



# Teachers Learning Classroom Sociology and Social Justice in Primary Education

## An Applied Research Project

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Article abstract

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## Teachers Learning Classroom Sociology and Social Justice in Primary Education: An Applied Research Project

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### Abstract

Classroom sociology is a powerful discipline that helps students develop a sense of identity, achieve success, and experience well-being while building a strong community in the classroom. Teachers who can see beneath the surface and are aware of classroom sociology create a better and more just learning environment for learners, especially in primary education. This study focuses on improving teachers' classroom sociology and social justice awareness. Researchers designed a four-week in-service classroom sociology program for primary school teachers. The program aimed to improve the teachers' awareness and behaviours in terms of classroom sociology and social justice. This applied research was conducted using an in-service program intervention with 12 primary school teacher participants. Data was collected from in-class observations, teacher ethnography notes, participant evaluations, and classroom observations. Initially, participants were more focused on academic performance and teaching routines and largely ignored the social context of the classroom. At the end of the study, teacher participants' awareness of classroom sociology and social justice increased, and both their attitudes towards their students and their teaching methods changed in a positive manner.

## Introduction

Classrooms are distinct spaces designed for learning and success. However, they are not only mechanical learning laboratories but also social settings that include personal relationships, feelings, attitudes, roles, and interactions; in short, they are social environments (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1976). Teachers and students form a unique, cohesive social group. Face-to-face interactions between classroom members create the social context of the classroom (Hirschy & Wilson, 2002), which is the subject of classroom sociology. Classroom sociology refers to the social dimension of the classroom. It is a broad term encompassing student and teacher roles, relationships, and identities and statuses and the power relations, norms, routines, rituals, language, etc., that exist in the classroom. The social dynamics of a classroom that make learning easy or difficult and enjoyable or boring can also be captured by the framework of classroom sociology. Essentially, all social activities and interactions that occur within the social context of the classroom can be analyzed under the umbrella of *classroom sociology*.

Research suggests that most classroom time is spent engaging in social activities (Rosenshine, 2015), and students find such activities more effective for learning than instructional techniques (Sargeant, 2014). They find social elements, such as peer relations and interactions and home/family relations and support, effective for their success.

Classroom sociology is an intertwined, multidimensional pedagogic and sociologic phenomenon. Its effects are broad, ranging from establishing power relations (Brooks, 2016) and influencing resistant behaviour (McFarland, 2001) to influencing academic success (Blanchard & Muller, 2015), student learning (Hirschy & Wilson, 2002), psychology (Ahnert et al., 2012), attitude (Walker & Graham, 2021), and identity (Donaghue, 2020). Both students and teachers are active in classroom sociology; however, research shows that teachers play a more pivotal role in constructing and shaping it (Freire, 2018; Sirotnik, 1982). Especially in primary school, teachers seem to be leaders of the class (Sarı, 2004). They decide on the learning materials (İlhan & Oruç 2016; Kablan et al., 2013) and activities (Miller & Kastens, 2018) that shape learning experiences (Hong et al., 2014). Moreover, the classroom climate in primary school has long-lasting effects as it helps construct student identity (Donaghue, 2020). However, based on the existing data, teacher awareness of classroom sociology seems rather low (Dupriez, 2006). Thus, the researchers of this study developed an in-service program on classroom sociology. The in-service program included the topics of ethnography and observation, classroom sociology and its effects on students, social justice, and the role of the teacher in classrooms. This program aims to improve teachers' awareness of classroom sociology and social justice.

## Review of the Literature

### *The foundation of classroom sociology: Primary school*

Classroom sociology enables teachers or educators to understand the hidden dynamics, real emotions, and social agendas in the classroom. Mehan (1979) refers to classrooms as “black boxes” in reference to their mysterious nature. Although there are detailed records of school enrollment numbers, literacy and pass/fail rates, and metrics on schools, teachers, students, etc., the ongoing experiences of students and teachers are not fully understood. However, sociology seems more important to student success and well-being than numbers (Evans et al., 2009). Most school memories, psychological attachments, and relations are built through classroom sociology (Barzykowski et al., 2019).

The basic foundations of classroom sociology are established in primary school because this is typically the first institution at which children receive formal education. Although the number of children who attend preschool is increasing, primary school is more systematic, institutionalized, and independent of parental control. In Turkey especially, preschool students are still regarded and academically identified as “children” rather than “students.” The Yükseköğretim Kurulu thesis database displays 29 results for “preschool students” and 139 results for “preschool children” (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2018). Furthermore, the effects of primary school classroom sociology are longer-lasting than those of preschool sociology according to the literature (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009; Qualter et al., 2007; Zanobini & Usai, 2002).

