



Distance Education in Corona Days or Remembering Ivan Illich

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Keywords

Ivan Illich, Corona pandemic, Distance education.

Abstract

This study aims to enable the pre-service teachers studying at an education faculty to evaluate the education they received during the pandemic within the scope of Illich's views and to question what Illich asserts about the deschooling society.

The study group consists of pre-service teachers studying in the first grade of Balıkesir University Necatibey Education Faculty and taking the Educational Sociology course in the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. One of the questions in the final exam of the Educational Sociology course was used as the data collection tool. This qualitative study was conducted on the opinions of 54 pre-service teachers and the obtained data were analyzed using the content analysis technique.

The majority of the pre-service teachers participating in the study advocate schooling societies instead of deschooling societies. The preservice teachers favoring the presence of schools consider schools not only as places of learning but also as structures that create value, while the pre-service teachers who support Ivan Illich's views evaluate schools in terms of pressure.

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1. Introduction

Ivan Illich's criticism against educational institutions in general and schools in particular, which have a central position within social institutions, makes him one of the important authors of critical pedagogy (Terzi, 2020). According to Illich, the school monopolizes the distribution of opportunities in the society instead of equalizing the distribution. The thing that Illich put forward as an alternative to schools is the total elimination.

Illich proposes the "learning web" approach that brings together the interests of individuals who share the same knowledge as a substitute to schools which reproduce social inequality and legitimate hierarchy (Terzi, 2020).

The main research problem of this study is whether the pre-service teachers, continuing their education through distance education in Corona days, attribute the meaning similar to Illich to distance education -it can also be called learning

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webs- and whether they adopt Illich's view of "*let's abolish schools*" even if they are not in the school.

2. Corona Pandemic and Distance Education

It is possible to say that the pandemic forcing the majority of the world's population to stay at their homes in the early days affected our lives in one way or another. It has not only physically restricted our lives but also had psychological, economical -especially work habits-, social, international, global, and local consequences. It is possible to say that, except for the use of nuclear power, no event with such a large global impact can be encountered.

With the spread of the pandemic, the health sector has become one of the most mentioned sectors worldwide. That is, through the concepts such as discussions on treatment, herd immunity, medicine, and vaccination, the health sector has become the most critical sector of the fight against the pandemic. Following the health sector, the education sector has also had to undergo a radical restructuring due to the pandemic.

According to the data of the United Nations, a learning population of 770 million people worldwide has been affected by the closure of schools and universities. Within the framework of whether it works or not, distance education has been put into use as the easiest solution to ensure the sustainability of education with the effect of the virus spreading all over the world (Yamamoto, 2020). However, the criticism stating that education will be further distanced and existing inequalities will deepen with distance education still continues. Moreover, the criticism regarding the problems such as the lack of equipment (computer, tablet) and difficulty in accessing internet has been especially justified. Compulsory practices and internships in courses according to school levels appear as other problematic areas in distance education.

Within this scope, distance education is defined as an education with mass media where there is little or no face-to-face interaction between teacher and students (Terzi, 2010).

3. Ivan Illich and the Deschooling Society

In his controversial book "Deschooling Society", Illich argues that real learning occurs outside of school, not at school, which is contrary to the general expectation and acceptance. He claims that poor families do not pay much attention to the information their children obtain at school and they only focus on the money that their children will earn through the diplomas to be received as a result of education. Additionally, he asserts that middle-class families leave their children under the supervision of the teacher to protect their children from the harmful effects of the street, and that teachers do not make an effective effort to increase learning in poor families (Illich, 2013).

Illich also argues that school leads to a monopoly in the distribution of opportunities rather than giving people equal chances, and since educators insist on providing education with a certificate, no progress can be made in education or justice through schooling (Illich, 2013).

According to Illich, the current school education system does not make sense as there is no connection with the qualifications that have practical value in the school. The most important obstacle to the orientation towards the formation of society to realize a real education is our dreams being fully schooled (Illich, 2013).

The presence of compulsory schools divides every society into two; some time periods, processes, practices and professions are academic or pedagogical while others are not. Thus, the power of the school to divide the reality of society into two has no boundaries (Illich, 2013).

Instead of closing schools, Illich proposes to establish a "*learning web*" where individuals can easily access information. First of all, it should be noted that Illich do not conclude the question of "*where are we heading now*" with sufficient clarity.

With the Corona pandemic, distance education has increased, but is it possible to say yes to the question of whether students and teachers like online lessons? In addition, is this state of distance education on a global scale the one that Illich is talking about in his deschooling society? It is also obvious that without an educational activity based on individual learning and social equality, either face-to-face or online education means adding a new accessory to the consumer society as Illich mentions.

