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INTERPRETING SCHOOL POLICIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

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Abstract

Political ideologies provide a framework for understanding the values and priorities underlying school policies. This study examined how prospective teachers interpreted school policies through liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism. Designed as a qualitative case study, the research involved 40 prospective teachers who completed a written interview form. Data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis. The findings showed that school policies were not associated with a single ideology; instead, different orientations became prominent depending on the policy domain and its rationale. Liberalism was linked to individual freedom, choice, and achievement; socialism to equality, social justice, and public support; conservatism to order, tradition, and cultural continuity; and nationalism to national identity, shared culture, and historical heritage. The study concludes that school policies are not merely administrative regulations but practices reflecting different ideological values.

Keywords: political ideologies, school policies, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, nationalism

1. Introduction

Although school policies often appear to be technical decisions regulating institutional operations, they also play a role in determining which values and social priorities are deemed legitimate within the school environment. Therefore, the content of school policies is not independent of value conflicts and political preferences in the educational context [1, 2]. The practices addressed in this study—such as discipline, dress, participation, social support, achievement, ceremonies, and citizenship—constitute different manifestations of school policy across various domains. Educational policy is not merely composed of centrally prepared regulations transmitted unchanged to schools; rather, it is a process interpreted, negotiated, and reshaped by teachers, administrators, students, and other actors within school and classroom settings [3, 4]. Moreover, policy texts are not transferred directly and unchanged into the school environment; they are reinterpreted in light of school conditions and the practitioners' perspectives. Consequently, the same policy may be understood and implemented differently across distinct school contexts [5].

Examining the ideological dimension of school policies requires consideration not only of the practices adopted but also of how the values associated with these practices are defined, negotiated, and reinterpreted in different political contexts [6]. Value domains such as individual choice, equality, tradition, discipline, public responsibility, citizenship, and national identity may acquire different priorities and meanings depending on their position within the ideological structure and their relationships with other concepts [7]. The literature indicates that education and school policies have been analyzed through diverse ideological orientations and classified according to varying frameworks. Gutek [8] examines nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism under separate headings regarding their effects on education and their educational implications. Robertson and Hill [9], on the other hand, analyze school and early childhood education policies in England along the axes of Marxism/socialism/radical left, social democracy, liberal progressivism,

neoliberal conservatism, and new conservatism. In this study, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism were adopted as the theoretical framework, as they allow for the joint examination of fundamental value domains such as individual freedom and choice, equality and public responsibility, order and tradition, and national identity and belonging. These ideologies assign different meanings and priorities to core concepts such as the individual, society, state, freedom, equality, tradition, and national identity [10]. Based on this differentiation, the four ideologies in question were employed as the theoretical framework for analyzing the values and priorities underlying school policies. While the dimensions of value, power, and meaning in school policies have been extensively discussed in the literature, this study aims to contribute to these debates by focusing on which ideologies specific school policies are associated with by participants and how these associations are justified.

2. The Ideological Basis of School Policies

School policies, while functioning as practices that regulate school operations, can also be evaluated within a political

they rest. Indeed, the literature on political ideologies includes not only liberalism, socialism, nationalism, and conservatism, but also other traditions of thought such as anarchism, feminism, ecologism, and fundamentalism [10, 11]. Yayla [12] classifies liberalism, socialism, and conservatism as core ideologies, and nationalism as a hybrid ideology. The reason for adopting liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism in this study is that these ideologies allow for the joint examination of value domains prominent in school policies, such as freedom, equality, order, tradition, public responsibility, citizenship, and national identity. Considering ideologies not as fixed and entirely isolated clusters of thought but as patterns of meaning that organize political concepts within specific relationships and assign different priorities to these concepts enables the explanation of how the same policy may acquire different ideological meanings depending on the values and rationales upon which it is grounded [7]. Below, these four ideologies are addressed in relation to school policies.

Liberalism is an ideological approach that emphasizes the moral priority of the individual, individual freedom, the capacity to choose, equal rights, and tolerance of differences [10]. In classical liberal thought, Locke [13] considered individuals' rights to life, liberty, and property as the foundation of political legitimacy, while Mill [14] regarded individuality, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression as essential conditions for personal development. Yayla [12] also explains liberalism along the axes of individual freedom, limited government, and market order. One of the most direct examples of market liberalism in education is Friedman's [15] approach promoting school choice and competition in education. In terms of school policies, this approach can be associated with practices such as enabling students to choose among courses, school types, or programs, increasing the diversity of options, and recognizing individual achievement and effort. However, school choice has been shown not to be a socially neutral opportunity; different social classes do not benefit equally from choice opportunities, and choice processes may reproduce existing class inequalities [16]. Therefore, school policies associated with liberal values should be evaluated not only in terms of expanding the domain of individual choice but also with regard to who is able to exercise these choices and the resources that enable such exercise.