Classrooms are social settings where students interact, build relationships, experience emotions, and create attachments. The social dimension of a classroom impacts students’ educational attainment (Buchanan et al., 2021). When classroom sociology fosters a sense of care and value (Ferguson-Patrick, 2020), positive peer relations (Black-Hawkins et al., 2021), and cooperation (Niemi et al., 2015), students experience belonging. In such classrooms, bullying activities are also reported to be low (Roland & Galloway, 2002).

However, not all students feel comfortable and recognized in the classroom. Willis (1981) shows how working-class children have been considered “outsiders” in classroom sociology. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2015), this segregation is caused by the difference between the habitus of the working class and the school. They suggest that the school and the selection system may underlie this segregation. Similarly, Chambliss (1973) presents teachers and school administrators as differentiating actors in the social context in that they have differing expectations, attitudes, and reactions towards working-class versus middle-class students. Moreover, Hargreaves and Hargreaves’s (1998) social identity theory suggests that the anti-school behaviours of students with low academic success are supported by other students. Today, social inclusiveness seems to be possible with teacher effort and awareness (Dimitrellou & Hurry, 2019; Scharenberg et al., 2019). Particularly at the primary school level, it seems possible to generate a classroom sociology that is comfortable for all students. Thus, this study aimed to improve primary school teachers’ awareness of classroom sociology and improve social justice for all students.

### ***Teachers as classroom leaders in primary schools***

Students and teachers constitute a group in classrooms that are formed around one common goal. Their togetherness resembles Durkheim’s organic solidarity, where reciprocal relationships are built with common sense in classrooms (Halasz & Kaufman, 2008). This resemblance implies the presence of a leader, which is institutionally pre-determined to be a “teacher.” The teacher’s role in classrooms is to teach, instruct, guide, and evaluate students. They are responsible for the learning environments, activities, experiences, and assessments therein.

Teachers are the ones who select and lead the learning activities (Mehan, 1979). They have a significant effect on learning styles, methods, techniques, and materials, which are often cited as determinants of academic success (Hong, et al., 2014) and students’ attitudes towards lessons (İlhan & Oruç, 2019) and teachers (Kablan et al., 2013). Teachers are also mentioned as the mediators of inequalities (Skourdoumbis, 2014, p. 123). Although there are some studies suggesting that a teacher’s effect on their students is insignificant (Bitler et al., 2021), others reveal that teachers’ practices and approaches have long-term effects when they teach the first and the second grades (Bressoux & Bianco, 2004; Vanwynsberghe et al., 2019).

In addition to their influence on academic success, teachers have been found to be effective in promoting engagement through student–teacher and student–student interaction (Nguyen et al.,

2018). This is especially the case in lower grades (Hoang et al., 2018). Particularly in primary school, a sense of school belonging is mainly fostered by the classroom teacher rather than other factors, such as school type (Knoell, 2012). In this setting, the teachers construct the main patterns of classroom sociology through the forms of interaction and dialogues that they have with students (Mameli et al., 2015) and their level of stress (Sönmez & Kolaşınlı, 2021). Some studies recommend introducing teacher supervision into schools given that teachers have a significant effect on classroom climate (Jensen & Solheim, 2020). The way teachers speak and their discourse also influences peer relations.

Moreover, teachers have been shown to mediate inequalities, especially in groups with low socioeconomic statuses (Torres, 2018). The way that real-life inequalities are reflected in classrooms is mostly determined by classroom teachers. They are referred to as “agents of social justice” in classrooms because they have the power to change the values attributed to certain criteria (Pantić & Florian, 2015). Cultivating cultural and social awareness in teachers seems to make a promising contribution to social justice in classrooms (Cuervo, 2020).

### ***Constructing students’ identities in the classroom***

During maturation, family attitudes, school conditions, culture, and other factors influence children’s identities. People ask themselves at every stage of life, “Who am I?” and answer according to their culture and environment (Atak, 2011). Students spend a minimum of five hours per day in the classroom with their peers and teachers, so the classroom becomes one of their fundamental social environments. Schools are not only buildings where children are educated but are also responsible for shaping children’s minds and conveying ideological perspectives. From early childhood to the adolescent period, youth acquire many beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours because of their education in schools. These acquisitions are important to the development of their identities. As Lewin (1936) said, behaviours and attitudes are shaped by environment, interaction, and personal differences. Sezer’s (2018) study shows that if the teacher creates a positive classroom sociology, students will develop positive traits, such as self-confidence and fairness. If these traits are developed in primary school, they continue to be formative for identity throughout life.