This study aims to enable the pre-service teachers studying at an education faculty to evaluate the education they receive during the pandemic within the scope of Illich's views and to question what Illich suggests about the deschooling society.

4. Method

4.1. Research Model

The phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in this study whose aim is to enable the pre-service teachers studying at an education faculty to evaluate the education they receive during the pandemic in line with Illich's views and to question what Illich asserts about the deschooling society. Phenomenological design is a method of examining and defining the presence of events by seeking an answer to the question of "what is truth?" (Baş & Akturan, 2017). Patton (2014) states that in phenomenological studies people focus on how they perceive a phenomenon, how they describe it, how they feel about it, how they judge, how they remember, and how they interpret a phenomenon. In this study, the opinions and feelings of the preservice teachers who were directly affected by this phenomenon were tried to be described in depth.

4.2. Sample

The criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in the selection of the teacher candidates participating in the study. Criterion sampling is concerned with studying situations that meet a predetermined set of criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this study, taking the Educational Sociology course was adopted as the criterion. The study group of the study consisted of 4 groups of pre-service teachers studying in the first grade of Necatibey Education Faculty and taking the Educational Sociology course in the spring semester of the

2019-2020 academic year. There were 223 pre-service teachers in these four groups. 143 of participant were female while 80 were male.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data used in this study were gathered from the question of *"Please discuss the effects of staying away from school and participating in distance education during the corona pandemic on both your psychology and your learning within the framework of Ivan Illich's criticism of the school"*, which was asked to pre-service teachers studying in the first grade in the final exam of the Education Sociology course in the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data that were obtained as a result of the opinions of the preservice teachers were analyzed with the content analysis method, one of the qualitative research designs. In the study, firstly, the answers given by 223 teacher candidates who took the exam were classified. The answers of the preservice teachers who did not understand the question, those who did not know about Illich, and those who wrote only Illich's criticism as an answer were excluded. 54 answers were reserved for evaluation. In data analysis, first of all, the answers given to the question in the interview form were read and coded by the researchers separately, and the categories and main themes were determined (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By making comparisons regarding the codes and categories, repetitive and non-overlapping codes were removed for research purposes, and new codes were added to the necessary parts. It is thought that obtaining deeply focused data in this way contributes to the reliability of the research. To increase the reliability and validity of the research findings, frequent quotations were made from the selection of the study group, the development of the data collection tool, and the opinions of the preservice teachers. The quotations from pre-service teachers in the study were named as pre-service teacher 16 studying in the Social Studies Department = PT16soc. It is also tried to increase the credibility of this study with «researcher triangulation» and the inter-coder agreement was determined as .91.

5. Findings

The opinions of the pre-service teachers advocating the presence of schools and Ivan Illich's views are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Opinions of the preservice teachers advocating the presence of schools and Ivan Illich's views

| Opinions | <i>f</i> | % |
|---|----------|----|
| Pre-service teachers advocating the presence of schools | 44 | 81 |
| Pre-service teachers advocating Ivan Illich's views | 10 | 19 |

According to Table 1, among the pre-service teachers participating in the study, 44 (81%) supported the presence of schools, and 10 (19%) favored the views of Ivan Illich.

In the following stage of the study, the categories and themes reached according to the opinions of the preservice teachers advocating the presence of the schools and Ivan Illich's views are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Categories and Themes Regarding the Opinions of Preservice Teachers Advocating the Presence of Schools and Ivan Illich's Views

| Themes | Categories | f |
|---|-------------------------|-----|
| Influence (Opinions of Preservice Teachers Advocating the Presence of Schools) | Value | 50 |
| | Individual | 30 |
| | Reality / Functionality | 14 |
| | Society | 8 |
| | Total | 102 |
| Solution (Opinions of Preservice Teachers Advocating Ivan Illich's Views) | Pressure | 11 |
| | Opportunity | 10 |
| | Class | 7 |
| | Contribution | 6 |
| | Total | 33 |

When the data obtained from the answers of the participants were analyzed, the opinions of the preservice teachers advocating the presence of the schools were themed as "influence" whereas the opinions of the preservice teachers supporting the views of Ivan Illich were themed as "solution". According to the results, it was concluded that the preservice teachers supported the presence of schools more than deschooling societies.