Conservatism is an ideological approach that values tradition, social continuity, organic society, hierarchy, and authority [10]. Burke [17], one of the founding figures of modern conservative thought, argued that social institutions are formed through historical experience and that profound changes should be carried out on the basis of continuity and gradual transformation rather than abstract designs. Oakeshott [18] explained the conservative disposition as a preference for the familiar and tried over the unknown and designed. In school policies, this orientation can be associated with practices such as strengthening rules and disciplinary measures, maintaining common behavioral standards, emphasizing family involvement, and sustaining activities that support the transmission of traditional values. It has been noted that within school policies,

emphases on market and choice can coexist with national standards, examinations, discipline, and traditional knowledge and values within the same ideological alliance [19]. In this framework, the school is regarded not only as a place of academic learning but also as an institution through which social order and cultural continuity are transmitted.

Socialism highlights the principles of community, cooperation, equality, and social justice, while social democracy emphasizes public intervention in achieving these aims [10]. In socialist thought, Marx explained social inequalities through relations of production and structures of class power. Regarding education, Marx [20] distinguished between the regulation of school expenditures, teacher qualifications, and fields of instruction by the public and the state's direct role as the educator of the people. Gramsci [21] argued that domination rests not only on coercion but also on hegemonic consent established within the education system, culture, and everyday life. Bernstein [22], a leading figure of social democracy, maintained that socialism could be realized through gradual reforms within a democratic and constitutional order. In the field of education, this orientation is reflected in practices such as providing meals and material support to disadvantaged students, allocating public resources to schools in low-income areas, and implementing supplementary programs designed to reduce achievement gaps. It has been emphasized that social justice in education cannot be reduced merely to the distribution of resources; institutional relations, students' diverse circumstances, and their capacity to transform provided resources into genuine educational opportunities must also be taken into account [23, 24]. Within this framework, school policies associated with socialist and social democratic values attribute to schools the character of public institutions bearing responsibility for reducing social inequalities.

Nationalism is an ideological approach that regards the nation as the fundamental political community and prioritizes common culture, collective belonging, historical memory, and the idea of self-determination.

have been explained through different theoretical approaches. Gellner [25] argued that the common high culture required by industrial society was disseminated through mass and standardized education; Anderson [26] emphasized that common language and print culture enabled individuals who did not know each other to imagine themselves as members of the same community. Hobsbawm [27] highlighted that ceremonies and symbols could produce invented traditions establishing continuity with the past, while Smith [28] maintained that national identity is nourished by shared myths, historical memories, symbols, and cultural heritage. Aarsal [29] argued that national character and understanding could be developed and transmitted across generations through literature, education, and teaching institutions. These approaches explain the role of schools in constructing and transmitting national identity through common language, history, literature, ceremonies, and symbols. In school policies, this orientation may be expressed through practices such as national holidays, history and citizenship activities, emphasis on common language and culture, and ceremonies and symbols. Schools are among the institutions that shape students' understandings of citizenship and community membership, as well as their construction of a sense of belonging [30]. Therefore, school policies informed by nationalist values should be evaluated not only in terms of their functions of fostering common identity and belonging, but also with regard to the extent to which they incorporate and acknowledge diverse identities.

3. Research Objective

School policies do not consist solely of technical regulations; they also embody ideological choices regarding which forms of knowledge, values, and social orientations are to be prioritized within schools. According to Apple [31], school knowledge is closely related to social power relations and values deemed legitimate. Ball [32] argues that policies should be understood not merely as written texts but as processes that generate meaning and practice in different contexts. These approaches necessitate examining not only the visible content of school policies but also the values and rationales upon which they rest. Moreover, school policies are processes through which particular priorities and social meanings are produced [33]. Nevertheless, studies examining how

school policies are linked to different ideologies and the rationales through which these associations are articulated from participants' perspectives remain limited. This study aims to examine how prospective teachers interpret school policies within the frameworks of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism, and the rationales upon which they base these interpretations. It also aims to contribute to understanding the ideological meanings attributed by participants to school policies and the forms of justification that support these meanings.

4. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine how prospective teachers interpret both school policies presented to them and real practices encountered in school life through the lens of political ideologies. A case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was employed. A case study is a research design that enables the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context [34]. In this design, a bounded case is examined in detail, with the aim of revealing descriptions and themes related to the case [35]. In this study, the bounded case was defined as the ways in which participants interpret school policies presented to them and real practices encountered in school life within the frameworks of liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, and socialism.

4.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 40 prospective teachers enrolled in the Social Studies Teacher Education program at the Faculty of Education. A purposive sampling approach was adopted. Purposive sampling was preferred because it allows for the selection of participants who can provide information relevant to the purpose of the study. Within this scope, participants who were able to develop opinions on school policies and ideologies, evaluate the policies presented to them from an ideological perspective, and express their views in written form were included in the study. All participants took part in the research on a voluntary basis. During the research process, no personal identity information was requested from participants, and their views were evaluated in accordance with the principle of confidentiality. In the presentation of findings, codes such as T1, T2, and T3 were used instead of participant names. In this way, the protection of participants' personal information and the anonymization of data were ensured.

4.2. Data Collection Tool

In this study, data were collected through a semi-structured interview by the researcher. In designing the form, the purpose of the study, the ideological foundations of school policies, and the theoretical framework concerning major political ideologies were taken into account. To ensure the content and face validity of the data collection instrument, the form was submitted for expert review. Within the scope of this evaluation, the appropriateness of the questions to the research aim, the extent to which they might lead participants, the clarity of the expressions, their consistency with ideological classifications, and their suitability for eliciting written responses were examined. Based on the expert feedback, necessary linguistic and content adjustments were made, expressions with similar meanings were simplified, and statements that could potentially direct participants toward a particular ideology were revised.

The interview form consisted of two sections. In the first section, participants were asked to examine examples of school policies prepared by the researcher, to associate these policies with one or more ideologies, and to justify their associations. In the second section, participants were asked to provide examples of real policies and practices they had encountered or observed in school life and to explain how they interpreted these examples in terms of ideological values. While the questions in the form provided participants with a certain framework, they also allowed for detailed explanations in their own words.

4.3. Data Collection Process

The data collection process was carried out through the administration of a written form. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of personal information, and that the data obtained would be used solely for scientific purposes. Subsequently, participants were asked to examine the school policies included in the form, to associate these policies with one or more ideological approaches they considered relevant, and to justify their choices. Participants were also expected to provide examples of real policies and practices they had encountered or observed in school life and to evaluate these examples from an ideological perspective.

Participants were given 40 minutes to complete the form. This duration was deemed sufficient for participants to read and evaluate each school policy, make the ideological associations they deemed appropriate, provide examples from real school practices, and express their rationales in written form. During the administration process, no guidance was provided to participants beyond technical explanations regarding how to complete the form. In this way, it was intended that participants would express their own views independently.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed through a two-stage process. The first stage was a descriptive analysis, followed by content analysis in the second stage. During the descriptive analysis, participants' associations of school policies with ideological approaches were organized according to a predetermined thematic framework. Within this framework, liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, and socialism were treated as the main ideological categories. The ideological associations made by participants for each school policy were examined; the policies were identified in relation to the ideologies, and the distribution of these associations was presented. The aim of this stage was to systematically classify participant responses and to broadly determine the ideological domains in which school policies were concentrated. The findings provided a foundational classification for the subsequent content analysis.

In the second stage, content analysis was carried out. In this process, not only the ideologies selected by participants but also the rationales underlying these associations were examined in detail. Participants' written explanations were read line by line, meaningful expressions were identified, and these expressions were transformed into codes. An inductive approach was followed in the creation of codes. In other words, codes were not derived from a fully predetermined list but were generated based on recurring meanings, rationales, concepts, and policy emphases in participants' responses. For example, recurring expressions such as individual choice, freedom, competition, performance, market logic, equality, public benefit, social solidarity, national identity, cultural values, tradition, moral order, and discipline were evaluated separately, and expressions carrying similar meanings were grouped under the same code. Initially, open coding was conducted, and each unit of meaning identified in participants' statements was recorded as a separate code. At this stage, initial codes such as individual choice, right to select, student interest, talent, achievement, reward, equality, social justice, solidarity, public support, order, discipline, responsibility, tradition, common language, common history, national identity, and belonging were created. Subsequently, the codes were compared regarding conceptual similarities and the contexts in which they were articulated; codes reflecting the same conceptual orientation were clustered to form subthemes. For instance, expressions such as "students making their own choices," "emphasis on individual preferences," and "providing multiple options" were categorized under the subtheme of freedom of choice. Similarly, statements such as "considering students' interests and talents," "providing education suited to needs," and "offering opportunities for each student's development" were associated with the subtheme of equality of opportunity based on talent and interest.