Classroom sociology provides a semi-structured pattern for the social base and influences identity development as a result. The tone of personal relations, interaction patterns, and the teacher–student relationship helps children develop a “student identity” that works in the social context of the classroom. Students develop their identities in a more positive way when they are socially recognized as individuals through pedagogic activities (Lee et al., 2011). Various factors affect the construction of student identities, such as the student’s placement in the classroom (Charlton et al., 2014) and the learning activities that they undertake (Jeffrey, 2008). The sociology of the classroom, or the “regulative discourse” of the classroom to use Bernstein’s words, is influential to students’ identity development (Bernstein, 2000). When students feel the comprehensiveness of classroom sociology, they develop a sound student identity in harmony with the class (Kamberelis, 2013).

## Research Design

### Methods

This study was designed using a qualitative applied research approach. Applied research offers solutions to existing real-world problems (Patton, 2014). In this study, inequality issues in education and teachers' indifference regarding the social context of classrooms were the problems to be addressed. The researchers designed a four-week in-service program as a solution to these problems and tested its effectiveness.

### Participants

The in-service training in this study was designed for primary school teachers. Thus, the participants were 12 primary school teachers who enrolled in a graduate primary teacher education program in Turkey. As a part of one course, the researchers implemented this in-service education. There were 23 students registered for the course. However, 11 of them did not participate in the lessons regularly and thus were excluded from the study. Four of the participants were male teachers, and eight were female. They were all active teachers in state schools in different cities in Turkey: İstanbul, İzmir, Tekirdağ, and Kocaeli. They were purposively sampled for the study—as is recommended for qualitative research (Yin, 2011)—given that they were graduate students. It was hypothesized that they would put time and effort into understanding classroom sociology. The demographic characteristics of the participants are illustrated in Table 1. The participants' names have been anonymized. The names in the table are nicknames that have been generated randomly.

Table 1: Participants

Nickname	Gender	City of work	Years of experience	Grade taught
Neriman	Female	İstanbul	6–10	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Selen	Female	İstanbul	11–15	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Ilkim	Female	İstanbul/Şişli	11–15	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Melis	Female	Tekirdağ	6–10	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
Eda	Female	İstanbul	16 and above	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade
Mehmet	Male	İzmir	11–15	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade
Aylin	Female	İstanbul	16 and above	4 <sup>th</sup> grade
Ahmet	Male	İstanbul	16 and above	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
Ela	Female	İstanbul	11–15	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade
Selim	Male	İstanbul	16 and above	1 <sup>st</sup> grade
Veli	Male	Kocaeli	6–10	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Sevda	Female	İstanbul	16 and above	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade

### Implementation process

The researchers developed a four-week in-service program on classroom sociology. The program was implemented online with 23 primary school teachers; however, only 12 contributed to the study. The in-service program included information on key concepts of classroom sociology and its construction, the formation of student identities, and the role teachers play in this sociology. The program outline is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Outline of in-service program

	Objectives	Content	Activities
1 <sup>st</sup> lesson	Lists the general characteristics of ethnography.	Atkinson, P. (2014). <i>For ethnography</i> . Sage.	Teacher narratives on their classrooms (what life is like in their classroom, what activities they do, etc.). Students write their observations regarding the YouTube video. Students write ethnography notes for their own classrooms.
	Expresses the difference between observation and interpretation.	Student video on YouTube.	
	Provides reports on classroom sociology using the method of ethnography.	Previous observation notes. Atkinson, P. (2014). <i>For ethnography</i> . Sage.	Students analyse observation notes and interpret them.
2 <sup>nd</sup> lesson	Defines classroom sociology.		
	Lists the effects of classroom sociology on students' learning, wellbeing, and success.	Diehl, D., & McFarland, D. A. (2012). Classroom ordering and the situational imperatives of routine and ritual. <i>Sociology of Education</i> , 85(4), 326–349.	Feeling cards: Teachers ask students to dye cards according to their feelings at the end of each day.  Chair activity: Students create a circle, and one student sits in the middle. Every student makes a positive comment about the student in the middle.
	Realizes their leading role as a teacher in the classroom in terms of academic, social, and evaluative factors.	Hirschy, A. S., & Wilson, M. E. (2002). The sociology of the classroom and its influence on student learning. <i>Peabody Journal of Education</i> , 77(3), 85–100.	
	Organizes their behaviours to increase social justice among students.		
3 <sup>rd</sup> lesson	Leads their students to develop identities in a just way.	Coşkuner, K. (2019). <i>Çocuklar ve çiçek mezarlıkları</i> . Ceve Kitap.	Students read Coşkuner (2019) and analyse it.
	Reflects on their behaviours in teaching and social relations in terms of social justice.	Berger Peter, L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). <i>The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge</i> . Penguin Books.	
	Constructs teaching content, social behaviour, and attitude according to classroom sociology.	Goffman, E. (1978). <i>The presentation of self in everyday life</i> (vol. 21). Harmondsworth.	
4 <sup>th</sup> lesson	Evaluates classroom sociology in-service program.		Students evaluate the program with the form prepared by the researchers.

