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															3	METU-COMPUTER ENGINEERING
															X	METU-MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
															X+1	METU-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
															X+2	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY- COMPUTER ENGINEERING
X+3	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ELECTRONICS AND COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING															
P27	MALE	CHEMICAL ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	HIGH SCHOOL	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (WORKING)	8000 TL	-	FEMALE (25) COUSIN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY MALE (25) COUSIN OF FATHER THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	25000-30000	1	EGE UNIVERSITY-DENTISTRY
															2	MARMARA UNIVERSITY-DENTISTRY
															3	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-DENTISTRY
															X	METU- CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															X+1	HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING
															X+2	METU-FOOD ENGINEERING
X+3	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-FOOD ENGINEERING															
P28	FEMALE	FOOD ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	10000 TL	IN THE PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY CHOICE - UNIVERSITY PRESENTATION DAYS	-	30000-35000	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															2	METU-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															3	METU-FOOD ENGINEERING
															X	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															X+1	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-FOOD ENGINEERING
															X+2	
X+3																
P29	FEMALE	FOOD ENGINEERING	ISTANBUL		ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	SECONDARY SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	RETIRED (NOT WORKING)	8000 TL	12 <sup>th</sup> CLASS - UNIVERSITY PRESENTATION DAYS	MALE (21) FRIEND	45000-50000	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND GENETICS
															2	METU-MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND GENETICS
															3	METU-CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
															X	METU-FOOD ENGINEERING
															X+1	YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND GENETICS
															X+2	İSTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY- FOOD ENGINEERING
X+3	TÜRK ALMAN UNIVERSITY- MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND GENETICS															





(Continued)

P30	FEMALE	ECONOMICS	ISTANBUL			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	SECONDARY SCHOOL	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	10000 TL	-	-	2000-2500	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
																2	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-ECONOMY
																3	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																X	METU-ECONOMICS
																X+1	SABANCI UNIVERSITY-MANAGEMENT SCIENCES (100% SCHOLARSHIP)
																X+2	GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY-ECONOMICS
X+3	ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ECONOMY																
P31	MALE	ECONOMICS	ISTANBUL			SOCIAL SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	RETIRED (WORKING)	RETIRED (WORKING)	7000 TL	-	-	-	1	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-ECONOMICS
																2	
																3	
																X	METU-ECONOMICS
																X+1	ÖZYEĞİN UNIVERSITY-ECONOMICS
																X+2	
X+3	ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ECONOMICS																
P32	MALE	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	ISTANBUL			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	PRIMARY SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	NOT WORKING	SMALL COMMERCE	2000 TL	11 <sup>th</sup> CLASS & BEFORE PREFERENCE TERM - SCHOOL TRIP & UNIVERSITY PREFERENCE EXPO	MALE() TEACHER DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY	10000-15000	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																2	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																3	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																X+1	ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																X+2	MARMARA UNIVERSITY-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
X+3																	
P33	FEMALE	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	ISTANBUL			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER & PRIVATE TUTORING	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	PROFESSIONAL FOR OWN WORK	GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE	10000 TL	-	-	10000-15000	1	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																2	TÜRK ALMAN UNIVERSITY- FACULTY OF LAW
																3	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X	METU-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																X+1	METU-SOCIOLOGY
																X+2	
X+3																	
P34	MALE	POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	ISTANBUL			ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL	PRIVATE TEACHING CENTER	PRIMARY SCHOOL	SECONDARY SCHOOL	EMPLOYEE	EMPLOYEE	3500 TL - 4000 TL	-	-	10000-15000	1	BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
																2	GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCES
																3	BILKENT UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X	METU-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
																X+1	ISTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCES
																X+2	ANKARA UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
X+3	MARMARA UNIVERSITY-POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION																



