

# **The Anatomy of Studies Concerning Neoliberal Education Policies in the Literature of Educational Sciences**

**Halil Buyruk**

*Ankara University, Ankara, Türkiye*

**Yalçın Özdemir**

*Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Niğde, Türkiye*

**Sabri Güngör**

*Kafkas University, Kars, Türkiye*

## **Abstract**

*As neoliberal policies became widespread, the number of studies concerned with those policies also increased. This study aims to analyse articles which are concerned with neoliberal education policies in the literature through systematic review. The current study makes efforts, in its scope, to exhibit the descriptive properties (methodological approaches, data collection and analysis techniques, sources of data collection, years of publication, countries of publication, levels of education-policy), topical foci and context of the studies under consideration. A great majority of them were completed in theoretical and qualitative research methods. Setting out from the topical foci of the studies, five basic themes were distinguished in the systematic review of the studies concerning neoliberal education policies. They were labelled as “political economy of education”, “ideological foundations”, “neoliberalism practices”, “transformation of education” and “imagining education differently”. Studies scrutinising neoliberal education policies put forward the causes of the relevant policies, the ways they function and substantially their negative effects on the subjects of education with richness in content. The number of studies analysing the*

*objection and resistance to neoliberalism or imaginations of different education beyond neoliberalism is scarce.*

**Keywords:** *Neoliberalism, political economy of education, transformation, systematic review, PRISMA*

## **Introduction**

Although neoliberal policies - which are applied globally - differ from country to country, they essentially share similar characteristics. Deregulation, reduction of welfare state support, privatisation of public services and subcontracting, blurring of the distinction between the public and private sectors, terminating the economic and social policies on the re-distribution of wealth, re-defining the roles and functions of the state, transforming human needs into profitable enterprise can be listed as some of the neoliberal policies (Duménil and Lévy, 2007; Harvey, 2005). The basic hypotheses on which these policies are based can be explained under three headings (Saad-Filho, 2003). The first hypothesis sets out from the distinction between state and market and argues that expansion of one will cause the shrinking of the other, the second argues that the state will disrupt economic development due to its expansion along with being described as bureaucratic and inefficient and that the market will lead to efficiency; and that therefore the state should become smaller. The third hypothesis argues, as associated with the first and second, that state intervention will disrupt the functioning of the market. The emphasis on free market is at the centre of neoliberal policies. It is one of the basic goals to put all areas of social life into the sphere of influence of the market (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism summons people to behave as the subjects of the market, to think and to act accordingly in education, health and neighbourhood relations.

According to this approach, all the areas of social life and all the human activities- whether or not they are financial, can become the subject matter of economic rationalism (Gorz, 2007). Here individuals adapt all the individual

and social processes into the measures of the market and manage them with market techniques and practices. This means that human beings are homo economicus. In such an approach, the role of the state is limited to providing the environments necessary for the free functioning of the market and to creating new markets (Adhikary, 2012). While describing the state as bureaucratic and inefficient gives rise to the argument that the state should shrink on the one hand, it also brings together the radical changes in the functioning of government agencies. It is claimed that public services are made more efficient by adopting the flexible and customer-oriented “public managerialism” model instead of “hierarchical” and bureaucratic organisation-based traditional public administration (Hartley, 1997). The new public managerialism is based on the assumption that the management methods and techniques specific to companies can be applied to the public sector and that efficiency and effectiveness can be reached in this way (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000). Such an approach supposes that there should be no important differences between the management of public institutions and the management of private companies. Yet, the process means more than implementing certain managerial techniques, and the spread of new managerial techniques in the public domain transforms the public domain in a holistic way. One of the basic ways of shrinking the state, expanding the market and creating new areas of valuation for capital is privatisation. Neoliberal policies have raised the issue of privatising formerly state-owned corporations in many countries. Besides, limiting the expenditures on public services such as education and health care- which are extensively financed by the state- in the period of welfare state caused to increase the share of the private sector in rendering these services.

A basic area of implementation of neoliberal policies is education. Throughout the last decades, neoliberal changes in educational policies have influenced the goals of education and schooling rates globally and re-shaped all the properties

of education (d'Agnese, 2020). All aspects of education -from school administration to the curriculum, from student assessment to teaching methods and from families' and students' perceptions of what is valuable and what is not valuable to what teaching profession should be like- were transformed in depth by the agenda of neoliberal education. Changes were made in teachers' working conditions while configuring the curriculum, and thus, de-unionisation accelerated (Hursh, 2005; Hill, 2007). National and international competitive environments were created through standard tests given while curriculum configuration which prioritised individualism was put into practice (Au, 2011; Ball, 2003). A structure similar to market competition model based on standard tests was formed between students, teachers, schools and school regions (Biesta, 2015; Hursh, 2005). On the other hand, privatisation was accelerated in education. "Privatisation" is generally used as a term which means handing over a government enterprise to a private entrepreneur; yet, the situation is more complex in education. While efforts have been made to increase the share of private educational institutions in the education sector, wider 'commercialisation' activities have been accelerated (Hill, 2007). Educational models which were based on different forms of financing were put into action through such applications as coupon schools and contracted schools. While educational institutions are turned into profit-oriented private institutions through time, the process of education is brought under the roof of institutional management which lays more emphasis on efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability (Adhikary, 2012). Both changes in educational management and school management (Mahony and Hextall, 2000; Dempster et al., 2001) and centralisation of the curriculum diminish teacher autonomy and thus harm teachers' professionalism (Stevenson and Wood, 2013; Robertson, 2012; Werler, 2016). Another basic change in the area of education is associated with discourse created in relation to what is valuable. Values such as autonomy, criticism, equality, trust and respect are re-defined in the new process by

considering economic priorities and their meaning is largely narrowed or modified (Bottery, 2000). The area of higher education is transformed through neoliberal policies, different funding models are put into effect, and commercialisation gains speed by implementing models such as university-industry cooperation (Maisuria and Cole, 2017). While disciplines associated with the market become more valuable in universities; art, social sciences and humanities are restricted (Anwaruddin, 2014).

The number of studies on neoliberalism began to increase as neoliberal policies began to be felt in several areas. Another area where relevant studies increase is education. Efforts were made to reveal the goals, functions and effects of the neoliberal policies implemented in different regions of the world with those studies, and the transformations they brought about in educational processes were focused on. It was found as a result of literature review, on the other hand, that analyses which considered the relevant studies altogether and which presented a holistic picture of the effects of neoliberalism on educational processes were not available. Exhibiting all the educational reflections of neoliberalism as a phenomenon which accelerates through the phenomenon of globalisation and which spreads from central countries into neighbouring countries through policy transfer can be significant in presenting a holistic perspective of the subject. Within its scope, this paper first aims to exhibit how the educational policies of neoliberalism are conceptualised and analysed in the literature of educational sciences. In line with this purpose, it attempts to analyse the studies descriptively. Then, it tries to reveal with what topical foci, in what theoretical framework and under what headings neoliberal education policies are conceptualised in the studies under consideration. Because in what theoretical framework a phenomenon is conceptualised is important in terms of revealing how the relevant phenomenon is described. Thus, the research questions in this study are as in the following:

RQ1: what are the descriptive properties (methods, data analysis techniques, sources of data collection, years of publication, countries of publication, levels of education- policy) of articles concerning neoliberal education policies?