For four weeks, graduate students and researchers met every Wednesday for an online class delivered via Zoom. The researchers conducted the class collaboratively, had personal interactions with the students, listened to students' classroom stories, and made observations in the classrooms of teachers who elected to receive such feedback. Graduate students were eager to have discussions during the lessons, and they shared stories and instances from their classrooms. However, they

were reluctant to write ethnography notes, probably because of their workload. Only three participants chose to do so. Thus, the study is mostly focused on participant evaluations of the program, observation notes, and in-class discussions.

### ***Data collection***

The data from this study were drawn from in-class observations, teacher ethnography notes, participant evaluations, and classroom observations. The results of the in-class discussions were collected from the Zoom platform and researcher notes. All the online lessons were recorded, and the researchers made note of the significant points.

The second data type, teacher ethnography notes, was requested from the teachers on the first and last week of the program. However, teachers were reluctant to write these notes. As scientific studies rely on voluntariness, the researchers did not put any pressure on participants to provide data. At the end of the first lesson, when ethnography was explained, participants were asked to write their classroom observations; however, only three wrote and submitted these. They seemed reluctant to do extra work after class; thus, in-class discussions were increased to understand how the participants constructed their classroom sociologies. These extra questions were intended to compensate for the lack of ethnography notes.

All meetings and chat notes were recorded. At the beginning of each lesson, participants were asked to reflect on their classrooms. Especially after the second week (during which they were supposed to implement the chair and colour activities), the researchers asked whether they did the classroom activities with their students, how they did them, and what effects they observed. In the last lesson, students were asked to answer evaluation questions on the Google Form application. The questions involved the subjects covered in the program: ethnography and observation, the definition of classroom sociology, the effects of classroom sociology, teaching methods, student identities, behaviour problems, the role of teachers, and social justice among students. The form also asked the participants to critique the program.

Furthermore, researchers offered to observe the participants in their classrooms and provide guidance for how they could improve their classroom sociology. Five participants volunteered, but only one was selected due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts with the class. Researchers observed Neriman's classes and provided feedback for improvement and key points to consider while teaching. This was where the classroom observation data was collected.

### ***Analysis***

The data from the study were analyzed using the content analysis method, which provides a systematic and objective method for understanding qualitative data (Lune & Berg, 2017). Specifically, directed content analysis was used to analyze the data based on existing theories of social justice and classroom sociology. To ensure completeness of the data, all types (class discussions, researchers' observation notes, teachers' ethnography notes, Google Form data, and interview transcriptions) were analyzed together by each researcher. First, each researcher read the data repeatedly and developed codes. Three lists of codes were compared in order to develop the following final code list: academic performance, success, correct answer, true, efficiency, outcome, on-task, self-esteem, well-educated, unsuccessful, disruptive, wrong, low-income, classroom observation, awareness, students, empathy, understand, equality, social justice, understand students. Then, the researchers moved to the next step: deriving categories. Again, the categories developed by each researcher were compared with each other. After highlighting the



patterns, relationships, similarities, and contrasts, the individual analysis and comparison process was repeated for themes.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Teaching content, academic performance, success: The only motives of education?***

The four-week in-service program for primary school teachers started with an ethnography activity. Ethnography is a research method that is intended to garner understanding of a culture without manipulating or changing its existing nature, and it has been found to be beneficial for teachers. Frank (1999) suggests that the “eyes of ethnography” enable teachers to gain an “insider look,” understand students, recognize differences, and comprehend underlying features of classroom life. Also, teachers expand their perspective and understanding of classroom sociology by using ethnography (Andrew & Teitelbaum, 1983; Riemer & Blasi, 2008; Valério et al., 2021). Thus, the researchers explained the basic principles of ethnography, ethnographic observation, and their use in education. For the following weeks, the participants were required to do ethnographic observation in their classes and take notes. Although the ethnographic observation component was intended to help teachers become aware of the things that they did not notice before, participants still reported mostly on academic performance. Their ethnography notes, in-class discussions, and program evaluations revealed that academic performance was the dominant priority for them. This over-focus on achievement resulted in superficial teaching strategies and student definitions.