The opinions of the preservice teachers defending the presence of schools in the study were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Opinions of Preservice Teachers Advocating the Presence of Schools

| Theme | Category | Code | f |
|--|--|---|------------|
| Influence | Value | A unique institution | 16 |
| | | The disciplinary role of schools | 12 |
| | | The interaction enhancing role of schools | 12 |
| | | Transformational schools | 4 |
| | | The school's role in keeping active | 2 |
| | | The school's role in keeping plans | 1 |
| | | The school's role in reinforcing learning | 1 |
| | | The role of transferring knowledge | 1 |
| | | The regulatory role of schools | 1 |
| | | Influence | Individual |
| Socialization | 10 | | |
| Communication | 2 | | |
| Creating a desire to learn | 2 | | |
| Enabling physical mobility in schools | 1 | | |
| Contributing to individual development | 1 | | |
| Reality / Functionality | Distance education creates inefficiency | | 10 |
| | Distance education is a utopian idea | | 1 |
| | Developmental differences between regions | | 1 |
| | Inability to adapt to distance education | | 1 |
| | Loss in the learning process in distance education | | 1 |
| Society | Being socially necessary | | 4 |
| | Solution to socio-economic inequality | | 3 |
| | School is an institution without a substitute | | 1 |

The definitions of pre-service teachers advocating the presence of schools regarding the theme of influence were organized under the categories of "value", "individual", "reality / functionality" and "society". When their responses to the value category were examined, the preservice teachers considered the presence of these schools important because they are mostly unique institutions and schools have disciplinary and interactive roles. When the answers to the category of individuals were analyzed, the preservice teachers considered the presence of these schools important because of their affective contribution and their effects on the socialization process. Additionally, when their answers to the reality / functionality category were examined, the preservice teachers considered the presence of these schools important, mostly because distance education creates inefficiency. When the responses to the category of society were analyzed, the preservice teachers found the presence of these schools important because they are mostly socially necessary and bring solutions to socio-economic inequality in the society.

The opinions of the preservice teachers regarding the findings are given below.

PT28esoc:... *In all this, I think Ivan Illich is wrong. In my opinion, the school is the only place to study. (Value - A unique institution).*

PT42ksci: ... *Although Illich advocates a deschooling society and education, I think the school environment disciplines students in education. (Value - The school's disciplinary role).*

PT1k:... *Although most of the learning is done by myself, it doesn't happen spontaneously because I have to listen, see, study, and read. In this respect, I consider the school necessary. (Value - The role of the school to increase interaction).*

PT16ksoc: *I do not think that abolishing schools will be beneficial, I think that what needs to be done is to transform schools according to the needs of the 21st century. (Value - Transformational schools).*

PTk23Sci:... *I am studying because I feel compulsory in the distance education process, and this affects my psychology negatively. (Individual- Affective contribution).*

PT49ksoc:... *Not in terms of education, but it is very sad not to be able to see my friends that I see all the time, so the school provided a very nice social environment. (Individual- Socialization).*

PTk33soc:... *The efficiency of online courses during the pandemic process was far below the efficiency of the school. (Reality / Functionality - Inefficiency of distance education).*

PT44ksoc: *We also understood during the pandemic that a society without schools is not a society. (Society - Socially necessary).*

PTk9soc:... *On the 19th page of Ivan Illich's book "Deschooling Society", he said "... As long as poorer children remain dependent on school for development and education, they will generally fall behind the others...". That this sentence disappeared during the pandemic process, a system that everyone can access on their televisions was created. (Society - Solution to socio-economic inequality).*

In the next stage of the study, the opinions of the preservice teachers who supported the views of Ivan Illich were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Opinions of the Preservice Teachers Advocating Ivan Illich's Views

| Theme | Category | Code | f |
|---------------------------|--------------|--|---|
| Solution | Pressure | The restrictive role of the school | 6 |
| | | Inadequate physical conditions of the school | 1 |
| | | Solution to absenteeism | 1 |
| | | The dependence-enhancing role of the school | 1 |
| | | The authoritarian role of the school | 1 |
| | | Schools' promoting social inequality | 1 |
| | Opportunity | Access to information at any time | 5 |
| | | Diversity in ways to access information | 2 |
| | | Getting more information | 2 |
| | | Offer self-learning | 1 |
| | Class | Solution to inequality | 4 |
| | | Deschooling society | 2 |
| | | The enslavement characteristic of the school | 1 |
| | Contribution | Anxiety-free education opportunity | 4 |
| | | Feeling valuable | 1 |
| Liberating the individual | | 1 | |

The definitions of the preservice teachers who supported the views of Ivan Illich regarding the solution theme were arranged under the categories of "pressure", "opportunity", "class" and "contribution". When their responses to the category of pressure are examined, the preservice teachers consider deschooling communities as a solution since schools have a restrictive role in distance education. As their answers to the opportunity category are investigated, the preservice teachers see deschooling communities as a solution since the most information is available at any time in the distance education process. When their answers to the class category are analyzed, the preservice teachers accept deschooling societies as a solution since the distance education process is the solution to the most inequality. As their responses to the category of contribution are examined, the preservice teachers consider deschooling societies as a solution since the distance education process offers the most anxiety-free education opportunities.