### C. TÜRKÇE ÖZET/ TURKISH SUMMARY

Türkiye’de yükseköğretim kurumlarına geçiş, merkezi sınavlar yolu ile yapılmaktadır. Zorunlu eğitim sürecinin sonunda, lise diplomasına sahip olmak ön koşulu ile üniversiteye giriş sınavına başvuru yapılarak, mevcut üniversitelere ve bölümlere erişmek amaçlanır. Türkiye’de üniversiteye giriş için uygulanan merkezi sınavlar, güncel siyasi koşullara göre yapısal ve içeriksel pek çok değişikliğe uğramıştır. Üniversite sınavı, Türkiye örneğinde, bireylerin iş yaşamına geçiş kurgusunun da büyük ölçüde belirleyicisidir ve eğitim öğretim temelli gelecek planı yapmanın zorunlu biçiminin pratikteki uygulanma aracıdır. Yüksek öğrenimin örgütsel ve ekonomik ilişkiler ile açıklanması ve anlaşılmasına ek olarak, bu çalışma, bireylerin sosyal yapıları içselleştiren eyleyiciler olduğunu ve üniversite seçme ve yüksek öğrenime erişim sürecinin yapıların içselleştirilmesinin izlerini taşıdığını göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, çalışma kapsamında, bireylerin toplumda yüksek öğrenime bağlı kurumsallaşmış anlamlarla yüksek öğrenime erişim sürecini nasıl deneyimledikleri, toplumdaki sınıf yapısından nasıl etkilendikleri ve üniversiteye geçiş sisteminin sınıf yapısını yeniden üretmek noktasında pratikte nasıl işliyor olduğu tartışılacaktır.

Temel olarak, üniversite giriş sınavından alınan puan, Türkiye’de yüksek öğrenime erişimin aracıdır ve mevzunun tam ortasında konumlanır. Üniversitelerin sıralaması, üniversitelere yerleşen öğrencilerin sınav puanları ve sıralamalarına göre belirlenir. Bu anlamda bu çalışma, hangi öğrencilerin hangi üniversitelere yerleşmek istediklerini, sistemi nasıl anlamlandırdıklarını ve sistemin içinde nasıl stratejiler geliştirdiğini anlamak üzere tasarlanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez çalışması, Türkiye örneğinde yapılan üniversite giriş sınavını derinlemesine araştırarak, Türkiye’de yüksek öğrenime erişimin koşullarını anlamayı amaçlar.

Ortaöğretim diploması ve üniversiteye giriş sınavı puanı, Türkiye’de yüksek öğrenime erişim için zorunlu şartlardır. Sınav, lise düzeyinde son sınıf öğrencileri için tasarlanmıştır. Ortaokul diplomasını aldıktan sonra, öğrencilerin üniversite

eđitimine bařlamak için üniversite giriř sınavına girmeleri gerekir. Bařka bir deyiřle, Türkiye’de lise ve üniversite deneyimleri arasına yerleřtirilmiř merkezi bir sınav vardır.

Yüksek öğrenime geçiř bađlamında, ana kurumlardan biri, her yıl üniversiteye giriř sınavının yapısından ve içeriđinden sorumlu olan Öğrenci Ölçme, Seçme ve Yerleřtirme Merkezi’dir (ÖSYM). Sınav, lise programı kapsamında verilen ana derslerle ilgili çoktan seçmeli sınavlardan oluřmaktadır. Sınav ve puan sistemini etkileyen diđer bir konu, Türkiye’de eğitim sistemi içerisinde fen liseleri, sosyal bilimler liseleri, anadolu liseleri ve meslek liseleri gibi farklı lise türlerinin olmasıdır. Fen ve sosyal bilimler liseleri kendi özel müfredatlarına sahiptir ve öğrenciler bu müfredatlara en bařından itibaren kabul ederek girerler. Öğrencilerin ađırlıklı olarak hangi dersleri alacađı ve tercih edebileceđi meslekler de bu liselerin kendi müfredatlarına göre belirlenir. Öte yandan, anadolu liselerinin müfredat yapısına göre, öğrenciler sayısal, eřit ađırlık, sözel ve dil bölümleri arasından seçim yapmak durumundadırlar. Tüm öğrencilerin aynı müfredat dahilinde aynı dersleri aldıđı sürenin sonunda, lise eğitiminin devamında hangi bölümde olacaklarını seçmeleri gerekir. Bütün bu bölümlerin farklı müfredatları vardır; ve bu farklılařma, pratikte, seçebilecekleri meslekler açısından da bir tür sınırlama olarak işlev görür. Bařka bir deyiřle bu seçim aynı zamanda, yüksek öğrenime geçiřte yapılacak olan seçimin bir tür erken ařamasıdır, çünkü üniversite bölümleri lisedeki bölümler üzerinden, öğrencileri alacakları puan türlerini belirlerler ve öğrencilerin seçebilecekleri meslekler de lise bölümlerinin her biri için farklıdır. Bu noktada, lise müfredatını ve lise eğitimini düzenleyen kurum olan Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (MEB)’in Türkiye’deki her öğrenciye eřit fırsat sağlayabilmesi ve öğrencilerin sisteme dođru entegre olabilmesi için, yöntemleri veya teknikleri düzenleyen ve uygulayan kurum olması itibari ile hayati bir rol oynadıđı söylenebilir.