The teacher role is primary in classroom relationships (Clinkscale, 1979; Newberry, 2013). However, the teachers in this study reported on teaching tasks, teaching routines, questions, answers, etc. in their ethnography notes rather than on relationships in the classroom. Their focus was mostly on academic performance. Melis described an hour in the classroom as follows: “We went out to the garden. Students lined up. We did warm up exercises. İlkim could do them, Derin and Esila could also. Kuzey couldn’t. He found them difficult. We went on to other moves.” She was focused on who was able to do the exercises and who wasn’t, and she did not report any flexibility in terms of how lower performances were evaluated. Likewise, the participants reported on their teaching activities and questions, how they started teaching and what they asked students to do, student answers, and the corrective feedback they provided. Selen reported on how the school day began: “The lesson started at 9 a.m. The whole school was going to read a book for ‘The Shade of Plane Tree Project.’ I called upon the two dutiful students, Damla and Efe, to deliver the books.” She was focused on her teaching duties and did not report upon how she greeted students, how students seemed, or how they interacted. This method of communication has been shown to increase anxiety in students (Rancer et al., 2013). Likewise, İlkim reported on how they ended the day: “Students got in the line. I told Talha to throw away the garbage. I told Aylin to straighten up the desk. I told Eymen to pick up the paper from the ground. I separated the fighting students. I told the students to move. We got out of the class.” She was focused on classroom duties and ended the day with tasks and warnings. Both participants were so focused on the expected duties that they neglected to greet or say goodbye to the students. Greetings are considered to generate a sense of togetherness (Oluyemi & Olumide, 2021) and display the features of social relationships (Pillet-Shore, 2012). From these examples, it is reasonable to assert that most participants had developed task/success-oriented relationships with their students.

Bernstein (2000) states that strong classification in the classroom creates a strict hierarchy and insulates teaching content and the statuses of the student and the teacher. In those classes, the emphasis is mostly on teaching content and completing tasks. In this study, teachers used strong

classification in their classes. They were task/success oriented when determining their teaching strategies. Participant teachers neglected the social context of their classrooms while deciding how to teach. They explained that classroom sociology effected their students' feelings, moods, sense of belonging, and academic success. In informal and in-class dialogues, they also often stressed the significance of positive classroom sociology. However, when they were asked how they determined teaching strategies, only one stated that classroom sociology formed the basis for his determination. Most participants explained that they decide based on the subject itself, students' background knowledge, or the level of the students and did not mention classroom sociology. Although attending to these factors is necessary for pedagogy, it seems that teaching concerns rarely went beyond them to consider social relationships and classroom sociology. As Freire (2018) explains, teachers seem to be reciting rather than establishing dialogue. Although the participant teachers' concerns seemed legitimate on the surface, the way they established the social setting in their classrooms seems detrimental to students' social well-being, which has more of an effect on students' learning processes than teaching styles (Strayhorn, 1989). If a positive classroom sociology can be established, and students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, students can easily achieve high academic success (Evans et al., 2009). Therefore, the teacher should pay more attention to classroom management than to subject matter or other academic issues.

The teachers' concerns for learning or success were also apparent in their student definitions. They defined active and passive students based on their academic performances. They defined successful, on-task, previously well-educated children as "active students" while labelling "those with lower academic achievement" as "passive ones," to use Neriman's words. Students labelled as "passive" were "behind academically from the very beginning. Although I did not emphasize it, they were aware. They have experienced failure and are shy because of it" (Melis).

As determined from the teacher statements, students are labelled as active or passive based on their academic performances in their current class as well as previous ones. When asked to explain why these students perform as they do, however, the teachers referred to family effects and the personal traits of the students. To them, active students had good social and communication skills and high self-esteem. Aylin stated, "The reason some students are active is because of high self-esteem, family care, and interest, and as a result of growing up in a happy family," and Ahmet said, "the reasons for active participation are democracy, communication, and self-esteem in families." The passive students, on the contrary, were referred to as "the ones who have problems in their families, experience academic incapacibilities, or have a handicap. They don't participate because of family, social, academic, or physical reasons" (Ahmet). The participant teachers seemed aware of family and social effects on academic performance. Both active and passive students had family and social reasons that explained their level of academic achievement.