The opinions of the preservice teachers regarding the findings are given below.

PT30kSci:... *Honestly, I have never felt the lack of school because I agree with Ivan Illich and find him extremely right. I think the school restricts learning. (Pressure - The restrictive role of the school).*

PT2e:... *The distance education is more comfortable for me. I can turn on my computer and read curriculum topics whenever I want. I don't need to be in a certain place in a certain time. I can rest whenever I want. (Opportunity- Availability of information at any time).*

PTSoc:... *We can see that education is going out of school through the internet and distance education, which we can define as communication web. (Opportunity - Diversity in ways to access information).*

PTe51soc:... *We see that Ivan Illich is really right in the distance education process during the pandemic as schools are the institutions that produce inequality. (Class - Solution to Inequality).*

PT27Sci:... *This distance education is in line with Ivan Illich's thoughts about school. Because Ivan Illich argued that compulsory education inevitably polarizes society and divides it into certain classes according to education types and grades. (Class - Classless society).*

PT11esoc: *"Illich said that learning webs should be established instead of schools". I fully agree with Illich's views which promote dechooling society. The absence of a school keeps me comfortable in the current situation. (Contribution - Anxiety-free education).*

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This qualitative study investigates whether the preservice teachers continuing their education remotely during the Corona pandemic consider the presence of schools as necessary based on Ivan Illich views. According to results, it is determined that the preservice teachers are mostly in favor of the continuation of the schools contrary to Illich. The preservice teachers see the school not only as a place of learning, but as a place that creates value, as a social structure, as a means of self-expression that contributes to socialization and affective development. In addition, the teacher candidates participating in the research consider schools as a place for the solution of social inequality, a socially necessary place and an institution with no substitution, which is contrary to Illich.

It can be said that the preservice teachers who accept the school as an indispensable institution do not support Illich's learning webs approach. Similar results were revealed in a qualitative study conducted by Varlıkgörücü and Şahin (2018) on their graduate students. The majority of the graduate students participating in the aforementioned study were not in favor of the disappearance of the school and stated that social chaos might occur with the disappearance of the school institution. Similar to our findings, most of the participants in the aforementioned research claimed that the school is the only opportunity available for emancipation and self-realization of lower class. In their study analyzing the school through metaphors, Nalçacı and Bektaş (2012) recorded the metaphors that liken the school to family and home as the highest metaphors. In addition, in the study of Aslan (2014) on preservice pre-school teachers, one of the items with the lowest participation was "*School is not an indispensable institution*".

The findings expressed in the value category and the transformational schools code are important and need to be emphasized. Some preservice teachers participating in the study suggest that schools should be transformed according to the needs of the 21st century instead of abolishing them. This perspective requires mentioning about the progressive education philosophy.

As a matter of fact, the progressive education philosophy considers the school not as a place to prepare for life, but as life itself (Terzi, 2010). Accordingly, it can be argued that the preservice teachers have the understanding that if the school is life, there is no need abolishing.

The preservice teachers adopting Illich's views through distance education i.e. arguing that the school should be abolished highlight the codes of access to information at any time, solution to inequality, the restrictive role of the school, and the possibility of anxiety-free education. These titles that are emphasized by the preservice teachers are not the result of an ontological and epistemological analysis, but they are their point of view on education during distance education.

The common codes of the preservice teachers favoring the schools and the preservice teachers favoring Illich contradict at the "inequality" title. The preservice teachers, who adopt Illich's views, promote the argument that schools are a source of social inequality and create new classes, while the preservice teachers who favor schools share the idea that social inequality can only be eliminated through schools.

It is possible to say that both groups are somewhat right. That is to say, Pierre Bourdeau state that the inequalities imposed on educational institutions are reproduced and legitimized from one generation to the next, and schools also cause dysfunction for many groups (İnal, 2009). On the other hand, with a functionalist perspective, it is claimed that talented and intelligent individuals are selected through school and rise to the top layers of society (Terzi, 2020).

This study is the first of its kind in the literature in Turkey. Therefore, there exist limited studies to compare the results of the study. This can also be argued as a main limitation of the study. Further studies with more student groups in different fields of higher education are needed.

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