RQ2: what are the topical foci and contexts of the articles concerning neoliberal education policies?

## **Method**

This study uses systematic literature review so as to discover the structure and patterns in existing studies and to determine the gaps to be filled by studies to be conducted in the future- as Staples and Niazi (2007) state. Systematic reviews, as stated in Moher et al. (2009), investigate wide range of literature so as to create a “complete” picture and to reduce individual errors or probability of subjectivity. Considered from this perspective, the current study includes a section on literature review and how to analyse the literature under the heading of describing the resources.

### Describing the Literature

The current study used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guide (Moher et al., 2009). The PRISMA approach has been used in several literature review and meta-analysis studies conducted recently (Hallinger and Kovačević, 2019; Shen et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022; Eadie, 2022). While literature review was done by using multiple databases in some of them, in some others, the data were analysed by using one single source of data- which Hallinger calls (2013) “limited search procedure” (Hallinger and Chen, 2015). This study was, however, limited to articles on neoliberal education policies in journals available in Web of Science (WoS) database. The following process was followed to determine the relevant sources.

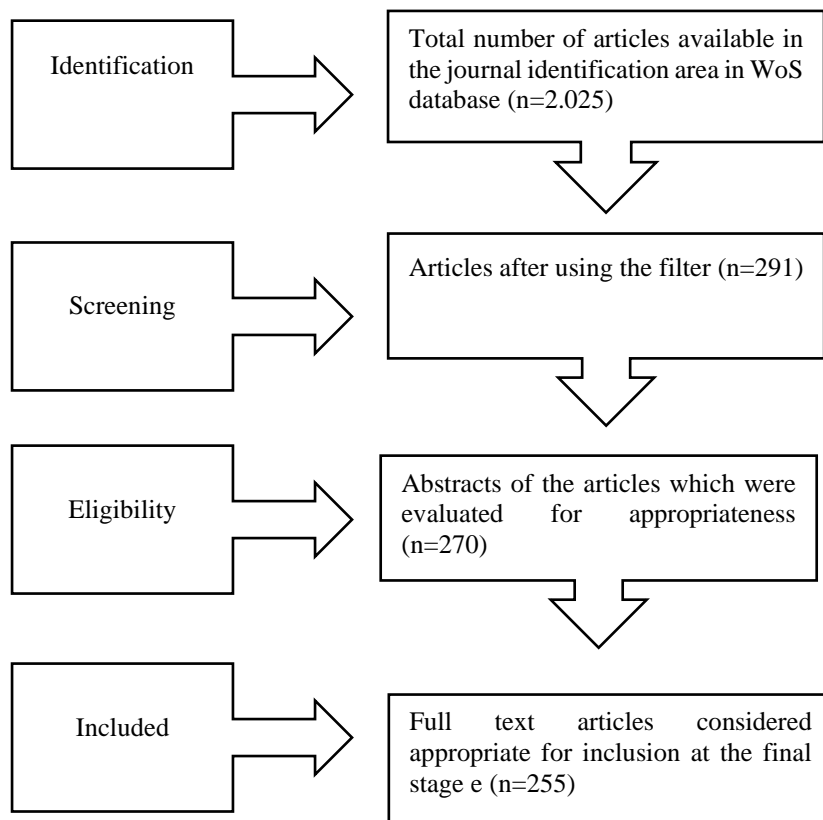
1. The study was not limited to any certain period.

2. The study contains only articles about neoliberal education policies in all areas published in peer-reviewed journals which are included in WoS. Documents such as book chapters, book reviews, presentations at conferences were excluded from review.
3. Top ten journals which were available in WoS and which contained the greatest number of articles on neoliberal education policies were included in the scope of this study.
4. Only the texts written in English were included in the scope of this study.

At the first stage of choosing the articles for analysis, decision was made on what the sources of data should be. The authors determined the WoS database by considering such criteria as widespread impact, richness in content and scope, seriousness in the article publication processes and availability of data source which all three researchers could reach. After that, the term “neoliberal education policies” was scanned in all areas. As a result of the scanning, 2025 publications were found. At the second stage, only the articles were scanned by using the filters “education and educational research”, (meso citation topics and Web of Science categories), “written in English” and “ten journals with the greatest number of publications”. In consequence, 291 articles were reached. The authors and headings of the articles, names of the journals, key words and abstracts were saved in an Excel file. All three researchers analysed the article headings, key words and abstracts independently of each other, and eliminated the ones which were irrelevant. At this stage, they had a Zoom meeting and talked about the articles they had eliminated. While the articles on which two out of three researchers agreed that they were not appropriate were removed from the scope of the study, the full texts of the ones on which they could not reach agreement were read again, and decision on whether to eliminate or not was made jointly. As a result of this meeting, 21 articles were excluded from the scope of the study. Then, the full texts of the ones which were controversial

were revised, and thus 16 of them were decided to be eliminated. In this way, the number of articles was reduced to 255 with the authors' joint decision.

Figure 1 shows the PRISMA flow diagram which summarises the process.



**Figure 1.** Flow Diagram PRISMA

### Data Analysis

Having determined the number of articles to be included in the study, the researchers moved on to the coding stage. An Excel table was used to record the following details for each article. At the first phase, the articles were shared by the researchers and such variables as authors, headings, journals in which the articles were published, key words and years of publication- which did not require interpretation- were entered in the Excel table. The Excel tables created were joined by one of the researchers. At the second phase, each researcher coded such information as methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed), techniques, sources of data (survey, interview form, document, etc.), data



collection groups, topical foci, contexts, levels of education (general, K12, higher education, etc.), levels of policy (international, national, city, school) and country of residence independently of each other. At least 20 codes were entered each week. The researchers had meetings on the Zoom each week and shared their coding, and the codes on which at least two researchers agreed were accepted. Agreement was reached on the others through re-analysis and discussion. One of the researchers recorded the agreed on subjects in a new Excel table. At the third phase, the researchers analysed the topical foci and contexts of the articles by using the agreed on codes- again independently of each other. They distinguished themes from the topical foci and contexts of the articles, shared their independent evaluations in the meetings and the themes were distinguished through consensus.