Furthermore, the classification of codes was based not only on lexical similarities but also on the meanings attributed by participants and the rationales they articulated. Thus, the same concept could be associated with different ideological themes depending on its contextual justification. For example, equality was interpreted within liberalism when justified regarding individual rights and

access to opportunities, but within socialism when expressed in relation to reducing economic and social disparities, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and supporting disadvantaged students. Similarly, the concept of belonging was associated with liberalism when framed in terms of students' attachment to school and individual participation, but with nationalism when explained through national unity, shared identity, and loyalty to the homeland. Conceptually related codes were subsequently clustered under subthemes, which were then aligned with the relevant ideological orientations.

To ensure coding reliability, the code list and sample participant statements were reviewed by a field expert. The researcher's and the expert's codings were compared, and inter agreement was calculated as 90%. Differences of opinion were mostly due to the interpretation of the same concept in different contexts. For example, the concept of "belonging" was coded under liberalism by the researcher but under nationalism by the expert. In such cases, the relevant statement was re

a consensus was reached. In the final analysis, only codes on which agreement was achieved were used.

5. Findings

In line with the purpose of the study, the findings were presented under two main headings. Under the heading "Ideological Orientations of School Policies", the ideologies with which participants associated school policies were examined. Under the heading "Ideological Justifications of School Policies", the rationales through which participants explained these associations were addressed.

5.1. Ideological Orientations of School Policies

The findings concerning how participants classified school policies within the frameworks of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distribution of school policies according to political ideologies.*

No.	School Policies	Lib. (f)	Con. (f)	Soc. (f)	Nat. (f)
1	Increasing the variety of elective courses in schools	33	0	4	0
2	Providing free meals and material support to disadvantaged students	2	1	36	0
3	Strengthening school rules, disciplinary measures, and dress codes.	2	32	3	2
4	Increasing national holidays, history, and civic awareness activities	0	9	0	31
5	Allowing students to choose between different school types or programs	30	0	4	0
6	Implementing additional support programs to reduce achievement gaps	14	1	25	0
7	Organizing activities that strengthen traditional values and family participation in schools	0	29	2	10
8	Emphasizing content that supports mother tongue, common culture, and national identity	1	3	2	28
9	Increasing teacher, student, and parent participation in school management	9	10	15	4
10	Rewarding students based on achievement and highlighting individual performance	27	2	3	1
11	Supporting schools in rural or low-income areas with public resources	5	0	31	1

No.	School Policies	Lib. (f)	Con. (f)	Soc. (f)	Nat. (f)
12	Expanding school ceremonies, symbols, and practices that strengthen a sense of shared belonging	0	11	1	27
Total		123	98	126	104

Note. Lib. = liberalism; Con. = conservatism; Soc. = socialism; Nat. = nationalism. Participants could associate a single school policy with more than one ideology, and some policies were not evaluated. Therefore, row totals differ from the number of participants.

When Table 1 is examined, it is observed that school policies are not clustered around a single ideological domain; however, certain policies are more strongly associated with specific ideologies. Considering the total frequencies of the policy examples presented in the table, socialism emerged as the most frequently associated ideological orientation, with 126 participant evaluations. Liberalism showed a very close distribution, with 123 participant evaluations. Nationalism was represented with 104 evaluations, while conservatism was represented with 98.

Liberalism was particularly strongly associated with policies emphasizing individual choice, plurality of options, and performance orientation. The policy of “increasing the variety of elective courses in schools” was associated with liberalism by 33 participants. Similarly, “allowing students to choose between different school types or programs” was evaluated within liberalism by 30 participants, and “rewarding students based on achievement and highlighting individual performance” by 27 participants.