Sınavın geçmiř ve güncel yapıları, lise eğitiminin sınavla iliřkili olan bölümleri çalışma kapsamında sunulmuřtur. Türkiye’deki lise yapısının temelde sunulan řeklinde, Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı (YKS) adı verilen sınavın řu anki halinin, aynı hafta sonu iki günde gerçekteřen iki ařaması vardır. İlk gün, öğrenciler Temel

Yeterlilik Testi (TYT) olarak adlandırılan genel bir sınava girerler. Birinci aşamadaki sınavın içeriği, lisede seçilen bölümlerden bağımsız olarak her öğrenci için ortaktır. TYT'de Türkçe, Sosyal Bilimler, Temel Matematik ve Fen sınavları yer almaktadır. İkinci gün, dil bölümündeki öğrenciler dışındaki öğrenciler, Alan Yeterlik Testine (AYT)'ye dahil olan kendi bölümlerine göre yapılan testlerden sorumludur. Türk dili ve edebiyatı, sosyal bilimler-1, sosyal bilimler-2, matematik ve fen sınavları AYT'de yer alır. Tüm bölümlerin tüm sınavları aynı kitapçıkta yer alır, böylece öğrenciler herhangi bir sebepten dolayı belirli bir bölümden gelecek olan puanı almak isterlerse diğer sınavlardaki soruları da cevaplayabilirler. Aynı gün, dil bölümü öğrencileri Yabancı Dil Testine (YDT) girerler ve YDT Almanca, Arapça, Fransızca, İngilizce ve Rusça testlerini içerir. Sınavdan sonra, sürecin öğrenciler, ÖSYM ve üniversitelerden oluşan temel üç bileşeni, üniversite seçim dönemi için hazırlanmak için çalışırlar. Öğrenciler sınava girdikten sonra, ÖSYM, öğrencilerin puanlarını açıklar. Öğrencilerin puanlarının hesaplanmasında lise not ortalaması da dikkate alınır ve lise not ortalaması öğrencilerin puanlarını ve sıralamalarını bir dereceye kadar etkiler. Öğrenciler, ÖSYM tarafından hazırlanan, üniversite bölümlerine son yerleşen öğrencinin başarı sıralamasını ve puanını gösteren tercih kılavuzu üzerinden kendi puanlarına göre tercih edebilecekleri üniversiteler ve bölümlerle ilgili bir tercih listesi oluştururlar. Tercih listelerinin ÖSYM sistemine yüklenmesinin ardından, üniversite bölümlerini tercih eden öğrencilerin sıralamasına göre yerleştirmeler yapılır. Temel olarak ve özetle sınav ve sınav puanı üzerinden yapılan sıralamalar, Türkiye'de yüksek öğrenime erişimin tam ortasına yerleştirilmiş tek yöntemi olma durumundadır.

Bu bağlamda çalışmanın araştırma soruları şu şekilde belirlenmiştir: Türkiye'de merkezi sınavla yüksek öğrenime geçişin koşulları nelerdir? Eğitim sisteminin üniversite seçim sürecini şekillendiren özellikleri nelerdir? Öğrenciler ne gibi stratejiler kullanırlar ve sınava hazırlanmak için sistemin onlara yüklediği roller nelerdir? Öğrenciler sınav puanlarını üniversite tercihi yapabilmekle nasıl ilişkilendirirler? Bu gerçekten bir seçim midir? Çalışma kapsamında, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayanan nitel yöntemlerden yararlanarak, ODTÜ Temel