Five themes were distinguished through the analyses done by considering the 17 topical foci determined in this study. Accordingly, educational economics, educational policies, equality, publicness, non-governmental organisations and curricula were included in the theme of political economy of education; alternative education and resistance were included in the theme of imagining education differently; transformation in education and transformation of higher education were included in the theme of transformation of education; school choice, teacher training, privatisation, neoliberal management techniques and benevolence were included in the theme of neoliberalism practices and discourse and ideology and subjectivity and identity were included in the theme of ideological foundations. The Excel program was used for coding and descriptive statistics in this study, and finally the findings were interpreted within the framework of themes, topical foci and contexts.

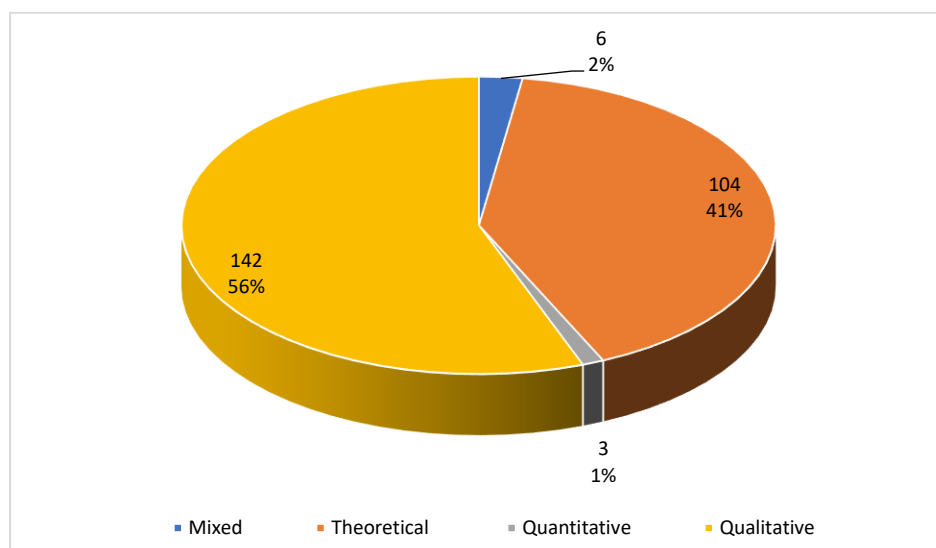
## Results

First, the results about the descriptive information of the articles were presented; then, the results about the topical foci of the articles and the contexts of the topical foci were offered.

### The Descriptive Features of the Articles Concerning Neoliberal Education Policies

The results obtained for the methodology (methodological approaches, data collection and analysis techniques, data collection sources) of the articles, their years of publication, distribution according to countries and levels of education and policy are presented under this heading.

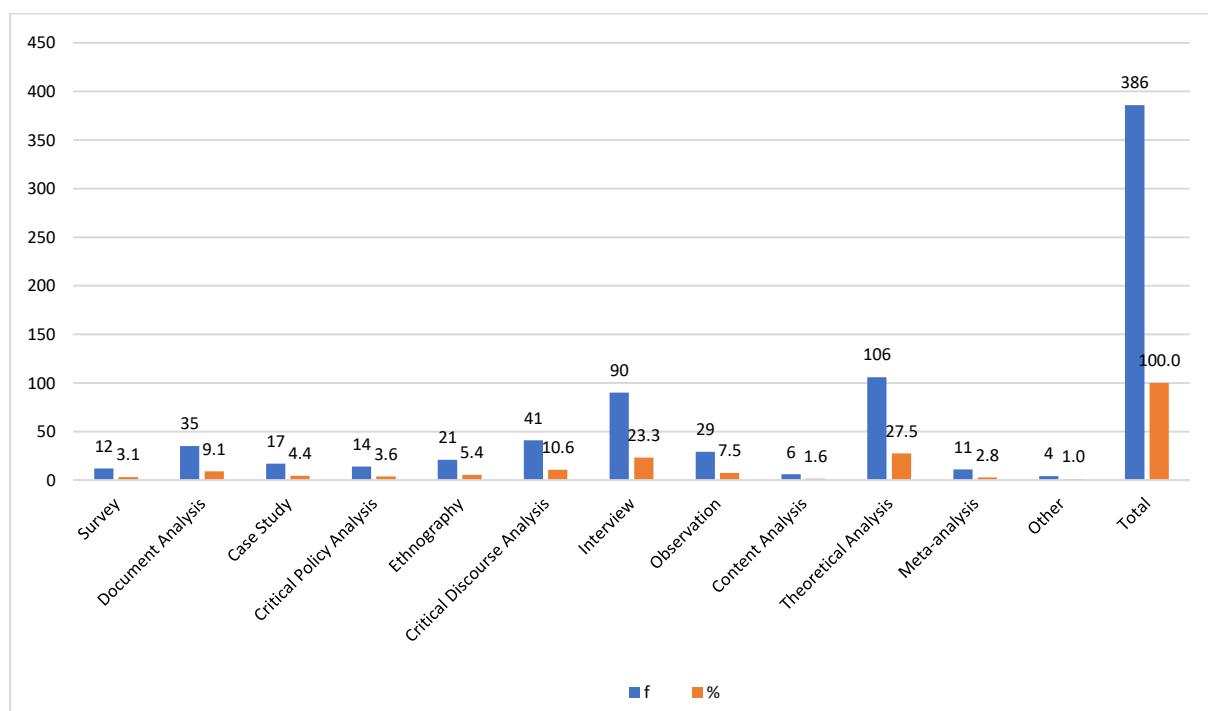
As clear from Figure 2, the majority (56%) of the 255 articles which were included in the scope of the study are qualitative and theoretical studies (41%). Yet, the scarcity of the articles using mixed method (2%) and of the quantitative studies (1%) was remarkable.



**Figure 2.** Methodological Approaches of the Articles

Figure 3 shows the data collection and analysis techniques used in the articles. Accordingly, the four most frequently used techniques were theoretical analysis

(27.5%), interviews (23.3%), critical discourse analysis (10.6%) and document analysis (9.1%). This was a situation consistent with the qualitative and theoretical study characteristics of the majority of the articles. On the other hand, use of totally 386 data analysis techniques in the 255 articles analysed was the consequence of using more than one technique in some of the studies.