Although teachers seemed aware of the effect of social factors on academic performance, their ethnography notes reveal they did not consider them effectively. Selen wrote the following in her notes: "10 minutes before the end of the lesson, Hira came up. I asked her why she was late, and she told me her sibling fell from the bed and they took her to the hospital. She told me the same reason once before. I said, 'Okay,' as a response and gave her a book too. Everybody continued reading." Although the teacher was aware that something was wrong, she did not react to the student with full consideration. To the teacher, it was time for teaching, and the reason the student was late seemed unimportant. Moreover, she did not report any further conversations with the student afterward. Awareness of the social and emotional well-being of students contributes to students' academic performances (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Poverty-aware (Steinberg & Krumer-Nevo, 2020), language-aware (Pomphrey & Burley, 2009), and environment-aware (Özden, 2008)

education influences students' well-being in educational settings and helps them learn. Teaching that focuses only on academic performance leaves some students disadvantaged, disengaged, or neglected.

### ***The classroom as a social environment: Change is possible***

Ethnography as an observation method is useful for creating a more inclusive social atmosphere (Espinoza & Torrego-Egido, 2022). Research suggests that teachers become more aware of their social role in the classroom with ethnographic observation (Riemer & Blasi, 2008; Tavakoli & Sadeghi, 2011). Thus, the in-service program aimed to introduce participant teachers to ethnography as an observation method. Teachers mentioned the “need to observe more attentively” (Selim) in classrooms. However, classroom observation is difficult and questionable, even in countries where teacher education involves observation skills (Birkeland et al., 2020). Teachers highlight the necessity of having prerequisite knowledge to make successful classroom observations (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). In Turkey, teacher training programs do not necessarily involve classes in observation or ethnography. Thus, the in-service program provided participant teachers with prerequisite knowledge about classroom observations and their effects. Teachers indicated that they saw the effect of observation through their experiences (e.g., Neriman).

During the in-service program, disadvantages, such as coming from a low-income family, having separated parents, migrating from other areas, and experiencing negative peer relations, were emphasized. Awareness of classroom sociology was one of the keys to solving these problems (Carter & Osler, 2000; Fernie & Cubeddu, 2016; Frisby et al., 2020). Socially disadvantaged students are generally not actively included in classroom activities (Golann & Jones, 2021; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991) are known to middle-class students because they are socially entitled to school education (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). However, when the classroom is managed consciously, social cohesion is possible for disadvantaged students (Golann & Darling-Aduana, 2020). Thus, researchers have stressed the importance of comprehensive, positive classroom sociology for disadvantaged children (Yan et al., 2011). After the program, the participant teachers reported an increase in their awareness of students, student emotions, classroom sociology, and equality. Especially after implementing the recommended activities, teachers remarked that they began to know their students better, resulting in a more positive classroom climate. Selen “learned what students think at the end of the lesson—what they think about me and the lesson.” Aylin “noticed students getting to know each other better. Also, they presented each other better [in the partner presentation activity].” Through the training program, classroom relationships came to light, and teachers' awareness of them was enhanced. Through the chair activity especially, teacher–student and student–student relationships were revealed. Teachers saw how well they knew their students and how well their students knew each other. They also witnessed the effect of good rapport in relationships. İlkim stated, “I tried to understand my students. The more compliments I used, the fewer problems I had. I could have them do what I wanted more easily.” Their reflections were aligned with the research, which states that positive relationships are built with positive words (Mazer & Hunt, 2008) and more importantly through individuals knowing one another. As Freire (2018) states, teachers need to generate dialogue with their students instead of preaching. Only through dialogue can they create relationships and make students feel valued. Participant teachers realized the power of getting to know students. Ahmet stated, “With classroom sociology, you get to know every student in the best way and give them equal opportunities.” As Rubie-Davies (2009)

mentioned, teacher–student relationships, teacher expectations regarding students’ behaviour and success, and classroom atmosphere have the power to change everything, especially academic success.

Social justice among students was a key theme for the in-service program, and the ethnography notes of the teachers revealed its exigency. It has been reported that social justice amongst students is an attainable goal in education (Nieuwenhuis, 2010) that can be achieved by taking economic, social, and cultural differences into account (Bull, 2008). In their ethnography reports, the teachers mentioned only a couple of students, particularly those who attended lessons with correct answers and those who had remarkable disruptive behaviour. They were focused on keeping the students on the track they initiated or controlling them in other ways. Researcher feedback suggested paying attention to the students that were disregarded and organizing group activities that would get all students involved in the classroom agenda. This would enable a reduction of disruptive behaviours and the need for teacher control (Silva & Neves, 2007). Collaborative learning has been effective in integrating students (Riese et al., 2012; Van Ryzin et al., 2020) and redefining the teacher role (Pinho & Andrade, 2015).