İngilizce Bölümünden 34 öğrenci ile görüşülmüştür. Görüşme içeriği, ne tür bir üniversite seçim süreci yaşadıkları, seçimlerini etkileyen faktörler ve nihai kararlarını nasıl aldıkları sorularına dayanmaktadır. Bunu yaparken, Türkiye yükseköğretim sisteminde sınava giren öğrencilerin üniversite tercihlerinin yapısını ve kararın alınışının doğasını anlamak hedeflenmiştir. Çalışma aynı zamanda, öğrencilerin Türkiye eğitim sistemi içinde yüksek öğrenimi nereye konumlandıklarını, nasıl stratejiler geliştirdiklerini, üniversite tercihi yaparkenki koşullarını ve üniversiteye geçişin ilk dönemlerini anlamaya ve peşpeşe gelen bu süreçlerin arasındaki ilişkileri/kopuklukları anlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Bu soruların cevaplanabilmesi amacı ile, üniversite tercihlerini henüz yapmış bireylerden oluşan bir örneklem oluşturulmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturan öğrenciler, Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı (YKS)'yi 2018 yılında almış ve bu sınavın sonucuna göre tercihlerini yapmış öğrencilerdir. Bu örneklemin özelliği 'başarılı' öğrencilerden oluşmuş olmasıdır. Sistem bir puan alma ve sıralanma mekanizması üzerine kurulu olduğu için, daha yüksek puanlı öğrencilerin üniversite tercihi yaparken daha fazla seçeneği olduğu varsayımı üzerinden, göreceli olarak başarılı bir grup öğrenciye ulaşmak hedeflenmiştir. Çalışma, üniversite seçim süreci ile birlikte üniversiteye giriş sınavının, Türkiye yüksek öğretim sisteminin kendisini yeniden üretmenin bir yolu olduğunu öne sürerken, öğrencilerin sınava dair deneyimlerini dikkate almaktadır. Bu amaçla, çalışma, daha fazla seçeneğe sahip olmalarına rağmen başarılı öğrencilerin seçimlerinin de formüle edildiğini ve belli kriterler etrafında sınırlandırıldığını göstermek için, sınavda göreceli olarak yüksek puan alan öğrencilere odaklanır.

Çalışma, yüksek öğrenime geçişin geçmişteki ve güncel biçimlerini, erişimin hangi yapılar ve kurumlar üzerinden kurgulandığını ve bu yapısal değişkenleri öğrencilerin bireysel düzeyde nasıl deneyimlediklerini anlamaya çalışır. Bu yaklaşım, yapı ve özneleri ilişkisel bir yaklaşımla ele almak için önemlidir. Çalışma, üniversite sayıları, öğrencilerin başarı puanları, yerleştirilen öğrencilerin sıralamaları, puanları ve notlamalarına dayanan ve sistemin çıktıklarına işaret eden bir dizi nicel analizin ötesine geçerek, Türkiye'de yüksek öğrenim alanına dahil olan bireylerin, belirli

sonuçlara ve çıktılara erişirken ne deneyimlediklerini de tartışmaya dahil etmeyi amaçlar. Bu sayılar dünyası, öğrencilerin elde ettikleri ve edemedikleri sonuçlar üzerinden oluşturulduğu için, öğrencilerin belirlenen sonuçlara nasıl kanalize edildiğini gizlemeye hizmet eder. Bu anlamda çalışma, üniversite tercih sürecini, üniversite sınavına hazırlanma evresinden itibaren ele alarak, sınavı nihai bir sonuç olarak tanımlamanın ötesine geçerek, sınav kurgusunun üniversite tercihi yapmakla nasıl ilişkilendirildiğini anlamaya çalışacaktır. Bu anlamda görüşmeler öğrencilerin sınava çalışma süreçlerini, sınav deneyimlerini, sınav sonrası tercih süreçlerini ve üniversitede geçirdikleri yaklaşık bir yıllık süreyi kapsayacak şekilde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu anlamda araştırma, katılımcılarının ODTÜ'de ilk yıllarında yüksek öğrenim alanını, henüz yaptıkları tercihe dönük kişisel değerlendirmeleri ışığında nasıl deneyimlendiklerine odaklanmış, veriler liseden üniversiteye geçiş deneyimlerini anlamak için toplanmış ve analiz edilmiştir.

Çalışmanın araştırma sorularının cevaplanmasında ve verilerinin değerlendirilmesinde kullanılan teorik çerçevede, hem eğitimin sosyolojik olarak anlamlandırılmasını içeren farklı sosyolojik yaklaşımlardan, hem bireyin belirli bir alandaki pratiklerinin yapı ile ilişkilerini açıklayan teorik yaklaşımlardan yola çıkılmıştır. Bu anlamda çalışma, eğitim teorileri ve yaklaşımları, birey kavramı ve bireyin pratikleri hakkında bir tartışma oluşturmayı mümkün kılmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu arka plan doğrultusunda, eğitim alanı içinde karar alma ve özellikle tercih yapma kavramını sosyolojik olarak anlayarak, yüksek öğrenime erişim ve eğitim kararları alma konularında tartışma yürütülmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, sosyal sınıf, yapı-özne ve bireyselleşme tartışmaları merceklerinden bakılarak eğitim tercihlerini tartışmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu tartışmanın ışığında, bu çalışmanın temel amaçlarından biri, Türkiye'de yüksek öğrenime erişimin sosyolojik olarak anlamlandırılmasıdır. Bu bağlamda, Pierre Bourdieu'nun teorik çerçevesine göre karar verme, kişinin belirli bir alandaki sermaye kaynaklarından kaynaklanan deneyim ve bilgisinin bir ürünü olarak ortaya çıkan pratikler olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır (Bourdieu, 1977). Bir seçim hakkındaki motivasyonlar ve eğilimler, bireyin inanç ve anlayışlarının oluşturduğu bir yapı içinde ortaya

çıkılmaktadır, böylece habitus kavramı bu eğilimleri içerecek şekilde tanıtılmaktadır. Bu anlamda, habitus, bir durumda veya alanda hareket etme eğilimlerini çerçevesi.