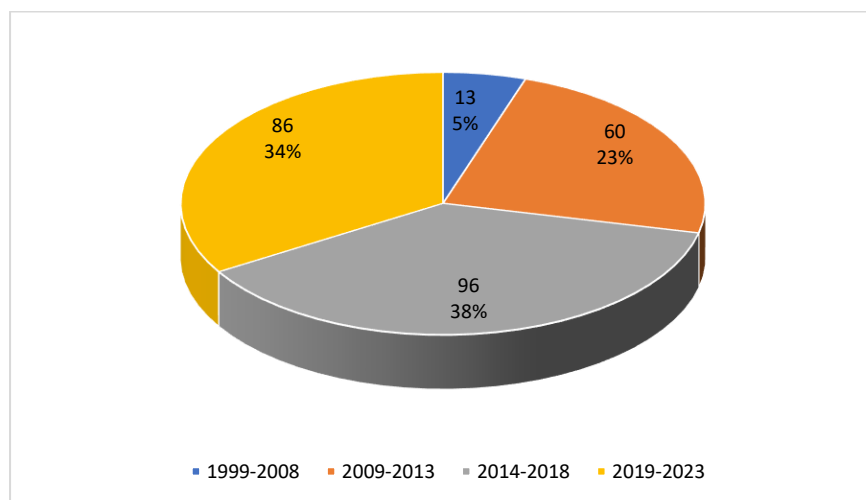
**Figure 3.** Data Collection and Analysis Techniques used in the Articles

It is apparent in Table 1 that a significant portion of the data sources of the articles were the subjects of the educational processes- the participants- (42.9%) and relevant literature (24.3%), documents (17.7%), the media (6.2%) or reports (5.3%) due to the fact that the majority of the articles were qualitative and theoretical studies. Of the subjects comprising the participants in the studies were academicians and teachers most frequently (13.2%).

**Table 1.** The Data Collection Sources of the Articles

Category of data source	Source of data	f	%
Documents	Finance document	5	1.1
	Policy document	32	6.8
	Documents given by the government/ministry of education	19	4.1
	National/ international organisation documents	3	0.6
	Documents of educational institutions	17	3.6
	Documents of law	7	1.5
	Total	83	17.7
Reports	Reports given by the government/ministry of education	7	1.5
	Reports of international organisations (OECD, UNESCO, DB)	10	2.1
	Research-evaluation-Project reports	8	1.7
	Total	25	5.3
Educational subjects	Academicians-teachers	62	13.2
	Students	32	6.8
	Administrators	31	6.6
	Support staff	33	7.0
	External stakeholders of education	21	4.5
	Parents	18	3.8
	Researchers' personal experiences -reports	4	0.9
	Total	201	42.9
The media	Newspapers, journals, movies, conversations, interviews, school photos	29	6.2
Literature	Articles, books, etc.	114	24.3
Other	Embassy employees, architects, etc.	17	3.6
TOTAL		469	100.0

As evident from Figure 4, the greatest number of articles are in the period between 2014 and 2018 (38%) and in the period between 2019 and 2023 (34%)- rates very similar; however, the smallest number of articles are in the period between 1998 and 2008 on classifying the distribution of the articles according to years in four periods.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of the Articles according to Years



itself in general- as a whole (38.4%). On the other hand, the least frequently considered level of education was preschool (0.8%). When analysing policy levels, it was found that the majority of studies analysed nationwide education (66.7%), non-specific education (11.4%) or state level education (9.8%). However, studies analysing education at the international (2.7%), regional (2.0%), city (2.7%) and school levels were remarkably rare. Table 2 below shows the findings.

**Table 2.** The Levels of Education- Policy Considered in the Articles

Levels of education considered in articles	f	%	Levels of policy considered in articles	f	%
Non-specific	98	38.4	School	12	4.7
K12	88	34.5	City	7	2.7
Vocational education	4	1.6	State	25	9.8
Pre-school	2	0.8	Non-specific	29	11.4
Teacher training	11	4.3	Regional	5	2.0
Adult education	4	1.6	National	170	66.7
Higher education	48	18.8	International	7	2.7
Total	255	100.0	Total	255	100.0

### The Topical Foci and Contexts of the Articles Concerning Neoliberal Education Policies

The themes were distinguished by evaluating the topical foci of the articles analysed. Even though the topical foci in the study can be divided into different themes, decision was made on what themes to distinguish on the basis of the way the topical foci were considered, of the contexts, of the theoretical frameworks and purposes of the articles. For instance, although the topical focus of curricula seems to be away from the theme of educational economics at first sight, the studies with such focus were largely found to consider curricula from the aspect of educational economics or educational policies (political economy of education). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were included in our Tables both as a topical focus and as a context. The reason was largely the way the phenomenon was considered. To give another example, while

privatisation was available in the text as a sub-title describing another phenomenon in some studies, it was the main topic described in some others.

Table 3 below shows the frequencies and percentages of the 5 themes distinguished according to the topical foci of the articles and of the topical foci.

**Table 3.** the Topical Foci of the Articles

Themes	Topical Foci	f	%
Political economy of education	Educational economics	9	3.5
	Educational policies	50	19.6
	Equality	8	3.1
	Publicness	4	1.6
	Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	6	2.4
	Curricula	9	3.5
	Total	86	33.7
Ideological Foundations	Discourse and ideology	30	11.8
	Subjectivity and identity	30	11.8
	Total	60	23.6
Neoliberalism practices	School choice	4	1.6
	Teacher training	5	2
	Privatisation	9	3.5
	Neoliberal management techniques	26	10.2
	Benevolence	4	1.6
Total	48	18.9	
Transformation of education	Transformation in education	18	7.1
	Transformation of higher education	21	8.2
	Total	39	15.3
Imagining education differently	Alternative education	8	3.1
	Resistance	14	5.5
	Total	22	8.6
Total		255	100

According to Table 3, the most frequently studied theme is political economy of education (33.7%)- which is followed by ideological foundations (23.6%), neoliberalism practices (18.9%) and transformation of education (15.3%), respectively. The least frequently studied theme, on the other hand, was imagining education differently (8.6%). The results obtained in relation to the themes for the topical foci and contexts of the articles are presented below under headings.

### Political Economy of Education

Political economy represents a methodological approach which regards that there are mutual obligatory relations rather than causality between economic and political and the term also represents an academic area. In this context, political economy of education tries to address the economic and political processes and phenomena related to education holistically within mutual relationality. In this framework, the theme contained studies which considered the economic dimensions of education and which were also concerned with education-related activities. As a result, as apparent in Table 4, the topical foci such as educational policies, educational economics, curricula, equality, NGOs and publicness were put together under the theme of political economy of education.

