

# Being a Student in a Village Primary School from an Ethnographic Perspective\*

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**Abstract:** This research examined the lifestyle of a typical village settlement and its reflection on the education of children in primary school and the meaning of being a child and student in the village from a sociological perspective. The research aimed to explore how village culture and experiences affect students' educational life in this context. This research was not the product of an external observation, but rather it was based on the impressions and experiences from a teacher's perspective. The ethnographic pattern was preferred because the research focused on examining children's life/learning process within the culture of a village and on the interpretation and reflection of the thoughts and behaviours presented by the people involved in this culture. Observations, participant observations, interviews, and focus group interviews were used in the data collection process. The study revealed that cultural understanding affects many areas. Students and the life experiences of the village have also deeply affected the status of being a student.

**Keywords:** Ethnography, village primary school, village culture, student

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## Introduction

Education is not a part of life but a collection of reflections of life. Education is the connection point of a process in which our culture, region, religious beliefs, family, and many other ways affect our lives. We need to consider these connection points to understand the contribution of education to the individual.

Being a student in the village can create a wide field for the researcher. The villages are the production areas and the centres of natural life; children are also raised as candidates to produce. This understanding of living by producing brings serious responsibilities and difficulties with it. Success is inevitable when the child reflects the struggle with the difficulties and responsibility in the learning process. It is not difficult to overcome the responsibilities in the classroom for the child who is relieved of the burden and tiredness of living conditions in family life at school. Studying and spending time in the classroom with the teacher and friends turn into an enjoyable situation.

Villages are alike. However, villages also have their own differences. There are similarities and differences in many issues such as food culture, customs, level of education, child perspective, and livelihoods. Education in the villages is directly related to whether or not some variables such as families, teachers, and school administrators fulfil their responsibilities. If the educational climate created by the responsible people is positive, the positive aspects of education in the village will increase accordingly. Apart from the individuals, village life also affects the educational climate. Children in the village spend their time in nature. They have the opportunity to observe how a plant grows, after which processes food is prepared and what kind of function animals have in our lives. According to Buyuksahin (2013), villages are the living spaces that provide opportunities to encounter scientific knowledge and events that a student can easily learn by doing. Children living in the village have the chance to observe all the life stages of plants and animals. Likewise, it is thought that the possibility of making more observations regarding the sky and vitality increase with no light and visual pollution. Tas (2010) also states that children who are intertwined with nature in rural areas have the opportunity to access data first-hand and learn by doing-living. Therefore, they have the opportunity to concretise concepts more easily and associate them with their lives.

When learning environments are designed to improve learners' thinking and problem-solving skills, students internalise information and acquire permanent knowledge by mentally understanding it instead of memorising it. What is required of the student is not stereotypical information. The students are asked to make original studies suitable for their real lives and be effective problem solvers in all areas of their lives (Demirel, 2011). The living environment must also be suitable for this situation to be problem-solving individuals. In general, it is known that there is no tradition in the villages children object to their elders or discuss a topic with them. The idea that children "can not understand everything" is dominant (Tas, 2010). Education in such an environment

has negative reflections on the school, classroom culture, and the child's personal development. According to Ece (2012), children reflect their experiences in their culture and environment to their classroom environment. In rural areas, children are more likely to face fear and unfair criticism. At the same time, they are considered "family workers". They may not be sent to school with the understanding of "So, what will happen after studying?" after completing their compulsory education.

### **Purpose of research**

In this research, the lifestyle of a typical village settlement and its cultural understanding's reflection on children's education in a primary school and the meaning of being a child and a student in the village were examined from a sociological perspective. In this context, the research aimed to explore how village culture and experiences in this culture affect students' educational life. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How is the effect of village culture on students?
2. What are the reflections of being a student in village culture on the educational process?
3. How is the effect of village culture on classroom and school culture?
4. What does being a student in the village mean for parents?
5. How is being a student in the village in different seasons?

## **Method**

### **Design of Research**

This study was designed as an ethnographic research, one of the qualitative research methods. The reason for this preference was to analyse the cultural structure of the village and examine and understand its reflection on the education life of children in more depth. In other words, the research focused on examining children's life/learning process in a village culture and the understanding or interpretation of the thoughts and behaviours demonstrated by the people in this context.

We can define qualitative research, an umbrella concept incorporating many concepts, as a study in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events realistically and holistically in the natural environment. Qualitative research is an approach that prioritises researching and understanding social phenomena within their environment (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). Ethnography is a social research tradition that deals with the way-procedures that organise the daily

lives of individuals forming a target social group from the perspective of the group members (cultural members); it is a cultural analysis that approaches culture as a whole. Ethnography follows certain procedures to capture the meanings of cultural members, some of which relate to how the ethnographer as an individual is perceived by local people and can control their own cultural inclinations. Ethnography is a research method and discipline that brings a different understanding of humanity's social life (Yahsi, 2016, p. 203).