Socialism was prominent in policies related to social support, equality of opportunity, and redistribution of public resources. The policy of “providing free meals and material support to disadvantaged students” was associated with socialism by 36 participants, making it one of the most highly evaluated policies in the table. Likewise, “supporting schools in rural or low-income areas with public resources” was associated with socialism by 31 participants, and “implementing additional support programs to reduce achievement gaps” by 25 participants. These results indicate that policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities were associated by participants with the principles of the welfare state, public responsibility, and redistribution.

Within conservatism, policies emphasizing order, discipline, tradition, and family were prominent. The policy of “strengthening school rules, disciplinary measures, and dress codes” was associated with conservatism by 32 participants, making it the most frequently identified policy within this ideology. In addition, “organizing activities that strengthen traditional values and family participation in schools” was evaluated within conservatism by 29 participants. This finding is significant in showing that the school was perceived not only as an academic institution but also as a structure related to the transmission of norms, continuity of values, and preservation of social order.

Nationalism was particularly salient in policies involving national identity, common culture, historical memory, and symbolic belonging. The policy of “increasing national holidays, history, and civic awareness activities” was associated with nationalism by 31 participants. Similarly, “emphasizing content that supports mother tongue, common culture, and national identity” was associated with nationalism by 28 participants, and “expanding school ceremonies, symbols, and practices that strengthen a sense of shared belonging” by 27 participants.

Another noteworthy finding was that the policy of “increasing teacher, student, and parent participation in school management” displayed a more balanced ideological distribution compared to other policies. This policy was evaluated within socialism by 15 participants, conservatism by 10, liberalism by 9, and nationalism by 4. Thus, participatory governance was not confined to a single ideological category; rather, it was interpreted through different domains of meaning such as

democratic participation, community-based/local decision-making, parental involvement, and pluralism.

5.2. Ideological Justifications of School Policies

Under this heading, the rationales upon which participants based their ideological evaluations of school policies are addressed. It was determined that participants evaluated school policies through ideological principles such as individual freedom, the right to choose, equality of opportunity, social justice, solidarity, order, tradition, national identity, and cultural continuity. Figure 1 summarizes these findings.



Figure 1. Ideological justifications underlying school policies

It is observed that participants' views on the determination of school policies differed within the frameworks of four political ideologies (Figure 1): liberalism, socialism, conservatism, and nationalism. Views related to liberalism were shaped around individual freedom and rights, freedom of choice and preference, equality of opportunity based on talent and interest, and a competitive understanding that encourages achievement. Within the subtheme of individual freedom and rights, emphasis was placed on protecting students' fundamental rights, enabling them to express themselves freely, and recognizing individual differences in the school environment. Participants stated that school policies should be arranged in ways that allow students to express their opinions and participate in processes concerning themselves. Participant T12's statement, "I graduated from a vocational high school and studied child development. I did a one-year internship in a kindergarten. From what I observed there, liberalism was influential because individual differences were taken into account. For example, when we were going to carry out an activity, we would go and help children with special needs or disabilities," illustrates the importance attached to considering individual differences in school policies. In connection with individual rights, freedom of choice and preference also came to the fore. This included the right to make choices according to personal needs, to select among alternatives, and to participate in decisions concerning students themselves. T11's statement, "Being able to choose the courses we want in schools," supports this view. Participants also emphasized that students' talents and interests should be taken into account, relating equality of opportunity not only to providing the same opportunities for all students but also

to offering support tailored to their diverse characteristics. Liberal views also included elements of encouraging achievement, rewarding, and competition. T3's statement, "The teacher can use different teaching methods. Students can choose elective courses; thus, cognitive achievement may increase," supports this approach to promoting student achievement.

Participants' views related to socialism were shaped around the subthemes of equality and justice, solidarity and public support, social participation, support for disadvantaged students, and access to education. Within the subtheme of equality and justice, emphasis was placed on providing educational opportunities fairly to all students. Participants stated that economic, social, and educational differences among students should be reduced through school policies. In this context, equality of opportunity was associated not only with the right to access education but also with students' ability to obtain the support they need. Within the subtheme of solidarity and public support, it was expressed that the educational and social problems faced by students should not be considered solely within the scope of individual responsibility. Participants emphasized that schools and public institutions should provide the academic, economic, and social support students require. T4's statement, "Since I grew up in a village, I had to go to the district for high school. If the state had not provided transportation support, I would not be studying now. For those coming from village schools, transportation and meal support were very important," illustrates the necessity of public support in the educational process. Participants also emphasized that students should participate in decision

support provided should be differentiated according to students' individual and social circumstances. T20's statement, "When I was in primary school, clothing and financial support were provided to those whose economic situation was poor," supports this view of addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. It was also noted that access to education should not be dependent on students' economic means. T7's statement, "The state providing textbook support in schools or offering transportation services in rural areas to facilitate access to school," illustrates the necessity of public responsibility in ensuring access to education.