**Table 4.** Topical Foci and Contexts Related to the Theme of Political Economy of Education

Theme	Topical Foci	Contexts
Political economy of education	Educational economics	Financing, justice, knowledge economy, subjectivity, educational modernisation, culture, performance-based financing, school choice, donation to school, privatisation, global economic crisis, poverty, international early learning study (IELS), commercialisation, employability
	Educational policies	Charter schools, language education, educational policies, local policies in education, early child education, equality, shadow education, racism, woman education, policy transfer, public policy, crisis policies, global education policies, vocational education, micro politics, conservatism, teaching, private schools, policy actor, political process, political philosophy, discourse, citizenship discourse, adult education, poverty
	Equality	Neoliberal rationality, educational reforms, institutional inequality, the scope/contexts of inequality, disadvantaged regions, Taoist social justice, social mobility
	Publicness	Welfare state, NGOs, higher education, privatisation
	Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	Think tanks, OECD, educational reform advocacy organisations, the World Bank
	Curricula	Program variation, gaining a place in the market, teacher training, moral education, curriculum reforms, free primary education, tension between vocational and academic education, curriculum intensity, neoliberal management techniques (NMT)

In what contexts the articles analysed in the theme of political economy of education considered and discussed neoliberalism was important. Although educational policies were considered in different contexts in the articles analysed in the topic of educational economics, one of the contexts which was



prioritised was financing education. For example, Ben David-Hadar, Case and Smith (2018), in a qualitative study conducted on the basis of legal texts, focused on the importance of school financing in providing the right of education in an environment surrounded by neoliberal policies. The articles deal with how justice can be provided in financing education. Windle (2014), on the other hand, addresses the issue of school choice in educational finance reform. The theoretical study aims to analyse forms of policy which support school choice and concludes that materialistic benefits and organisational capacity are important in implementing educational reforms. Focusing on performance-based financing in higher education, Ziskin, Rabourn and Hossler (2018) analyse how and in what contexts policy makers use the concepts of neoliberal economy to design and support performance-based finance policies in higher education.

Educational policies was the heading under which the greatest number of articles were included in the theme of political economy of education.

Educational policies were considered in various contexts from practices in different countries to pre-school education in the articles analysed under this heading. For example, Polat (2013), in a theoretical study which considers neoliberal transformation in educational policies in Turkey, concludes that neoliberal policies transformed education in a way that makes it marketable and private. One of the practices which performs basic functions in implementing neoliberal education policies is charter schools. Stern (2013) aimed to compare the global and local policies directed to educational subjects who are in unequal relations. The results obtained in the article demonstrated that investment groups' activities influence most of the society's way of thinking about living in a global world, society members' their way of talking about neighbours and foreigners and their way of expressing moral problems about what is possible. Studies on shadow education were abundant especially in China. For instance,

Zhang and Bray (2017)- who describe the functioning of shadow education in Chinese system of education as micro neoliberalism- consider the blurring of the borders between state schooling and private lessons in the context of marketability and privatisation.

Another topical focus in the studies was publicness. While the collapse of publicness along with neoliberal policies was the basic topic of discussion, reconstruction of publicness was also among the discussed topics. Gerrard (2015), for instance, in a study which considers public education at neoliberal times, analyses the relations between neoliberal policies and welfare state and makes efforts to argue for public education. Accordingly, there are organic relations between neoliberal policies and the properties of welfare state applications which contain inequality, and therefore, demands for public educations should be made carefully and tactfully. Del Fierro (2023), who discusses the likelihood of publicness in neoliberal period, concludes that one of the conditions of public higher education is the adoption of the idea of objectivity which is not impartial and in which conflicts and clashes are accepted.

Non-governmental organisations play significant roles in putting neoliberal policies into effect. Therefore, headings for NGOs were included in the articles in classifications of topics addressed. Haugen (2013) analysed the OECD texts through critical discourse analysis, examined the effects of OECD's national education policies on the process of production, and focused especially on teacher training. According to the results obtained in the study, OECD argues for a combination of setting clear criteria for selecting teachers, of standardising knowledge, of monitoring teachers closely according to clearly defined standards for what is considered as successful teaching and of rewarding effective teaching. Another study is the one conducted by Vavrus and Kwauk (2013) on attempts to lift school fees made by the World Bank. The study, which was conducted through document analysis, tries to demonstrate how the

World Bank manifests itself as an institution of development by means of current educational policies and policies of reducing poverty by resolving the attempts to lift school fees.

Other headings under which the articles are grouped are equality and the curriculum. Changes were observed in both equality approaches and equality applications with neoliberalism. Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, Martino (2017) focus on the changes in neoliberalism and the concept of equality in education. They conclude in the article examining the effects of neoliberal education policies on equality in education that equality is re-defined through performative accountability via standardised central tests. In articles analysed under the heading of curricula, the curricula implemented in various countries at different levels of education were analysed from the perspective of economy policy. For instance, Elkorghli (2021) focuses on the changes in teacher training curricula in the process of neoliberal globalisation and concludes that the curricula were made consistent with neoliberalism by depoliticising them. Zavale (2013), who examined the effects of neoliberalism on the curricula in Mozambique, argues that transition into a curriculum aiming to meet market demands is available.

### Ideological Foundations

Ideological foundations - which is composed of the topical foci of discourse and ideology and subjectivity and identity - is the second theme in which the second greatest number of articles were available. As evident from Table 5, the articles which focus on discourse and ideology are concerned with such topics as mobility, colonialism, neoliberal values, rationality, transformation of the state and of education, access to education, culture, development and career. For example, Riddell (2013) considers the discourse of social mobility as a way of understanding the transformation in neoliberal state, focuses on education in accessing to certain jobs, and emphasises that transformation from rational directive state into hybrid neoliberal state is actualised. Honkanen and Huttunen

(2022) form the ideological foundations of neoliberal education policies by means of Mill’s philosophical thoughts about education and thus aims to analyse today’s neoliberal policies. According to the article, although Mill’s classical version of liberalism has views and forms of creation similar to modern neoliberal policies, it basically diverges from neoliberalism. On the other hand, Brissett (2021) tries to describe discourse and ideology on the basis of neoliberal values such as instrumentalisation, competitiveness and individualism.

**Table 5.** Topical Foci and Contexts Related to the Theme of Ideological Foundations

Theme	Topical foci	Contexts
Ideological Foundations	Discourse and ideology	Social mobility, student mobility, Mill’s arguments, colonialism, neoliberal values, rationality, NGOs, charter, transformation of the state and of education, elitism, educational policies, development, access to education, performance-based financing, the media, theorisation, market, culture, development, career
	Subjectivity and identity	Rural location, multi-culturalism, teacher identity, rational subject, student identity, creativity, obedient subject, academician identity, alternative subject, school administrator identity, parent identity, parent control, manager autonomy, neoliberal subject, the curriculum, pedagogical practices

D’Agnese (2023), in an article addressing the rhetoric and slogans of neoliberal educational institutions and the media by using discourse analysis, compares the advertisements of private sector with educational discourse, and demonstrates that the reports, publications, talks and videos of strong educational institutions have great similarities with advertisements. Down, Smyth and Robinson (2017) also try to describe the transformation in the labour market and the career goals of the young who are receiving vocational education by using their experiences. The study reaches the conclusion that disadvantaged young people have difficulty in getting a job, that their discontent with education has increased day by day and that this situation strengthens, especially among the poorer communities in schools, the myth that working with hands rather than with mind is more appropriate. The situation leads to a version of education in which teaching is separated from broader philosophical, ethical and political dimensions and from students’ desires, imaginations, passions and interests and

which is minimised; and as a result, the discourse used by knowledge economy about creating more qualified and higher wage jobs causes the young to have more and more false notions.