Ethnography tries to understand the culture from the perspectives of the people or society present. What the participants think, the materials they use, their beliefs and actions constitute the basic topics of ethnography (Hatch, 2002). "By its very nature, culture is ambiguous and can not be measured with standardised data tools. It is observed, experienced and felt. For this reason, a researcher who conducts research with a cultural analysis approach should stay in the field for a long time and go through an intense data collection process in order to understand the culture in which he/she works and the effects of this culture on individuals or groups in detail" (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013, p.77).

## **Participants**

The research participants consisted of the students studying/had studied in a village primary school, the teachers currently working in the school, the school staff and the village people. The participants were thoroughly introduced in subheadings. Ethically, pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names except the researcher/participant's.

### ***Students***

The research aimed to examine the village's culture in depth and detail in a certain period. The basis of the study group was formed of all the students in the village's primary school. In addition, fifth-grade students who had graduated from the same school during the research process were also included as participants. The primary school, which consisted of combined classes, had 3 teachers, one of whom was a kindergarten teacher and two of whom were primary school teachers. The school had 37 students, 12 of whom were kindergarten, 8 first grade, 4 second grade, 6 third grade, and 7 fourth grade students. The total number of students with graduates was 45.

It was found important to get to know the students better to understand the village being researched. The students who stood out among all the students were considered separately at each grade level. Two students were the leading students of the first grade. Arif was a leader among the other students in the classroom with his success in his lessons. His leadership in the classroom was also reflecting outside the classroom. During breaks, the rules of the games and the situations were determined, e.g. who made which mistake and who won. While making these decisions, he sometimes

received support from the second leader named Halil because Halil stood out with his language skills. Having even more knowledge of vocabulary than many middle-class students made him a natural leader.

Looking at the second grade, a student named Esra stood out. She had already established herself among her friends. Because the first and second-year students were in the same class, the first-year students also took Esra as a role model. Esra, supported by her family to continue her education, had secondary, high school and university goals in the future. Esra's mother was the most effective person to encourage Esra to achieve her goals. Her mother was one of the rare people in the village who wanted their children to get an education. When Esra's parents agreed on this subject, the child's success at that point on was supported by the family. The family, who were aware that school success was more important than many subjects in life, did not pay attention to the villagers' words, "So what if your kids go on their education?". The family's leadership in the village effectively made Esra, a family member of her class, a leader.

Suna and Seyda drew attention among the third-grade students. The harmony between these two friends was effective in the decisions made inside and outside the classroom. Suna and Seyda, the most active buddies among their friends, were also successful in their classes. Suna was more successful in social lessons, while Seyda was more successful in math and science lessons. Both students put great effort into all tasks assigned by their teachers, from the simplest to the most complex. Seyda had difficulty attending the classes. She was the one with the most absences among third-grade students. Despite Suna's success in her classes, she had a family who tended not to send their daughters to school. Her older sister, who graduated from primary school last year, continued to secondary school due to the intense efforts of her primary school teachers. It was observed that this situation increased Suna's attention and willingness in her classes compared to the previous year.

Among the fourth grade students, a student named Akif came to the fore. Akif was one of the students who were not liked among his peers with his talkative nature. However, he drew attention with his ability to express himself both inside and outside the classroom. It was perceived as "spoiled, useless, etc." by the village people. However, the situation was different for the teacher. His teacher had a positive perception about his student by saying, *"The most enthusiastic student in my classes always asks me questions and sometimes exhibits undesirable behaviours, but is interested in the lesson when the lesson needs attention"*. It was thought that the family conditions might be effective in the difference between the school profile and the village profile. While almost every child in the village had 7-8 siblings, Ismail had no siblings. Ismail was not cared for by his mother or father but by his grandfather. The student exhibited behaviours that tended to attract attention in the village. It was thought that he tried to overcome his loneliness in this way. Despite all these negative accusations, he was a self-confident student. He said that he wanted to be a good soldier in the future and that he wanted to fight those who wanted to harm our country.

The kindergarten students were in a gap due to the students who moved to the first grade. The fact that all students in the leading position received education in the first grade might have caused the kindergarten students to be upset. The crowded kindergarten class displayed a calmer profile with fewer students during the period of the research. Among these students, a student named Ahmet stood out in the classroom. This student was the younger brother of the student named Esra mentioned in the second grade. The reflections of Esra and her family's understanding of education were also valid for Ahmet.

### *Teachers*

There were three teachers in the primary school of the village, which was the subject of research. Two of these teachers were classroom teachers, and one was a kindergarten teacher. The first workplace of all the three teachers was the village where the research was conducted. They had previously done teaching through teaching practices and paid teaching experiences for short periods. However, they all stated that they had started their teaching profession in their searched village. The experiences of other village teachers in the related literature were similar to the teachers' in this research (Bayindir, 2007; Bilir, 2008; Garan, 2005; Gulder, 2007; Sidekli & others, 2015; Yildiz, 2011).