Habitusu dair bir açıklama olarak Reay (2004), habitusun Bourdieu'nun metodolojisinin anahtarı olduğunu, özne-yapı ve makro-mikro ikileminin ötesine geçme çabası olarak ele alındığını, böylece habitusun uygulamayı sermaye ve alanla ilişkilendirmek için bir kavramsal araç olarak anlaşılması gerektiğini savunur. Mevcut olan kaynakların farklı seviyelerinin farklı alanlar için farklı değerler anlamına geldiği ile ilgili olarak, Bourdieu ekonomik, kültürel, sosyal ve sembolik sermaye olmak üzere dört tür sermaye ilişkisini tanıtır (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu bu dört tip sermayeyi kendi içlerinde ve ayrıca tanımlasa da, sermaye konusundaki anlayışı dönüştürülebilirlik fikrine dayanır. Bu anlamda, Bourdieu'ya göre bu dört tip sermaye dönüştürülebilirlikleri ve bir diğerine karşı değiş tokuş yapma potansiyelleri ile dikkate alınmalıdırlar.

Tercih yapmanın sosyolojik olarak anlamlandırılması yolu ile, çalışmanın araştırma sorusu ile ilgili olarak, Türkiye örneğinde öğrencilerin yüksek öğrenime geçişte karar verme ve tercih yapma deneyimlerini kavramsallaştırmak amaçlanmaktadır. Yüksek öğrenime geçişin üniversite tercihi söylemi etrafında şekillenmesinin ne anlama geldiği, bu süreci tercih söylemi üzerinden anlamamanın neyi örtüyor olduğu çalışma kapsamında anlaşılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Sınavın, sınava hazırlık sürecinin sonuna, üniversite tercihi yapmanın öncesine konumlanması, görüşmelerde ve çalışmanın bulgularının sunulmasında da korunmuştur. Bu anlamda çalışmanın bulguları, sınava hazırlık süreci, sınavın kendisi, tercih süreci ve tercih sonrası üniversite deneyiminin tercihin sorgulanmasına dönük ilk bir yıllık süreci şeklinde sunulmuştur. Bulgular, öncelikle bu aşamaların özelliklerinin özetlenmesi ve bu aşamalar üzerinden yüksek öğrenim yapısının üniversite seçimlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğinin tartışılması şeklinde sunulmuştur.

Katılımcıların deneyimlerine göre, YKS'ye hazırlanmak ve sınav konusunda yetkin hissetmek, sürecin başından itibaren sürekli olarak farklı türlerde, Bourdieu'nun tanımladığı anlamda sermaye gerektirir. Sınava hazırlık sürecinin en genel ve