Another topical focus within the theme of ideological foundations is subjectivity and identity. Subjectivity and identity was found to be studied via rational, alternative, obedient and neoliberal subjects in some of the articles whereas it was studied through professional identities related to educational subjects such as teachers, students, academicians and administrators and through location, multiculturalism, creativity, parents and the curriculum. For instance, Kulz (2015), in an ethnographical study, focuses on building obedient subjects by means of neoliberal educational discourse, and finds how neoliberal educational reform and the contradictions of a subject are concretised through leadership applications. The article argues that the contradictions of neoliberalism are hidden while inequalities in education are re-generated with the process of building the neoliberal subject in education. Xiong, Li and Hu (2022) analysed how teachers who taught private English lessons built their professional identity in educational, institutional and socioeconomic environments directed to the market. Accordingly, teachers create a hybrid identity as a test expert and as a sales assistant. This situation overlaps with utilitarian discourse underlying education directed to examinations and with the logic of competition and making profit; and the unstable and vulnerable identities built cause teachers to get away from professionalism and to have identity crisis.

Oyarzun (2020) analyses the correlations between rural area students' subjective narrations and neoliberal policies and what its equivalent is in rural environments and concludes that neoliberal educational policies fail to offer real improvement in students' future educational and living conditions. Oyarzun (2020) states that social re-production and subjectivity production intersect in a complicated and hybrid manner and that while neoliberal discourse and policies

produce certain forms of subjectivity, such subjectivity forms are still produced through previous social patterns and through patterns of generational and social re-production. Gormley (2018) analyses the discourse-based construction of creativity in education in neoliberalism, Foucault’s homo economicus, the paradoxes of creativity, preparation for professional life and employability in the context of subjectivation for change. The author points out that the concept of creativity is built by neoliberal discourse in educational policy, and therefore, the normative definitions of the concept are problematic and they are included in neoliberal themes and financialisation processes which prioritise dominating the challenging environments.

### Neoliberalism Practices

Neoliberal ideology gains visibility in educational practices and its functioning becomes legitimate in this way. Therefore, a considerable number of the studies analyse the practices in education and thus trace neoliberalism. As shown in Table 6, the practices of neoliberalism are comprised of such topical foci as school choice, teacher training, privatisation, neoliberal management techniques and benevolence.

**Table 6.** Topical Foci and Contexts Related to Neoliberalism Practices

Theme	Topical foci	Contexts
Neoliberalism practices	School choice	Re-generation of ideology, racism, privatisation, teachers’ dislocation
	Teacher training	Neoliberalism, professionalism, commodification, reform, accreditation, professional life
	Privatisation	Spatial differentiation, private school registration rates, higher education, academician, school- facilities activities, power struggles
	Neoliberal management techniques (NMT)	Accountability, governmentality, quality assurance systems, subjectivity, use of knowledge and technique, technocracy, standardisation, standardised tests, governance, PISA, school choice, performativity, quantification, family entrepreneurship, proficiency measurement, OECD, high stake testing, measurement and evaluation
	Benevolence	Neoliberal foundations, entrepreneurship, NMT, NGO policies

“Neoliberal management techniques” was the topical focus with the greatest number of articles in this theme. Accountability and governmentality occupied a significant place in this topical focus. The study conducted by Aviles and Simons (2013) which considers the rules of accountability in education and the correlations concludes that governmentality enforces accountability and that it reduces professional autonomy by requiring to act according to standards instead of taking on responsibility. Neumann (2019), on the other hand, suggests that the ability groups formed according to test scores increase competition with the implementation of accountability policies in schools and that the competition triggers discriminative practices in schools by influencing social relations in negative ways. Whereas accountability, governmentality and standardised tests are important factors in shaping neoliberal education practices, family entrepreneurship can be said to be a new technique. Paniagua-Rodríguez and Bereményi (2017) discuss how to understand summon for families’ active participation in schools as a form of regulatory action generating neoliberal properties based on responsibility, entrepreneurship and rational calculation. The study, which approaches participation as an essential characteristic of neoliberal governmentality, points out that participatory initiatives in schools encourage an approach of assimilatory variation and that it legitimates the current status quo in schools.

Privatisation has influenced education substantially as it has influenced every domain. O’Neill (2011), in a theoretical study which evaluates the privatisation of public schools in New Zealand, addresses such issues as the effects of privatisation on education, educational financing and hidden privatisation. The study reveals that privatisation occurs with government’s withdrawal from funding schools and with increase in non-governmental services, that pressures for more privatisation of public schools have increased and that it has stemmed almost completely from commercial concerns. Perera (2021), who puts

privatisation in focus and addresses the issue by setting out from academicians' stories, concludes that the issue is not only logic-based but it is also loaded with emotions. Discussing individuals' emotional positions to understand the changes in universities- which are becoming more and more similar in every part of the world-would be helpful in directing the changes.

Teacher training, school choice and benevolence are among the areas where neoliberal management practices are experienced. Simmie (2021), in a study which tries to describe neoliberal policy reforms by using discourse analysis in the context of teacher training, suggests that teachers and teacher trainers in all countries should be given academic freedom in schools and in institutions of higher education. Duarte (2023) focuses on neoliberal and racist school choice and analyses the applied reality of school choice in a primary school which Latin students attend and which has inadequate resources and which has historically displayed low performance. According to the article, neoliberal racism becomes permanent with the spread of school choice, meanwhile policies focusing on marketability threaten the legitimacy of public schools and competition in the market of school choice harms schools. Olmedo (2013), who puts benevolence into focus of the study, associates benevolence with governance and tries to reveal what benevolent governance is and what roles it plays in the formation of educational policies. The study lays emphasis on the fact that the new benevolence contributes to re-producing the imbalance in existing power relations.

### Transformation of Education

Neoliberalism as an original form of capitalism brings with it transformation in education- as in all areas of social life. Not surprisingly, one of the themes prominent in the articles analysed in this study was the theme of transformation of education. It is apparent in Table 7 that the articles analysed in this theme are the studies trying to set the general framework of transformation in education-



including studies focusing on various dimensions of the transformation in higher education.

**Table 7. Topical Foci and Contexts Related to the Theme of Transformation of Education**

Theme	Topical foci	Contexts
	Transformation in education	privatisation, lifelong education, vocational education, NMT, city strategies, localisation, policy transfer, educational reforms, contracted schools, school autonomy, period of post-socialism, teaching profession, ideo-pedagogical locations, outsource teacher employment
Transformation of education	Transformation of higher education	Neoliberalisation, art, humanities and social sciences, limiting education, extraordinary cases- wars, Covid 19, system crisis, naturalisation of neoliberalism, NGOs, distance education, the role of the state, post-colonialism, society's participation in financing, equality, network governance, university management, internationalisation, participation policies, research effect

Some of the articles which analysed transformation in education addressed the transformation within the framework of reforms. For example, Bromley, Overbey, Furuta and Kijima (2020) examined the educational reform reports of post-war period global organisations. The study revealed that the post-war period was largely characterised by the expansion of global educational reform activities, but that emphasis laid on reforms had diminished more and more due to disappointment caused by liberal and neoliberal worldviews leading to the affirmation of educational reforms and by cultural principles. Sayılan (2015) draws attention to the above-mentioned disappointment on the one hand and gives examples for the content of transformations in education in Turkey on the other hand. Marketability of adult education, good quality education becoming possible only for the rich minority and education which is increasingly becoming religious are described as the reflections of transformation in Turkey.