Cemal, the kindergarten teacher, was in his second year of teaching. Cemal teacher, whose first place of work was the researched village, also carried out the duty of the authorised principal of the school. In this duty, he sometimes experienced difficulties. However, he stated that not having someone superior to him in the workplace relieved him, and he was pleased to perform his duty because he did not feel any pressure. At the same time, he stated that he had difficulties in having a big responsibility, and he was happy in this profession because he loved children so much; otherwise it would not be worth enduring it. Cemal teacher, who had a peaceful personality, was concerned with his students. He tried to help the students of all the classes, not only his own class. He said that he was strict from time to time because of his position to keep control. He thought it was important for the students to have somebody they could be intimidated by at school.

Songul, the third and fourth graders' teacher, was appointed to the village, which was also her first place of work. Songul was faced with various stress factors because it was her first year of teaching. She was interested in her students overcoming these problems and made significant contributions to the quality of education in the school. She had various problems in her classroom related to a paid teacher's employment in the previous year's class. The fact that the paid teacher who worked last year was not a primary teacher had reduced the quality of the education in this class. Songul teacher was working hard with the students to turn this failure into a success. However, her desire to immediately get the students' feedback, which resulted from being unfamiliar with the village culture, caused her motivation to reduce. She expressed that she could not find professional satisfaction in her job of teaching as she wanted.

### ***School Staff***

At least one employee was assigned to the school every year in cooperation with the Turkish Employment Agency and the municipality. This employee was changed each year. After the preliminary applications of the assigned persons were received, their duties were determined by the municipality. The cooperation of the National Education Directorate of the District and the municipality would care for the employees.

Two employees were working at the school. One of these employees, Mr Emre, cleaned and maintained the school, burned the stove, and performed various other duties assigned by the authorised principal/teacher for nearly a year. Mr Emre was the father of 7 children and was born in 1961. Only one of his children had a university education. His son was currently working in a private bank in the district centre. This situation was a source of pride for Mr Emre. Mr Emre was praised and respected by the villagers. Mr Emre added value to his existing position by having his son educated, positively affecting his village position. In addition, Mr Emre had 74 sheep. He took care of his animals in the times he left his job.

Mr Burhan was the second person employed at the school by the Turkish Employment Agency's quota. What made Mr Burhan stand out in the village was the profile of a father who got his daughters to get an education. When education was discussed in various interviews with the villagers, a separate parenthesis was opened, especially for Mr Burhan. He was one of the fathers of the two families who was the most eager to get their children to get an education in the village. His children were mentioned with success, e.g. 'student of the month' and 'the school's top student' in the schools of the district centre. With his daughters, who gave great importance to their lessons, he instilled hope for the rise of education in the village.

### **Village and Village People**

The village where the research was conducted was in the district of Ercis in the province of Van in Turkey and was eight kilometres from Ercis. The village was a typical Eastern Anatolian village. The most important source of income in the village was sheep and goat breeding. In addition to animal husbandry, livestock-based agriculture was carried out. Besides, the fathers of families who could not live with animal husbandry earned their living by working in big cities as construction workers. The researched village was used as a village where Armenian and Kurdish citizens originating from the Ottomans lived together before the Relocation Law. As a result of the migration of Armenians from the village, the population lost its village feature. While the village was used as the plateau of another village 50-60 years ago, settlements started over time and first became a hamlet. With the increase in settlement and population, it regained its village character.

The village consisted of 40 households. The number of households and families were not equal. More than one family lived in a household. However, there were also families living in a house as a nuclear family. Adult males of families generally worked in big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Bursa. Mothers were engaged in livestock and agriculture in the village. The men of the families who lived as nuclear families lived in the village. These families were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry more intensely. There were no households in the village that did not have sheep or cattle. The elders of families were sending their young sons to work in big cities. The earnings obtained there was sent to the father of the family.

### **The Researchers' Role**

The first author was also the first and second-grade teacher at the primary school in the researched culture. The researcher/teacher, whose first workplace was the researched village, had been in this culture for 4 years. His good communication with the village people contributed positively to the research. The role of the teacher also contributed to the role of the researcher in applying data collection methods such as observation, participant observation, interview, and focus group interviews. The second author guided the first author in cases such as the correct application of qualitative research methods, ethical rules in the field, and the ethnographic design to the research. She tried to ensure the maturation of the study by reflecting her qualitative research experience to the study. Both authors kept in touch and contributed to the research in reflecting and interpreting the collected data throughout the process. The second author did the translation of the English text of the research.

### **Data Collection Tools**

"The most common data collection tools in qualitative research are interviews, focus group meetings, observations, and document analysis. There are a variety of dimensions and strategies that need to be considered in using these methods. It is quite common to use multiple data collection tools together in many qualitative studies. The researcher can include more than one method to answer the research questions, taking into account the pros and cons of data collection methods. In this way, the limitations of one data collection method are overcome by another data collection method. The limitations of more than one data collection method in the same study are overcome by another. The use of more than one data collection method in the same research is called 'data triangulation' (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013, p. 97). Ethnography reveals the cultural structure of society by discovering it and explains this structure in a meaningful way. During field studies, ethnographers must follow certain principles to achieve these goals (Yahsi, 2016). Participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews were used in this ethnographic study considering the stated principles. At the same time, data were collected through field notes kept during observations and interviews.