katılımcılar için genel anlamda benzeşen karakteristiği özel eğitim kuruluşlarından sınava hazırlığa dair bir destek almaktır. Üniversite sınavı, öğrenciler ve aileler için Türkiye örneğinde dersaneler, özel dersler ve özel okullara katılım ile desteklenmeye çalışılan bir süreç olması itibariyle ekonomik sermayenin giderek daha önemli hale geldiği bir deneyime dönüşmektedir. Özel kuruluşlara ulaşma ihtiyacı neredeyse “gerçek” bir aday olmanın ve bir seçim yapabilmenin bir kuralı gibidir. YKS hazırlığı için kurumsal yapının devlet okullarından özel mekanizmalara kaydığı göz önüne alındığında, öğrenciler ve aileler daha fazla kaynak ayırmaları gereken bir sistemin içinde sınavı deneyimlerler. Sınava kadar olan süreci etkili yönetebilmek önemlidir bu nedenle aileler sınav hazırlığı için en verimli olabilecek mekanizmalara erişmeye çalışırlar çünkü sınavdan alınacak puan diğer aşamalara doğru ilerlemenin yoludur. Etkili bir hazırlık süreci geçirilemezse, diğer aşamalardaki güçlü adaylardan biri olunamayacağı gerçekliği bağlamında, tüm süreç, sermayeleri bir araya getirme, birbirine dönüştürme ve sınav puanı şeklinde somutlaştırma süreci olarak anlaşılabilir. Hazırlık aşamasında, öğrenciler ve aileler sermayelerini, eğitim alanında puanlara karşılık gelen bir değere dönüştürmek için kullanmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Puan derinlemesine analiz edildiğinde, puanın, sosyo ekonomik arkaplanın, okul türünün ve özel destek mekanizmalarının somutlaştığı gerçeklik olduğu ortaya çıkacaktır. Yani, aile, okul ve özel mekanizmalar YKS hazırlığı aşamasında işletilerek puan olarak somutlaştırılırlar. Hazırlık sürecinde yer alan yapısal faktörler, diğer süreçler boyunca şekillenmeye devam edecek olan tercihlere ilk şeklini veren faktörlerdir. Öğrenciler süreçte işletebildikleri kaynaklarına ve sermayelerine göre farklılaşan hazırlık süreçleri geçirirler. Katılımcılara, yüksek öğrenime geçiş aracı olarak sınavı nasıl değerlendirdikleri sorulduğunda, cevapların genel özelliğinin, sınavı bir tür zorunluluk olarak görmeleri olduğu görülmüştür. Sınav sistemindeki eksikliklerin farkında olsalar da, ülke nüfusu, kaliteli eğitime erişmenin iş dünyasına geçişteki önemi gibi sebeplerle temelde sınavın ya da bir tür eleme sisteminin bir ihtiyaç olduğuna inandıkları görülmüştür. Bunun önemli nedenlerinden biri de, sınav sisteminin kendisini bireylerin üstünde konumlandırarak, bir gelecek planı yapma biçimi olarak dayatmasıdır.

Üniversite seçim süreci, öğrencilerin puanlarını etkili bir şekilde kullanmaya çalıştıkları, yani puanlarını bir üniversite bölümüne dönüştürmeye çalıştıkları bir başka aşamadır. Hazırlık süreci ve sınav deneyimi, tercih yapma aşamasında daha fazla avantaja sahip olmak isteyen öğrencilerin tercih süreci aşamasını konforlu geçirebilmek için yatırım yaptıkları aşamalardır. Bu anlamda, sürecin geneli, üniversite tercihi yapmaktan çok üniversite sınavından, istenilen şekilde üniversite tercihi yapabilecek bir puan almaya odaklanarak geçmektedir. Yüksek öğrenime geçişin kendi içinde sınav yoluyla bölündüğü aşamalar birbirine bağlı deneyimlendiği için, tercih yapmak onlar için ancak yüksek bir puan alabilirlerse mümkün olacaktır. Sermayesel anlamda, tercih sürecinde baskın olarak işletilen sermaye tipinin sosyal sermaye olduğu da bulgular arasındadır. Sınava hazırlanma sürecinde baskın olarak yer alan özel eğitim kurumları, katılımcıların çoğu tarafından tercih döneminde etkili olabilecek bir kaynak gibi görülmezler. Tercih sürecinde daha çok, tercih listesine eklenmesi ihtimali olan üniversiteler ve bölümlerdeki öğrenciler, ailenin üniversitelere ve üniversitelerdeki kişilere yönelik sosyal ağı bilgi edinmek için kullanılır. Öğrencilerin ODTÜ'ye geldikten sonraki deneyimleri, üniversite tercihini yüksek öğrenime geçiş sürecinin içinde yer alan bir deneyim olarak konumlandırmak için çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir. Bunu yaparak, üniversite tercihini sonuçları ile beraber anlamlandırmak ve üniversite tercihi yapmayı, tamamlanmış bir sürecin çıktısı olmaktan ziyade, devam eden bir sürecin içindeki önemli deneyimlerden biri olarak kavramsallaştırabilmek amaçlanmıştır. Bu tür bir anlayış, üniversite seçiminin kendi içinde biten bir sürecin ürünü olarak ele alınmaması gerektiğini vurgulamamızı sağlama potansiyeli itibari ile önemlidir. Katılımcılar ODTÜ'de Temel İngilizce Bölümü'nde hazırlık sınıfı öğrencileri olduklarından, bölümlerindeki derslere henüz katılmamışlardır, bu nedenle amaç yalnızca üniversiteye ve tercihlerine dair ilk izlenimlerini ve bunlara dair bir yıllık deneyimlerini çalışmaya dahil etmektir. Sistemin genel kurgusuna ve sınavın varlık sebebine dair bütün mesele üniversiteye geçiş olsa da, bu süreçte en az düşünülen ve üzerine en az odaklanılabilen kavramlar üniversiteler ve bölümlerdir. Bunun sebebi, sürecin diğer basamaklarının, öğrenciler için başarılı bir şekilde tamamlamaları

gereken baskın kısımlar şeklinde pratik edilmesi ve üniversite tercihinin sınav sonrasına ötelenmesidir.