Participants' views related to conservatism were formed around the subthemes of social order and responsibility, discipline, values, traditional structure, cultural transmission, and cultural continuity. Within the subtheme of social order and responsibility, emphasis was placed on adherence to school rules, fulfillment of students' duties and responsibilities, and the maintenance of school life within a certain order. T23's statement, "In my environment, teachers were very disciplined and were people who ensured social order. They gave students strict, disciplined education. In doing so, they did not only teach lessons; they also took us outside to collect garbage to instill a sense of social responsibility," illustrates the importance attached to individual responsibility in maintaining school order. T30's statement, "Having lessons at specific times, banning smoking in high schools, and rules such as haircuts and shaving are necessary for students to adapt to society," shows that rules were considered necessary for social adaptation. Participants expressed that discipline was not merely a sanction restricting behavior in the school environment but also an element ensuring the orderly continuation of communal life. T36's statement, "We had to wear school uniforms and shave. A parent meeting was held about this at school. In this meeting, attended by teachers, students, and parents, a decision was made to use school uniforms," supports the view that rules and discipline were considered necessary for the functioning of the school. Within the subtheme of values and traditional structure, it was emphasized that the school is not only an institution providing academic knowledge but also one responsible for instilling social and moral values in students. T16's statement, "Events such as Nevruz were taught to students; thus, it was thought that values would be transmitted to future generations. There was the Loyalty Project. Students visited the schools and teachers from which they had received education," supports the role of traditional elements in the educational process. Cultural transmission and continuity were also among the elements associated with conservative school policies.

Participants' views related to nationalism were shaped around the subthemes of national identity and consciousness, national unity and solidarity, common language, common history,

common culture, historical and cultural heritage, and loyalty to the homeland. Within the subtheme of national identity and consciousness, emphasis was placed on students seeing themselves as members of the national community and developing national awareness. T21's statement, "If I were to give an example from my own school experiences, I would mention national holiday celebrations. In my school, the celebration of Republic Day on October 29 was a concrete example of raising awareness of national values," supports the role of the school in the formation of national consciousness. T34's statement, "I think nationalism is more dominant in our country and that this is correct. Celebrating our national holidays with enthusiasm instills national consciousness not only in students but in all citizens," also supports this view. Participants emphasized that schools should create a sense of common belonging among students and support social cohesion. T26's statement, "I would want nationalism to be increased and Turkish generations to be raised," illustrates the view that unity and solidarity should be reflected in school policies. It was emphasized that common language, common history, and common culture are effective in ensuring national unity and solidarity, and that national history and historical and cultural heritage should be transmitted to new generations. T35's statement, "History lessons taught since primary school can be associated with nationalism. Teaching history at all school levels enables students to understand who they are and how they should view the world," supports the importance of common heritage in the educational process. Finally, in views related to nationalism, elements of loyalty and attachment to the homeland gained importance; it was stated that school policies should contribute to students developing responsibility toward their country and a sense of belonging to the homeland.

6. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, which examined how prospective teachers interpret school policies within the framework of political ideologies, it was concluded that participants evaluated the policies in relation to liberalism, socialism, conservatism, and nationalism. The findings revealed that school policies were not assessed within a single ideological orientation; rather, depending on the purpose of the policy, the values it prioritized, and the rationales upon which it was grounded, they acquired different ideological meanings. This result demonstrates that the relationship participants established between school policies and political ideologies was neither linear nor one-dimensional. According to the findings, participants' interpretations of school policies varied according to the ideological orientation they adopted. In determining socially legitimate forms of knowledge, values, and understandings of identity. The findings of this study overlap with Apple's theoretical approach in showing that school policies can be interpreted on the basis of different, and in some cases even opposing, values. However, unlike studies that directly examine the values embedded in school policies, this research reveals the ideological rationales through which participants explained these policies.