## ***Observations***

Observations were mostly used as a data collection method in the research. Observation is a data collection tool commonly used in qualitative research. First-hand access to data is the strongest feature of observation. Especially the presence of doubts such as “Does the data in the interview reflect the truth?” as a result of the data obtained through the interview method, brings the observation method to the fore (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013).

Observing human behaviour in its natural environment is a prerequisite for these behaviours to be examined. Human behaviours examined in a culture different from their natural environment cannot reflect the reality exactly (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013, p.200). For this, it is important that the natural environment does not change during observation, and the signs desired to be observed are not affected by observation. There is the advantage of collecting more unbiased data. The observer should take precautions in advance to avoid spoiling the natural environment during observation (Karasar, 2009).

## ***Participant Observations***

Participant observations are the most important way to gather information. During the participant observations, the researcher pays attention to what the participants say, what they do, and the individual participation order to capture the local meanings specific to the participants. For this reason, the ethnographer needs to demonstrate culturally accepted behaviours in their interactions with the members to participate in the activities of cultural members. (Yahsi, 2016). Otherwise, the members may perceive them as unattractive or untrustworthy, which may lead to a perception that the questions become meaningless and the researcher is seen as an outsider.

Participant observation gives more information than external observation. In external observation, the events are tried to be predicted by the observer. This creates an environment for various errors. However, in participant observation, events can be understood in-depth and more valid (Karasar, 2009). “If we consider the concept of participant observer in more detail, here the researcher tries to enter and be a part of the culture or subculture of the subject he/she is studying. Field observation studies are seen almost identical with culture analysis (ethnography) studies that aim to identify a particular culture from its inside. Since the aim is to identify a particular culture from its inside, the researcher does not have any standard means of observation or interview. Instead of evaluating or finding evidence for one or more situations, the researcher will try to describe the culture or subculture in which he/she is working in as much detail as possible. In this definition; language, customs and traditions, values, religious ceremonies, written and unwritten rules and laws are included. Often this requires the researcher to enter the culture in which he or she is working, that is, to be a ‘participant observer’” (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013, p. 201).

The researcher had been active for two years in the entire education process in the field. In addition, he made various observations in many areas of life in the village, from weddings to feasts and funeral ceremonies. During the research, he responded to the villagers' dinner and tea invitations. He held parents' meetings and visited parents about the general situation of the students. In addition, he deliberately visited the coffee houses that the villagers went to in the district centre and made purposeful conversations and focus group discussions. All these experiences provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe the cultural structure of the village and the general attitudes and behaviours of the students in all detail in their natural environment. It was thought that this situation would also facilitate the researcher, who had become a part of the natural environment, to minimise the negativities of the observer effect. Whether the observer effect disturbed the natural environment observation or not was identified by being in the same places many times.

### *Interviews*

"The opportunity of providing in-depth knowledge of ethnography as a deepened extension of field research is based on the participation and observation of the researcher. However, this involvement and observation should be carried out not by asking questions created by the imposition of a particular point of view but by allowing the local culture to express itself including the open-ended and unrestricted field of the researcher. The researcher, who uses ethnography as a way and method of getting information, giving his interlocutor a chance to express himself, and bringing different cultures into dialogue, is not only an observer looking at the research universe from the outside, but also an actor of that field, perhaps a transformed person under the influence of that field" (Durna ve Durna, 2015, p.104).

The researcher carried out the study in the flow of the natural environment in the field. Besides being a researcher, being a teacher of the village culture made it easier for the research environment to be more realistically examined by the researcher. Interviews were sometimes done with a family providing care for the sheep, sometimes with a parent who came to school, and sometimes in a house in the village. The interviews were also held at regular intervals to confirm the observations. For example, observing during the break, the teacher tried to confirm the reality of what he understood in the next process by interviewing. The interviews were conducted in an environment where the students felt comfortable. For example, the teacher, who played football and volleyball with the students, provided them with the necessary environment, energy, willingness, and comfort to express themselves by interviewing after this friendly atmosphere.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

Human behaviour occurs at conscious and subconscious levels (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; in Ersoy, 2017). In their interaction of consciousness and subconsciousness, people's behaviours when alone and within the group are different.

While groups create their own normative patterns, they also represent the culture and value system within the group. Groups are more creative than individuals; they can solve problems faster. They can produce more options in a short time and save time. Multiple data are met at once. However, there are certain risks of the focus group interviews. The risk-sharing between groups can cause daring or bold statements and mislead the researcher. The group process, which is one of the biggest advantages of focus group interviews, brings along the most sensitive aspect of the method. If there is a difference in status and power among the participants, or if they always share the same environment, they may remain timid (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013).