In this study, one of the classrooms experienced a paradigm shift in its social dimension. When the researchers observed Classroom 3-C, which was located in an average socio-cultural district, it was apparent that students were distant from each other and were constantly vying for teacher approval. Neriman revealed that they were always informing on each other and that there was a lack of classroom coherence. She was the third teacher in the class, and it had been only three months since she began teaching there. The cognitive skills of the students were good. They were attending the lessons; however, some students never spoke. Most students had parents who were separated and family issues. They had also experienced online education during the COVID-19 quarantine, which caused learning losses according to the classroom teacher. Two students in the classroom belonged to a traditional tribe, and they spoke only to one another and not to the other students. Moreover, one of them, Zehra, told one of the researchers that she would not continue her education when she finished the obligatory eight years. She was not speaking to her classmates or the teacher during the lesson. During recess time, she only spoke to her relative. She seemed shy and calm.

Teachers have a considerable impact on the social dynamics of a classroom (Farmer et al., 2011). They shape classroom sociology by determining how to manage social dynamics (Norwalk et al., 2021). With this in mind, the participant teacher, the researchers, and the school counsellor had a long conversation after the observation session. The researchers explained the necessity of classroom coherence and positive relationships both among students and between students and the teacher. They also recommended that activities designed to have psychological effects be used for warm-ups and that the developmental activities should be group activities. After three weeks, the researchers visited the same classroom for observation and were thrilled to see the difference in classroom sociology. Students were sitting in groups and working together, making jokes, and laughing. They were still reporting to the teacher but not about one another’s mistakes; instead, they were reporting on their own work. They were writing poems and reading them to their friends to show how beautiful they were. Moreover, they started caring for each other. There were three groups in the front, and it was difficult to pass through because of the sharp nails at the back of the desks. Although this mainly impacted the fourth group, all the students were making suggestions about how to fix the sharp spacers and offering to help while the teacher worked on fixing it. When the researchers spoke with the teacher during recess, she expressed how pleased she was with the experience of creating positive classroom sociology: “I normally use group work from time to time, but I never thought it would work in this group. Because they were all separated from each

other, I was thinking they wouldn't cooperate. But first I used the psychological activities you recommended: the chair activity, colour activity, and ring activity. Then we started group work, and now all of them study. Even my silent students are active in groups. I believe they were afraid of me. But now they have built a relationship with each other and see me as a friend." Even Zehra was talking with her friends and the teacher. She seemed more confident and engaged.

In Classroom 3-C, common goals helped students create positive relationships with each other (Arevalillo-Herráez, 2014; Chen & Tjosvold, 2002) and feel more confident. The teachers in the classroom also had a chance to see students in their comfort zones and foster social justice among them. Students were not facing the teacher—the symbol of knowledge and authority in the classroom—in their groups, so they felt more comfortable speaking and sharing their ideas. Their personalities and differences became more visible, which in turn encouraged social justice in the classroom. Social justice and the principle of equal opportunity require that individual situations or conditions be taken into consideration in interactions and decisions (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). However, participant teachers regard justice as “treating all students in the same way” or “pertaining just to warnings.” The teachers presented practices in which they treat all students the same as proof of justice in the classroom. For example, Ela said, “I treat everyone the same. I make them feel that.” Ela also said, “I try to give them all the same amount of time to speak or to do math. I use the class list and call them one by one.” The second focus regarding social justice expressed by the teachers was fairness in administering warnings. They reported that they had concrete reasons for their warnings (“I warn them not to say negative things about each other. If it continues, I tell them that they cannot get along and should stay away from each other” [Selen]) and that they treated the students with the same level of patience (“I try to approach them with the same patience” [Neriman]). Although İlkin said, “I care for my special student a little more,” and Melis said they “treat them according to their needs,” most participant teachers misconceived justice. They had vague explanations of justice or simply explained it as “treating all students in the same way” rather than focusing on their social needs. Teachers have “diverse concepts of equality” (Dupriez, 2006), and their perceptions of equality and justice among students have a determining effect on their practices (Qu, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The participant teachers were mostly concerned with maintaining their schedules and success rates, meeting homework deadlines, completing paperwork, or cultivating classroom management. In their ethnography notes, they reported on how they provided students with instructions, followed the planned schedule, or directed efficient activities. For example, Mehmet wrote “The class went very well. I was able to finish all the planned activities in time” in her ethnography notes as evidence of how good her class was. Although maintaining the schedule is valuable, she did not include any interactions with students or comments about their social behaviours, well-being, or mood in her notes. The classroom was reported on as a task-fulfilling site; however, neither teaching nor education is a checklist of duties. Instead, the school and the classroom are social organizations populated with people and their emotions. The students and teacher(s) in a classroom create a social context with their norms, routines, rituals, interactions, roles, relationships, social features, etc. Conceptualized as classroom sociology, the social context of classrooms seems to affect academic success (Holland, 2007), motivation (Mazer & Hunt, 2008), learning strategies (Cheema & Kitsantas, 2016), peer relations (Zurbriggen, et al., 2021), student and teacher well-being (Forsberg et al., 2021), etc. The participants of the study expressed the significance of classroom sociology in terms of classroom behaviours (Selen), academic