Findings related to liberalism indicated that participants associated liberal school policies with principles such as individual freedom, the right to choose, consideration of talent and interest, achievement, reward, and competition. This finding corresponds with the emphasis placed on individual autonomy and freedom of choice in liberal thought. Participants' explanations concerning rights, freedoms, and individual development, as well as school choice, competition, and performance, suggest that they brought together within the same framework both the rights and autonomy dimension of classical liberalism and the choice and competition dimension of market liberalism [12, 13, 14, 15]. In the literature on school policies, school choice and competition are considered fundamental elements of market

[16] demonstrated that although school choice provides individuals with a domain of preference, different social classes do not benefit equally from this opportunity, and choice policies reproduce existing social advantages. In this study, however, practices based on the right to choose and achievement were more often evaluated as positive policy instruments supporting students' individual development. Therefore, while the findings on liberalism resemble the literature in terms of freedom and choice, they reflect only to a limited extent the critical dimension concerning the risk of choice opportunities reproducing inequalities. This difference indicates that participants

evaluated liberal policies primarily in terms of individual benefit and students' self - realization while focusing more narrowly on their social and class -based consequences.

Findings related to socialism highlighted equality, social justice, solidarity, public support, attention to disadvantaged students, and securing access to education as decisive themes. It was observed that participants did not interpret equality merely as providing the same practices to all students, but also in terms of supporting students according to their diverse circumstances. Participants' emphasis on public support and redistribution can be associated with the social democratic approach of reducing inequalities through democratic reforms and public interventions [22]. By contrast, Marx's approach, which addressed the problem of distribution together with relations of production, and Gramsci's analysis of hegemony in relation to education and cultural institutions, suggest that the structural and ideological dimensions of inequality were more limited in participants' explanations [20, 21]. This finding overlaps with the perspective that social justice in education should not be treated as a one -dimensional plural framework encompassing different conceptions of justice and social conditions [23]. Hart [24] argues that indicators such as educational resources, school enrollment, or academic achievement alone are insufficient to explain the injustices experienced by students; the freedoms students have to transform available opportunities into valued outcomes must also be considered. In this respect, participants' views on providing additional support to disadvantaged students reflect a needs-based conception of justice, distinct from the distributive conception of justice.

statements focused largely on the provision of support and fair distribution of opportunities, the literature also draws attention to broader structural processes that produce inequality.

Findings related to conservatism showed that order, discipline, responsibility, preservation of values, maintenance of traditional structures, and cultural transmission were associated by participants with conservative school policies. This result is consistent with the emphasis of conservative ideology on social continuity, authority, established values, and the preservation of order. Participants' emphasis on tradition, order, and cultural continuity overlaps with the importance placed in conservative thought on historical experience, tried practices, and the safeguarding of cultural heritage [17, 18]. In this respect, the findings demonstrate that conservatism was associated not only with authority and discipline but also with continuity and the preservation of cultural heritage. Oeschger et al. [36] noted that the Lehrplan 21 program in Switzerland represented a protective orientation composed of tradition, conformity, and security. This finding resembles the results of the present study regarding conservatism. At the same time, the same study revealed that an openness -to- change stimulation, was more dominant in the program. This indicates that educational programs are not composed solely of values based on protection or change, but that opposing orientations can coexist within the same educational system.

When the findings related to conservatism are evaluated together with those related to liberalism, it becomes evident that ideological combinations may emerge in school policies. Participants considered individual choice, competition, and achievement important on the one hand, and discipline, tradition, and value transmission on the other. Apple [19] emphasized that contemporary education policies are not determined solely by a single ideological approach; neoliberal orientations advocating market, competition, and performance can operate simultaneously with new conservative orientations emphasizing standards, authority, moral values, and traditional culture. In this study, although liberal and conservative elements were classified under separate ideologies, the fact that both were used to explain school policies overlaps with Apple's assessment that different ideological orientations can be simultaneously influential in education policies.

Findings related to nationalism identified national identity, common language, common history, cultural heritage, national unity, and loyalty to the homeland as fundamental determinants. Participants evaluated the school as an institution that creates a sense of common belonging among students and contributes to the transmission of national culture across generations. Participants'

emphasis on common language, history, cultural heritage, ceremonies, and symbols overlaps with modernist and ethno nationalist approaches that education in disseminating common culture, imagining the national community, and transmitting historical memory [25, 26, 27, 28]. In the Turkish context, the prominence of education, history, and cultural transmission resembles Arsal's view that national character can be transmitted across generations through education and literature [29]. Sant et al. [30], in their study conducted in England and Catalonia, showed that students defined themselves in different ways as members of various communities and as citizens, and that school activities contributed particularly to the formation of belonging to the school and peer groups. However, it was found that students did not directly associate school lessons with the formation of broader national or political identities. In the present study, participants' attribution of the function of producing national identity and cultural belonging to schools generally overlaps with the literature on the role of schools in identity formation, but reflects a more pronounced emphasis on national identity than the findings obtained from students in the same study.