In this study, the researcher who conducted focus group interviews could notice the influence and pressure of those in the top position in the village on the other individuals (such as the head of the village, the imam, and the teacher). An area with people who have a say in the village, such as the headman and imam, can prepare an environment for other individuals to become listeners. The researcher grouped the interviewees from similar or equal status individuals of similar ages to prevent this. The purpose of the researcher was to minimise this sensitive aspect of the focus group discussion.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Long-term interaction, in depth-focused data collection, triangulation, and participant verification were used to ensure the validity of the research. A long time was spent in the field to ensure validity in the research process. The interaction of the researcher/teacher with the village culture increased because he served as the principal/authorised teacher in the last year of the research. As a result of the observations and interviews, the findings were shared with the school teachers and feedback was received from them. In addition, the data obtained through the observations were tried to be confirmed by the interviews. Consistency was taken into account to ensure reliability. For this purpose, it was referred to as consistency analysis.

## **Findings and Interpretation**

### **Being a child and a student in the village**

In the village culture studied, the children were generally not given the value they deserved. Although there were many reasons for this, the most important reason was the high number of children in the family. Children were forgotten in the crowd, and the children who wanted to remind themselves tried to attract attention with their unwanted behaviours. The parents who wanted to prevent this situation chose to educate their children with pressure and fear. In the researched village culture, the mother could not meet the needs of all her children. The high number of children usually meant that they were left alone and their needs were not cared for in the family. This situation harmed the self-development of children who were left alone in the

crowd. The children who couldn't go after something they were curious about or could not get answers to their questions had a loss of self-confidence. There were not many people around to answer or appreciate the questions raised by children. This opened the way for the children to stop asking questions or wondering.

Most of the students were happy to be students at the village school. They expressed that the school made them happy for different reasons. It was observed that the third and fourth-grade students generally had thoughts that prioritised the teachers. For example, Seher, a third-grade student; *"The teachers teach and explain well, they write little, I love the village school, why; because the teachers here are very good."* Another third-grade student, Fatma, stated that she was happy to be a student at the village school as follows: *"Yes because we receive a good education, we tell our teacher what we do not understand. The teachers here are very good, we can express our opinions well, and we are very happy in this school."*

Being a student in the village strengthens the bond between students and their families and allows them to spend more time in their family environment. So, the students felt safe in such an environment. The fact that they could go to their families during lunch break, spend time with them and come to school also supported this trusting atmosphere. In addition, they saw the school as their home, as they were not in very crowded classrooms and crowded environments. It was observed that the children felt freer at school, while the parents at home behaved in a repressive way towards their children. Being students in the village with the opportunities provided by living in the village enabled the students to gain a more creative identity. Even though impossibilities surrounded the students, they would not stop thinking creatively/original.

The impossibilities in the village improved the creative thinking ability of certain students and prepared the groundwork for many students to develop themselves in this field. The researcher/teacher noticed that one of his students was writing with a clothespin in the class. Although the pen became shorter as it was used, the student chose to find a solution because he did not have any other pen. Since the student could not hold his small pen and write, he used a clothespin he brought from home as a tool to hold the pen. He managed to use the clothespin for its production purpose. Since they were students in the village, they could not get what they wanted instantly. As soon as they said, *"I want a pen"*, they could not have a pen immediately. They had to wait for days till it was gotten for them. Since the families did not care, they returned by forgetting to get it every time they went to the district centre. So the students took care of themselves, finding out a way for the solution of such problems. At the same time, the fact that everything the students wanted was not realised instantly prepared the ground for their transformation into a patient character. Since the students lived in village facilities, their toys were limited. For this reason, the kindergarten students came to school very eagerly with the dream of being able to play with the toys in their classrooms.

Being a student in the village provided many opportunities to observe the seasons and nature. The first-grade students examined how the birds came to and left their nest

from the school garden, what the mother bird did when it wanted to feed its offspring, and what sounds the offspring made. As a result of the observations made by the students during a break, the students came to the researcher/teacher very excitedly and said, "Teacher, we have a surprise for you, close your eyes." After the students asked the teacher to open his eyes, they explained what happened in the nest on the tree. Some students were very sensitive about animal love. All the students adopted a dog that came to the school garden. This ownership of the students was only in terms of nurturing and loving. In other words, none of the children had the mentality of taking animals home and looking after them there. They looked at the researcher/teacher strangely, who deliberately asked, "Who wants to feed it at home?" Because the understanding that living things should not be at home but outside in nature was adopted from a young age.

### The Role and Effect of Parents on Children in the Village

In the researched village culture, the mother was primarily responsible for the children in the family. Since the mother devoted most of her time to her children, she interacted most with the child. In shaping the family culture in the village culture, the mother's background and her attitude towards the traditional understanding of the village culture were also very important, especially for girls' future education. It was understood from the interviews that how influential a mother living in the researched village and having three girls out of her five children could be on the family culture. The mother expressed herself as follows:

My husband is willing to send our children to school but not as much as I do. Sometimes the men of the village affect my husband so much that we feel we are under a lot of pressure. We have been offended with my husband for days due to these reasons. It is difficult to live in the village. The other day, I went to Ercis to stay with my brother because he was going to be staying at the hospital. Whoever I knew stopped me and said, "What are you doing in Ercis alone? Where is your husband?" You wanna say, "What is your concern?" In the first years of my marriage, I almost got crazy because of this. I thought I was going crazy then. Thank goodness for today.