Sınav, akademik bilginin bir göstergesi olarak sunulmaktadır. Bu gösterge sayesinde, üniversiteye geçiş süreci tercihlere dayalı üniversite seçimi olarak adlandırılarak ve pratik edilerek deneyimlenmektedir. Ancak, akademik bilginin kanıtlanması, birçok kaynağın birlikte kullanılmasını, bu kaynaklara sahip olmayı ve bunları kullanabilmeyi gerektirmektedir. Bütün bu kurguda sermayelerini eğitim alanı için kıymetli yeni sermayelere dönüştürebilmek belli bir sosyal gruba karşılık gelmektedir. Bu bağlamda, merkezi sınavın ve tercih söylemiyle üstü örtülen üniversite yerleştirmelerinin mevcut sınıf yapısını ve eşitsizlikleri devam ettirdiğini söylemek mümkündür.

Bu bağlamda araştırma, üniversite sınav sonucunun hem nasıl elde edildiğini hem de bir üniversite seçimine nasıl dönüştürüldüğünü öğrencilerin sınav ve yüksek öğrenime geçiş deneyimlerine dayanarak anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Sınav sonucunu üniversite seçimi kavramı ile ilişkilendirmeden önce, çalışma sınav sistemi üzerinden tanımlanan yüksek öğrenime geçişin tüm aşamalarını ayrıntılı olarak incelemeye çalışmış ve bu aşamaların öğrencilerin ve ailelerin sermayelerini etkin bir şekilde kullanmaları ile tamamlanabilen aşamalardan oluştuğu sonucuna varmıştır. Bu durum dikkate alındığında, üniversite seçiminin yalnızca sınav puanı üzerinden elde edilen olanaklar ve sınırlamalarla değil, aynı zamanda ilk aşamada puan almak için gereken sermayenin olanakları ve sınırlamaları ile de ilişkili olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu nedenle, üniversiteye geçiş süreci, üniversite tercihi yapma sürecinde belli seçenekleri ve alternatifleri oluşturabilecek ve değerlendirebilecek ölçüde başarılı olmaya çalışmakla meşgul olunması sebebiyle neyin seçileceği ile ilgili düşünmenin ve plan yapmanın sınavın tam da kendisi tarafından engellendiği ve ertelendiği bir optimizasyon sürecidir. Ayrıca, çalışma, sınava özgü stratejileri ve algıları olan ve sistemin kendisi tarafından üniversiteye geçiş kurgusunu sınava odaklanarak deneyimlemek zorunda kalan bir öğrenci tipini ortaya koymaya çalışmıştır. Bu anlamda, puanlarına ve sıralamalarına üzerinden ifade edilen 'başarılı' öğrenci tanımı, sosyo ekonomik arkaplan ve mevcut kaynaklar sayesinde sistemdeki

değişimlere uyum sağlayabilen öğrenciler şeklinde yeni bir başarı tanımına doğru genişletilmiştir.

Öğrencilerin, üniversite seçimini sınav deneyiminden sonra odaklanmak üzere ertelemeye meyilli oldukları çalışma kapsamında ortaya konmuştur. Bunun sebebi, üniversite tercihinin dönüştürülmesi mümkün olabilecek ya da olamayacak olan aracın sınav puanı olmasıdır. İlk aşamada, öğrenciler ve aileleri mevcut tüm kaynakları sınavın sonucunun göstergesi olan bir niceliğe dönüştürmek zorundalardır. Sınav sonuçları belli olduktan sonra ise, ÖSYM tarafından tercih dönemi olarak belirlenen süre içinde, yine ÖSYM tarafından yayınlanan tercih kılavuzu temel alınarak öğrenciler kendi puanlarını, listedeki üniversite ve bölüm puanları ile karşılaştırarak bir tercih listesi aralığı belirlemiş olurlar. Bu anlamda, öğrencilerin yüksek öğrenime geçiş deneyimi hem sınavda başarılı olarak tercih yapabilme durumuna gelebiliyor olmanın gerektirdiği sermayeye sahip olup olmamak hem de sınav ve tercih sisteminin Türkiye bağlamındaki yapısal özellikleri tarafından şekillendirilir ve sınırlandırılır. Bu anlamda, bu sürecin, baskın olarak kullanılan tercih kavramı ile tanımlanamayacak bir deneyim olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.