success, socialization (Veli), awareness (Sevda), and classroom climate (Ela). As shown in the data, observing the classroom through the lens of classroom sociology enables teachers to see beneath the surface and adjust their behaviours, attitudes, and teaching activities accordingly. Disadvantages become visible, and teachers have the opportunity to eliminate discrimination. This way, inequalities can be addressed, and social justice becomes attainable (Kennedy, 2016).

However, the researchers' observations and the participants' ethnographic notes revealed that the participants' statements were incompatible with their practices. Their classrooms were "inattentive of students as social beings" (observation notes). For example, when students "spoke with their hands in their pockets without making eye contact" (Ela's ethnography notes), Ela did nothing to include the students in the social context of the classroom. The findings of this study align with previous studies. Previous studies have shown that teachers seem ignorant of the social context of classrooms and that the social context of the classroom requires more attention from educators and researchers (Dupriez, 2006; Zurbriggen, et al., 2021). The four-week in-service program improved the teachers' social practices in classrooms. For example, Sevda said, "I asked students to stand up one by one and asked the others to say one positive sentence about the student standing up. As a result, I saw students developing positive attitudes towards each other." The recommended activity in the in-service program helped teachers improve their classroom sociology and cohesiveness. The participant evaluations, the classroom observed by the researchers, and the ethnography notes written by the teachers revealed the positive effects of the program on classroom cohesiveness, sociology, and social justice. Social interaction among classroom members, social equality, the social role of both students and teachers, personal differences, and classroom atmosphere are all factors of classroom sociology (Glickman, 1976); hence, this in-serve program focuses on all these factors.

Although the in-service program highlighted the social context of classrooms, the participant teachers were mostly concerned with teaching and learning activities. They reported on teaching styles, with notes such as "We start the lesson with a story, then continue with our activities"; student answers, with notes such as "They were able to give the correct answers"; and classroom management incidents, with notes such as "It was hard to get them in line, but I managed." Although they expressed interest in student interests and personal differences, their ethnography notes revealed that they were reluctant to consider social attributes. For instance, Aylin stated, "I direct them according to their interests and give examples accordingly." However, she seemed reluctant to consider student interests while using the instruction method to teach the class and ignored student questions. Also, the participant teachers' notes included only a couple of student names, and they were either those that were particularly successful in the lessons or had disruptive behaviour. They also defined "active students" as those with high academic success rates or correct answers in the classroom, and the "passive students" were labelled as such due to their inability to succeed academically. Interestingly, teachers were aware of the family effect on the active and passive students' performances. Both active and passive students had family situations that influenced their performance and their subsequent labelling. Despite this, teachers still seemed indifferent to that reality in their behaviours and attitudes towards those students. Although they reported gains in awareness in terms of social justice, labelling students decreases equality in the classroom (Tournaki, 2003). In addition, after being labelled, active students are held in higher esteem in class even when passive students try to gain the acceptance of their peers (Adıay, 2011).

Starting from this point of reluctance, the researchers worked with one teacher to improve her classroom sociology. Her classroom was initially disconnected, inharmonious, and agonistic. Researchers observed the classroom and made recommendations that she be sensitive to the

culture and the students; that she implement group work, cooperative learning, and peer assessment; and that she cultivate a good rapport with each student. After a couple of weeks, the researchers paid another visit to the classroom and were amazed to see the magnitude of the difference. Even the most silent and off-task students were talking with their peers, collaborating, working on their tasks, and laughing. Teacher track recommendations contributed to improvement in the classroom (Sneyers et al., 2019). The unitary effect of cooperative learning and cultural sensitivity (Brady & Katre, 2021) changed the sociology of this classroom into a positive and harmonious one.

In conclusion, the four-week in-service program revealed a significant concern regarding teaching practices in classrooms—that is, teachers' ignorance of disadvantaged students. To promote social justice in education, more attention should be paid to classroom sociology; our research shows the transformative effect of in-service programs designed for this goal. At the end of the program, the participant teachers indicated that it helped them be more conscious of classroom sociology and social justice in their classrooms. We have seen that this change is possible with a little attention, and we recommend further study by both researchers and educators to reveal additional implications. Getting to know students, communicating with them, and collaborating with rather than controlling them enables teachers to create a better, more just classroom sociology (Damianidou & Phtiaka, 2016).

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