This mother also mentioned that she took care of her children closely. She was happy to have sent a son to a big city for his university education. For this reason, she would have her daughters get an education in the same way. The interviewed mother did not think and act according to the village's traditional understanding, which also caused the family to be perceived differently. As the mother stated in this interview, their family was one of the families with the most difficulty in the village culture. The most respected family in the village was also the same family that had experienced these difficulties. There were certain stereotypes in the village culture that everyone knew to be wrong, but no one could oppose them because they had become traditional.

While families made their own decisions at the point of primary education of their daughters, when they reached the secondary education and university level, the stereotypes of the village culture damaged the educational understanding of the family. Living with this understanding, the village and the family in the village gradually came

to the point that they did not care about girls' education. This might pave the way for understanding whether or not girls' attendance at school was not important. The point of view of education having a cross-sectional understanding rather than continuity, and the thought that *"Education will stop somewhere and it will not continue"* constituted an obstacle for girls to care about school and education. Furthermore, since girls would marry and be included in another family prevented their education from being cared for. The opinion of a father from the village summarised how the education of the female child was viewed in the village culture; *"What will happen if they go to school, teacher? You will spend that much money, and she is gonna get married anyway, someone else (her husband) will spend their money."*

Every variable in the village and family culture was a factor that affected being a student in the village. In the village culture, the father influenced many points, from the village's culture to being a student in the village. The father was the most respected and feared person in the house. Mothers scared their children through the father profile, and children were intimidated and disciplined through their fathers. The father spent little time at home. In some families, the father stayed at home for only 15-20 days a year. Fathers in the researched culture; could be evaluated in two groups as "the fathers who live in the village and earn their family's livelihood with village resources" and "the fathers who earn their living by working in big cities". In addition, some fathers did not fit into the general father profile in the village culture.

The father, who lived in the village, played the leading role in providing for all the family's needs. When the child needed something, the father was first told to get it since there were no stationeries or bookshops near. If the father said, *"Okay, my child, I will buy it"*, the child's need for class materials was met. If the father did not care about meeting his child's school needs, the student always faced negativity at school. For example, the student admired the other students with crayons in school and felt incomplete.

In the culture studied, when the father had a negative perception of education, the most important person that could change this understanding was the mother of the home. If the mother cared about their children's education, the father could also change his attitude accordingly. When families who cared about their children's education were observed, it was understood that the mothers were the most willing and that the fathers also prepared the necessary environment for taking a step in that direction. The father could also act differently in supplying the educational materials. While meeting the student's needs such as notebook, pencil, sharpener, and eraser, he would not meet the student's expectations as he did not consider the needs such as drawing book, dry paint, crayons, and aprons as important. Since children were aware that they lived in a male-dominated culture, they thought that *"If Dad said no, it is no."* and did not mind in time that their needs arising from being a student were not met.

The researcher/teacher who stated that the two sibling students did not have a notebook by sending a text message to the father expressed his face-to-face interview with him as follows:

I said, "Your daughter don't have a notebook, could you get it for her?" He said, "Okay, no problem, when I go to the market, I'll get it." He had also a brand-new transit type vehicle, I said, "Blessings, use it in good days." for his vehicle. That's to say; the father's economic situation was good. If he could buy a car, I thought he could buy a notebook as well. Several weeks passed after this talk, my student still had no notebooks. I met her notebook need by photocopying the notebook from the photocopy machine in our class. I said to the student, "Your father might have forgotten, tell him to get your notebook." When I asked why he did not get it next day, she said he could not get it because he had no money. When I asked who told her that, she said that her father did.

As understood from student-teacher and parent-teacher interviews, fathers sometimes did not treat their children honestly. It was understood that the fathers reflected the understanding that a notebook was very expensive and could not be purchased. Although the teacher had waited two months by making photocopies to meet the notebook need, he finally found the solution of buying the notebook for the students himself.

Kazim, who had an important place in the researched village culture, told the researcher/teacher that his daughter would be taken on a trip to Istanbul and Canakkale by the school and stated that he was very happy. He said that the six most successful students from Ercis were chosen to go on this trip. While one of his daughters attended primary school in the village, two attended middle school and high school. It was stated that they were among the most successful students in their schools. In the researched village culture, Kazim met all the needs of his children regarding their education. Mr Kazim and his family's perspective on education had changed with various experiences. In this change, Mr Kazim's work in various cities and his experience of various environments had an important effect. However, most importantly, it was understood from the interviews that his wife's full support on this issue was also effective. Against all odds, girls' education was unusually continuing at home, and the parents stated that "We will get them educated as far as they go on". However, the male child's education was interrupted because he took care of the sheep and goats. He stated that due to his father's work in other cities, from time to time, trying to fulfil the father's responsibilities in the village caused disruptions in his education. However, since they were a family that did not employ girls in such jobs and with girls' being very successful, their education went on.