Gelecek planı yapabilme işlevi; işsizlik, güvencesizlik gibi potansiyel sonuçları olabilecek bir yüksek öğrenim deneyiminin ilk kurgusunda sürecin katılımcıları olan öğrenciler ne deneyimliyor, sınav nasıl kurgulanıyor, sınav bireylerin hayatında nereye konumlanıyor, bireyler stratejilerini nasıl belirliyor, ‘tercih’lerini nasıl yapıyorlar sorguları üzerinden yüksek öğrenime geçiş mevzusunun Türkiye bağlamında resmini çizebilmek bu çalışmanın genel amacıdır. Bunu anlamak için sisteme ve sistemin gerektirdiklerine entegre olabilen bireylerin bunu hangi koşullarda yaptığını anlamak önemlidir. Sistemin belirlediği rasyonel başarı tanımı üzerinden ‘başarılı’ olduğu listelenen üniversitelerde kimlerin olduğunu anlaması, ‘başarısızlık’ ya da ‘başaramayanlar’ mevzularını da anlamayı, sistemin kimleri dahil ettiğini ve kimleri dışarıda bıraktığını tartışabilmeyi sağlayacaktır.

Liseden üniversiteye geçişte sınavın diğer deneyimler üzerindeki baskınlığı etrafında şekillenen yüksek öğrenime ilk geçiş deneyimi, sonrasındaki süreçte üniversite öğrencisi olma deneyimi içinde hangi anlamlara gelmektedir ve süreçler birbirinden ayrılabilir mi sorularının da cevaplanacağı yeni bir çalışma da katkı sağlayıcı olacaktır.

Çalışma kapsamında, hazırlık süreci için ekonomik sermayeye sahip olmanın sınav sistemiyle en uyumlu stratejiyi uygulamış olmaktan ileri gelen bir göreceli olarak güvende hissetme hali yarattığı ve bunu yapabilmenin de belli bir sosyal gruba işaret ettiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Benzer bir şekilde, mevcut sermayelerin eğitim alanı için değerlere dönüştürülebilme gücüne sahip olmanın, sınav için motive olmak olarak deneyimlendiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca, sistemin yeni değişikliklerine ve gereksinimlerine uyum sağlayabilecek ölçüde esnek olmanın, sistemin kendisi tarafından “başarı” olarak tanımlandığı; ve mevcut kaynakları yeniden düzenleyerek üniversiteler ve bölümlere dair karar verebilmeyi içeren optimizasyon sürecini etkin kılan sosyal sermayeye sahip olmanın “üniversite tercihi” olarak adlandırıldığı bir geçiş deneyimidir. Bu anlamda, üniversite “tercihi”, neoliberal anlayışın izlerini taşıyan bir kavram olarak düşünülebilir. Bu nedenle, eşitsizliği yeniden üreten sınav yapısının sonucunda deneyimlenen üniversitelere ve bölümlere dair karar almayı gerektiren süreci tercih olarak adlandırmanın yüksek öğretime geçiş deneyiminde avantajları ve dezavantajları sınıf pozisyonlarına göre bölüştüren yapıya odaklanmamızı engellediği ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Özet olarak, bu araştırma, merkezi sınavların varlığını, Türkiye bağlamında yüksek öğrenime geçişte uygulanan sınav özelinde araştırarak, var olan eşitsizliklerin eğitim yoluyla sürdürülmesinin meşru yollarından biri olarak ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, yüksek öğrenime geçişte önemli bir zaman dilimine işaret eden üniversite tercihi yapma deneyimini sınav üzerinden gerçekleştiren öğrencilerin deneyimleri üzerinden anlamaya çalışarak, üniversiteye giriş sınavının öğrencilerin üniversite tercih süreçlerine katkıda bulunmayı vaat edemeyeceğini tartışarak sınavların eşitsizlik bağlamında sorgulanmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamıştır. Çalışma aynı zamanda, üniversite giriş sınavını, kendisini öğrencilerin üniversite tercihi yapma

deneyiminden daha baskın konumlandırılan, sürecin üniversite tercihi yapabilmekle bağımlı zayıflatan ve öğrencilerin üniversite seçimine odaklanmasının önünde zihinsel, fiziksel ve süreçsel bir engel olarak işleyen ve son olarak üniversite tercihi deneyimini genel olarak sınav sonucuna indirgeyen bir mekanizma olarak yeniden tanımlamaya çalışmaktadır.

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