A considerable number of the studies included in the theme of transformation of education focused on the transformation of higher education. The transformation was evaluated in the context of neoliberalisation to a considerable extent. Anwaruddin (2014) argues that demand-based supply is

spreading day by day in higher education as a result of neoliberal policies in parallel to the professionalization of education in general. The consequences of this are listed as supplying more and more the programmes which can be sold at high prices, but art and social science education restricted by market-oriented policies; and it is claimed that the situation will have negative effects on the future of democracy as a result. The studies analysed in this paper considered the transformation in higher education in a rich context such as the roles of non-governmental organisations and of the state in transforming education, distance education, the management of higher education and network governance and transformation in financing higher education. Yokoyama (2008), on the other hand, argues that the transformation in higher education stems from market-oriented government programmes and calls attention to the non-spontaneous existence of transformation which is shaped within power structures.

### Imagining Education Differently

As clear from Table 8, the theme of imagining education differently- which has such topical foci as alternative education and resistance- is the theme in which the smallest number of studies are available. The topical foci and contexts related to the theme are shown in Table 8. The articles under the heading of alternative education were in search of alternatives to neoliberal education policies. For example, Gandin (2007), who examined the Project of Citizen School in Brazil, claimed that the project was started as a real alternative to hegemonic policies to create progressive areas in education. Starnawski and Gawlicz (2021), who researched the new democratic schools in Poland, analysed the formation of these schools which emerged through attempts of parents who were searching for an alternative to the traditional pedagogy of the public school, parents' motivation, collective identity structures, involvement processes and emerging tension. The results showed that going out of the mainstream education offered opportunities for establishing democratic schools.

**Table 8.** Topical Foci and Contexts Related to the Theme of Imagining Education Differently

Theme	Topical foci	Contexts
Imagining education differently	Alternative education	Hegemony, citizen school, community-based education, inequality, social class, social transformation, joint school, ideology, citizenship education, building subjectivity, identity, collective identity, preference, Freireist critical literacy, critical teacher training
	Resistance	Post-colonialism, student movements, social movements-agency, opposition to neoliberalism, Dewey and Arendt's views, location, cultural resistance, academic labour, teacher certification from the aspect of Bourdieist capital types, unionism, subjectivity, governmentality, educational reform, critical ethnicity theory, educational location

Resistance was another heading. Some of the articles included under this heading were concerned with resistance to neoliberal education policies in different regions of the world. “Student movements” was one of the topics which came into prominence. For example, Wubbena (2017), who analysed Chilean student movement through visual documents, made efforts to reveal the pedagogical nature of the student movement. In a similar way, Inzunza, Assael, Cornejo and Redondo (2019)- who also focused on Chilean student movement- examined the dynamics between educational policies and student mobility and concluded that student movements revived such discussions as public education and free of charge schools. Some other articles, however, considered the topic of resistance at institutional level. D’Agnese (2020) claims that imagination of a new education may be put forward with Dewey’s argument of innovation and Arendt’s argument of unexpectedness against the neoliberal agenda in education, and that such an approach may help educational actors to resist neoliberal pressures. Discussing resistance to neoliberal education policies by means of New Zealand, McMaster (2013) claims that some of the societies can grind down the destructive effects of neoliberal ideology on society and on education thanks to their culture.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Scientific practice is a political effort which affects making sense of, interpreting, re-producing or transforming the reality and which can build the legitimacy of or objections to dominant social formation rather than the sole

description/portrayal of it. This paper made an attempt to analyse as a political phenomenon the studies which had chosen neoliberalism and neoliberal education policies- the existing form of it in education- as a topic of research. The basic mission adopted in this paper was to be able to exhibit how neoliberal education policies were conceptualised and analysed in the literature of educational sciences. In line with this purpose, the studies under consideration were first subjected to a descriptive analysis. Then, this paper tried to show through what topical foci, what theoretical frameworks and under what headings the studies conceptualised and analysed neoliberal education policies; because the theoretical framework in which a phenomenon was conceptualised was important in how the phenomenon was described.

The most frequently studied theme in the articles was political economy of education - which was followed by ideological foundations, neoliberalism practices and transformation of education, respectively. The least frequently studied topical focus was the one labelled as “imagining education differently”. The distribution of the topical foci of the studies showed that efforts were made to put forward, understand and describe neoliberal education policies and their economic, political and ideological contexts in terms of structure, process and functioning as a whole. Because neoliberalism- which emerges in a specific economic-political context and which desires to continue its existence through a discourse-based and ideological structure that obtains the subjects’ consent- focuses on transforming education by means of practices specific to educational processes in addition to basic practices in all areas.

The studies included in the theme of political economy - most frequently studied theme in the articles- were found to analyse the activities related to specific type of education such as charter schools, early child education, shadow education, vocational education and adult education on different dimensions on the one hand and to analyse the subject and functioning of direct policy

development process such as public policy, crisis policies, policy actors, policy process, micro policy, and policy transfer on the other hand. The analyses related to the economic context of neoliberal policies were done especially under such headings as global economic crisis, financing, privatisation and school donation in this category. Some of these studies questioned the roles of such organisations as capital groups, think tanks, reform advocacy organisations or the World Bank and OECD in neoliberal education policies; and some of them (Anwaruddin, 2014) described this situation as a kind of neo-colonialism. An important dimension of neoliberal policies was related to the erosion of publicness, and one of the most important consequences of the erosion of publicness in the area of education was inequality. The studies considered in this paper focused on these two points. The study of Wiseman and Davidson (2021) is noteworthy in this respect. While this study draws attention to the results of neoliberal education policies that re-produce inequality in processes such as the commodification of education, it also recommends that public expenditure monitoring surveys should be examined to decipher the mechanisms of neoliberal policies that mask inequalities. The authors' view that collecting and analysing descriptive data does not guarantee removing inequalities but that removing inequalities and developing equalitarian educational policies will be possible through data which reveal inequalities and which enable to do systematic analyses about education also shows the importance of the articles analysed in this study.