In the culture studied, the grandfather usually took the responsibility of children whose fathers went to work in big cities. If the mother and father were young, the mother and children began to live in the patriarchal family system because the father could not be at home. This crowded environment caused problems in providing children with the necessary environment for studying due to the need for heating and insufficient rooms. In this case, if the number of children under the age of primary school students was higher, the possibility of providing an environment for the child to study decreased.

However, since there were more older students than the students themselves contributed to conscious behaviours in the village and their school success. The people who helped students with their school responsibilities were usually aunts. Since these people were young and went through a certain educational process, they could increase students' interest in school.

In the village culture, inviting the teacher home had become a tradition. The researcher/teacher had the opportunity to visit the homes of families whose children were students at the village primary school within four years. During each family visit, he held interviews considering the success and abilities of the children. He emphasised what could be done for the children to continue their education by informing the parents about their success and abilities. It was observed that the biggest obstacle of being a student in the village was the understandings that stuck to the tradition.

The parents were willing to interrupt, especially their daughters' education. The difficulty of living in the village culture made student life difficult for girls. The researcher/teacher responded to the invitation to a house in the village with two other teachers. Meanwhile, the father said, *"I am working hard for my children, I spend a lot of money, but if they do not study at all, they have better not go to school"*. The father said that he did not want to send his daughters to school because of their low academic performance in class. The mother was the student of the researcher/teacher from the literacy course. However, in the mothers' interview, there were academic success and other situations as reasons. The mother wanted her children to continue their education. The researcher/teacher knew that their children's academic performance was low. He was able to teach their daughter how to read and write with the first grades by taking her to his class a year ago, even though she was in an intermediate class. The family's fourth-grade daughter learned to read and write in the previous year. The researcher/teacher tried to ensure that this child was sent to secondary school, taking into account the important situations in the village culture. Since the father's education level and his perspective on girls' education were known before, an interview was provided based on the father's issues. The researcher/teacher, in his interview with the father, said:

Brother, if they finished school last year being illiterate, there would be a difference between the people who would come to ask your daughter's hand for marriage and the people who would do this when she knew how to read and write. If your daughter is a high school graduate tomorrow, the person who will come will be an even more qualified person. If you want your daughters to have a better life, at least don't talk like you're going to interrupt their education. Look, she can hear what you say outside and how can she be confident if you talk like that? It would be more effective if you say "girls, you can do it, you can be successful" If you talk to your daughters and say, "My daughters, I will always help you, just study", your daughters' view of the school and the teacher in the village changes according to it. Don't talk about what you can't do all the time, and talk about what you can do. Now you cannot help your daughters' lessons because you don't know. Don't let it be this way so that your daughters can help their own children. Maybe your daughters will not be very successful, but your grandchildren will be. If you don't send these girls to school, you're not just getting your daughters uneducated, but also your unborn grandchildren.

The researcher/teacher was in constant contact with the mother because she came to school for the literacy course. The mother who developed an attitude that complained about the father of children who did not want to get their children to be educated felt helpless.

## Being a Student in Village Primary School in Different Seasons

The meaning of being a student in the village primary school differed every season depending on many variables. The changes in the seasons had a reflection on almost every area of the village primary school. They affected many situations, from the quality of the education provided, the student's attendance to transportation.

### *Summer*

With the arrival of summer, the workload of the people in the village increased. Due to the increase in the workload, students also had some duties. This situation increased the number of students who did not attend school. Families gave responsibility to their children regardless of age. Some students were not sent to school because of their domestic responsibilities, while some were not sent to help their families, especially those dealing with agriculture and livestock. The researcher/teacher visited a family on 06.01.2018 to give the literacy certificate of the parent who attended the literacy course. He went nearby the family and observed them while milking their sheep in the barn with their children. While one child was holding the sheep, the mother was milking it, and the other child was catching and preparing the sheep to be milked. The father, on the other hand, was seen meeting the various care needs of the sheep. Mother said, *"haven't sat since morning, teacher, the work of the villager is never finished"*.

In the dialogue between the student and the researcher/teacher, the researcher/teacher asked the student, *"school or dealing with beautiful sheep?"*. The student answered *"school"*. As seen in the conversation with the student, the student wanted to come to school more. As observed during the family visit, the summer increased students' responsibilities. This situation prevented students' attendance in school. In addition, students found many opportunities to play games in the summer. Students had the opportunity to spend more time outside as the weather got warmer, and the daytime got longer. As soon as the families responsibility to their children was over, the children gathered in certain areas in the village where they played. Spending excessive time outside the home caused a decrease in the academic performance of some students. Students who fully fulfilled their teaching and school responsibilities in winter were not affected by this situation. However, students who performed less in lessons and school responsibilities during winter were disconnected from the class and school with the arrival of summer. Another reason for this was that families spent their days dealing with various jobs at home, the field, the pasture, and the barn, which created another obstacle for their children's education. The possibility of families' following the friendship relations, lessons, social needs and expectations of their

children could also become even more impossible in the summer because the number of their children was quite high. When these situations came together, it became difficult for the students to feel like students in the summer. Because they had more responsibilities in their lives outside of school constituted an obstacle to the responsibilities they should take as a student.