On the other hand, Karakus discourses in the context of rising nationalism and increasing diversity, and found that official discourses in curricula and textbooks reproduced a monocultural national identity while largely ignoring existing diversity. In this study, participants' explanations of nationalism largely in terms of unity, common culture, and loyalty indicate that they focused on the integrative dimension of nationalist school policies. By contrast, Siebers [38] demonstrated that in higher education classrooms in the Netherlands with students from diverse migration backgrounds, ethno nationalist discourses could increase conflict and polarization, thereby disrupting the functioning of citizenship education. In this respect, while the findings of the present study highlight the role of nationalism in fostering a common identity, the critical literature underscores the potentially exclusionary consequences of national identity policies. The divergence between the findings and the literature indicates that school policies aimed at fostering common identity and cultural continuity should be evaluated together with the principles of pluralism, cultural diversity, and inclusiveness.

One of the significant findings of the study is that the same concept or school policy could be associated with different ideologies depending on the values and rationales upon which it was grounded. For example, equality was associated with liberalism when explained in terms of individual rights and access to opportunities, but with socialism when considered in the context of reducing social disparities and redistributing resources. Similarly, belonging was associated with liberalism when justified through individual participation and attachment to school, but with nationalism when explained in terms of common identity, national unity, and loyalty to the homeland. Indeed, Braun et al. [5] emphasized that policies are not directly transferred into the school environment but are re

the interpretations of different actors. The findings of this study likewise demonstrate that the ideological nature of a school policy cannot be determined solely by its visible content; the purpose of the policy, the values upon which it rests, and the rationales provided must also be taken into account.

The findings further revealed that participants were able to evaluate the relationship between education and politics through school policies. In Özdemir's [39] study conducted with prospective teachers, it was found that most participants regarded education as a political phenomenon, whereas the majority did not evaluate the teacher's role in the classroom as political, or believed that this role should not be political. In the present study, however, participants' ability to associate school policies with different political ideologies indicates that they possessed a certain awareness of the political and ideological dimension of education. At the same time, the fact that the same policy could be explained through different ideological rationales suggests that this awareness was not based on a fixed and immutable understanding of ideology, but was shaped by different values, social assumptions, and educational perspectives.

According to the results of the study, participants interpreted liberalism in terms of rights, autonomy, and choice; socialism in terms of equality, redistribution, and public responsibility; conservatism in terms of order, tradition, and continuity; and nationalism in terms of common culture, historical memory, and belonging. Nevertheless, the fact that the rationales related to each ideology contained different emphases and orientations indicates that ideologies are not closed and immutable doctrines, but rather patterns of meaning in which core concepts are structured within specific relationships [7]. This result demonstrates that the ideological nature of school policies should not be analyzed solely according to the type of policy, but through a combined evaluation of the values, purposes, and social consequences upon which the policy is based.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the study indicate that school policies should not be regarded merely as decisions taken at the level of implementation, but as regulations reflecting particular values and ideological orientations. Accordingly, in the development and evaluation of school policies, attention should be paid to the potential consequences of these policies in terms of freedom, equality, justice, order, identity, and cultural continuity. In particular, policies that expand individual choices may increase inequalities, while policies aimed at strengthening order, tradition, and national identity may have the potential to restrict diversity. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the same school policy could acquire different ideological meanings depending on the rationale upon which it was based. Therefore, policymakers and school administrators should focus not only on the visible content of a policy but also on the student, society, and educational perspective upon which it rests. Including the views of different stakeholders in policy development processes may contribute to reducing ideological one-sidedness and to making

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study are limited to the written views of prospective teachers enrolled in the Social Studies Teacher Education program at a single university. Collecting data through a written interview form restricted the possibility of deepening participants' explanations with instant follow-up questions. Nevertheless, the fact that participants justified both the policy examples presented to them and the practices they selected from real school life in ideological terms enabled a detailed examination of the meanings attributed to school policies. Future research could investigate how the ideological interpretation of school policies varies across different contexts by employing diverse participant groups, school types, and data sources.

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