It is difficult for neoliberal education policies to have legitimacy without a discourse-based and ideological structure that obtains the consent of subjects. That is to say, legitimisation and the need for consent- the existential need of policies as practices of power- need to be met by a certain ideological, discourse-based structure. Because “legitimisation is the necessary instrument of political power and ideology is the necessary instrument of legitimisation”

(İnal, 2004). The studies classified in the category of discourse and ideology were directed to demonstrating what discourse-based and ideological background the neoliberal policies had. For example, Letizia (2016) argues that policies are constructed with language and discourse and therefore, political discourse has the power to configure the actions, speech and thoughts of individuals affected by the policies, and the author reaches the conclusion that the regime of reality constructed with language shrinks the policies on public welfare on the axis of neoliberalism. On the other hand, the existence of ideology requires not only the existence of discourse-based structures produced by power structures, but also the existence of subjectivity shaped by these structures. As Foucault pointed out, the subject itself is a product of historical forces, and while different circumstances produce different types of subjects, subjects are produced within social relations shaped by the power (Çelebi, 2013). Thus, social reproduction and the production of subjectivity intersect in hybrid forms, and neoliberal discourses and policies produce certain forms of subjectivity (Oyarzun, 2020). The articles analysed in this study had significant findings about the process of constructing teacher, student, school manager, academic and parent identities in line with neoliberal ideology and the role of pedagogical practices in this process. Wilkins (2012), for example, argues that the focus on conforming student behaviour to the aims of 'neoliberalised' education, characterised by concepts and applications related to competitive and individual developments in learning, underpins neoliberal pedagogical demands. The production of teacher identity, which plays a fundamental role in achieving these goals, gains meaning in this context. Chatelier and Rudolph (2018) suggest that the logic of neoliberal management has shifted teachers' focus from the development of students in need of attention to professional accountability criteria and professional subject, through tensions such as teacher responsibility and interest and teacher accountability and autonomy.

Neoliberalism as a search for a solution to the crises of capitalism has played a fundamental role in transforming the welfare state character of the state. The reflection of this in education is the transformation of education in line with relevant policies, along with the 'reforms' that are inevitably implemented. While the articles analysed in this context showed that the transformation of education has generally been realised in the form of increased privatisation, vocationalisation of education and flexibilisation of teachers' employment on the basis of performance along with policy transfer, they also pointed to originality in the transformation of higher education. The popularisation of distance learning and internationalisation, the growing restriction of the humanities and social sciences - in contrast to the growing interest in applied sciences - can be identified as phenomena that are coming to the fore. The results of the studies also point to the negative consequences of the transformations brought about by neoliberal education policies. It was argued that the changes caused by neoliberal policies in education could not contribute to development difficulties (Regmi, 2017), that they reduced the quality of the teacher workforce and increased the inequality in reaching qualified teachers (Martindale, 2019), and that they contributed to the deterioration of the public good instead of repairing it (Chrysochou, 2018). Moreover, studies also pointed to the disappointment caused by liberal and neoliberal worldviews and cultural principles that led to the affirmation of changes in education (Bromley, Overbey, Furuta and Kijima, 2020).

The studies which analysed neoliberal educational policies, as summarised above, demonstrated the causes of the relevant policies, the ways they functioned and substantial negative effects on educational subjects in rich content. On the other hand, one of the most remarkable properties of this current study was the scarcity of studies analysing objections and resistance to neoliberalism in education- which could be the focal point of anti-neoliberal

economic and social struggles according to Saltman (2012)- or studies analysing educational envision beyond neoliberalism. A small number of the studies considered in this paper focused on instances of resistance especially in the form of student movements or social movements mainly in South America. According to Stovall (2013), who draws attention to the political nature of social reality and the hope at its centre, people's hope against neoliberal education policies should be supported and raised, and this should be done in relation to the financial conditions of the individuals for whom we are responsible and with whom we interact through active struggle. Despite their shortcomings, the examples of resistance to neoliberal education policies are valuable in this sense. For example, Inzunza, Assael, Cornejo and Redondo (2019) showed that student movements brought to the fore several issues related to public education, such as the rejection of profit-making in education, which had never existed in the Chilean education system, free schools, participation and comprehensive education.

It is meaningful to discuss the reasons for the scarcity of studies that address objections and resistances to neoliberalism in education or non-neoliberal educational imaginations. One of the possible reasons for this situation may be the rarity of resistance to neoliberal policies on a global scale, despite the increasing spread of right-wing political power and practices around the world. On the other hand, it is doubtful that the global resistance to neoliberal policies is fully reflected in scientific production, even if it is not sufficient. Difficulties in the processes of critical scientific production and publication may be another possible reason for this situation. The positivist scientific approach, which considers being above politics and excluding the political from science as the criterion of scientificness, may lead academics not to choose many political and social phenomena as a subject of study or to deal with these issues as a technical phenomenon by isolating them from their political context. The likelihood of



critical-political publications being published in mainstream indexed journals varies from country to country. In some countries, for this reason, issues related to resistance may not be sufficiently analysed by academics. It is also possible that the index criteria we have determined in our study may have led the selected articles to be gathered in certain subjects. In addition to all these possible reasons, there is a need for studies that can reveal the political nature of academic publishing processes and question why resistance to neoliberalism can find a place in such a small number of articles and provide scientific evidence for this.

Hursh and Henderson (2011) argue that opposing neoliberalism requires situating neoliberal policies within a broader neoliberal discourse that promotes markets, competition, individualism and privatisation. The findings of the current study suggest that the use of the term neoliberalism itself is deliberate and conscious, and that there is a critical perspective among researchers that associates neoliberal policies with neoliberal discourse - and thus with capitalism. With this aspect, the current study again points to the political dimension of social sciences in particular. Hursh and Henderson's (2011) study makes important points about the politicisation of the social sciences. They argue that we should think about what kind of lives and relations we want, and that being able to resist neoliberalism has three contexts, which they call discourse-based, political and pedagogical. While resisting neoliberalism in a discourse-based context requires understanding which discourses are dominant at local, national and global levels; how power has been seized and how it is densely available in the hands of institutional and political elites should be examined for fighting with neoliberalism in political context, and resistance should be displayed accordingly. In the educational context of the struggle against neoliberalism, schools should make their students face the vital problems of our time and should direct them to issues such as justice and the

environment. Administration which will enable critical analysis and active participation should also be supported to be able to create alternatives to neoliberalism.

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### Author Details

#### Halil Buyruk (Corresponding author)

Ankara University, Ankara, Türkiye

[hbuyruk@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:hbuyruk@ankara.edu.tr)

ORCID: 0000-0003-4817-3798

#### Yalçın Özdemir

Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Niğde, Türkiye

[yalosdemir@gmail.com](mailto:yalosdemir@gmail.com)

ORCID: 0000-0002-0222-3609

#### Sabri Güngör

Kafkas University, Kars, Türkiye

[sabri.gungor@kafkas.edu.tr](mailto:sabri.gungor@kafkas.edu.tr)

ORCID: 0000-0002-0254-1885