In the interview with a fourth-grade child from another family, *“what do you think it means to be a child?”*. With the effect of the summer months, he gave the following answer to the question: *“Childhood is only going to sheep. I don’t want to be a child. I want to grow up. I want to have a house and a car. We go to the sheep with my grandfather every day, teacher”*. The student thought that being a child was equivalent to being a shepherd because he and his grandfather took care of the sheep, and he was in the village while his brothers were working as construction workers in big cities. The student saw this as a difficulty.

### ***Autumn***

In the autumn season, which is the beginning of school, the school’s physical needs attracted attention as the most struggling times for teachers. The school employee who was assigned with the appointment of Iskur from the Ercis Municipality quota did not start to work in the first months of school. Therefore, teachers cleaned the school and the burnt the stove, which was necessary for the heating. These conditions caused a loss of motivation, especially for a teacher who did not know about village life, and as a result, being a student in the village was affected the most.

Since autumn was the season when student-teacher and teacher-parent communication was the most intense, the teacher being more careful in this period created an environment for the students to adapt to the school and the teacher in the future. Therefore, the advantages of being a student in the village could be more felt by students. Focusing their attention or being directed to school became a precondition for future times to pass more efficiently. In this process, the teacher had the biggest duty. The teachers’ workload increased considerably since the first-grade teacher was also the second-grade teacher. The teachers’ good communication in this process was very effective in the students’ future lives. In the village primary school, this time was very important. It could be certain whether the students would take the teacher as a role model. The students watched the most different person in the village, the teacher, tried to understand, and exhibited imitating behaviours. If they were reinforced for taking the teacher as a role model in the first days of school, their families supported the changes in them. They benefited from this situation, which was integrated with the advantages of being a student in the village. The basis of this understanding could also be formed in the kindergarten class. Besides, it was also very effective in the process of learning to read and write.

### *Winter*

In winter, the students' having little responsibility for agriculture and animal husbandry made it easier to focus on their education. When they went home, they could find time to study. Student-family interaction took place at its highest level in winter. As they spent more time at home, other family members could also spend more time at home. This created a large amount of time for the family to meet the child's needs and be concerned with their academic success. For a student who had a house far from the village school, it was very difficult to reach the school when the ground was covered with snow. Students could come to school in 15 minutes, but in 30 minutes due to the snow. The students who went home during the lunch break spent two hours walking between school and home. Considering these situations, being a student in the village was affected by seasonal conditions in the winter.

On the other hand, students learnt to deal with the difficulty in this way. They learnt to act together in solidarity with their friends and siblings between school and home. Struggling with difficult conditions contributed to students' lessons and the learning of many skills in life-related issues. For example, students spent winter without getting sick easily. Even if they were sick, they overcame the diseases in a short time without using any medication. Many situations perceived as difficulties for the students who adapted to difficult conditions could turn into a game and entertainment. Students were asked whether they were tired from the trip between school and home when it snowed. They described how they slid down slopes and that they had fun.

All three teachers working at the school lived in the district centre. They made daily trips to the village with shuttles. They sometimes faced difficulties in reaching the school in winter. Heavy snowfall caused the road to be closed. The time until the road was opened again prevented starting the lessons on time. This situation disrupted or negatively affected the teachers and the education. In addition, the road could be icy in the first hours of a winter day. This could cause various accidents. There were times when the teachers couldn't think of the lessons they would teach with students while trying to reach the school on the ice because they focused on going to and from school without any accidents. As a result, the following can be said that the village's students were the most affected group of students from the seasonal conditions in Turkey.

### *Spring*

Spring offered teachers an opportunity to teach with what nature had to offer. Teacher-student interactions that occurred outside of the classroom increased the connection between students and teachers. For example, they could have a visual arts lesson outside or have a science lesson by observing nature.

Since the teachers in the village felt the season, they tried to make also their students benefit from these situations. The researcher/teacher expressed the situation as follows:

Being a teacher in a village is like being a student in a village, feeling seasonal transitions. Besides, summer is lived like summer, winter like winter. You live each season by feeling it. Its air is clean. You feel the cleanness of the air you breathe. Exhaust smoke does not come to your nose, dirty air does not burn your throat. A fog of polluted air does not cover the top of where you live. Being a student or a teacher in the village is to spend the lunch break by reading a book under a tree. Nature is not far away. You are surrounded by nature even in the schoolyard.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The research examined every element in the village culture and its effect on the school culture. The focus of the lens was on the culture. Cultural understandings have an effect on the students and many other aspects. The life experiences and cultural accumulations of the researched village deeply affect the status of being a student. Some village cultures view being a student as an opportunity. In contrast, it brings many difficulties in some others. The researched village is also important because it holds many positive and negative situations in the cultures of the villages. Although the village's culture, which is eight kilometres away from Ercis district centre of Van, is in harmony with the general cultural understanding of the district to which it is affiliated, it contains differences in terms of its location and characteristics.

In the researched village culture, the mother was primarily responsible for the children in the family. However, when it came to taking care of the children's lessons, the responsibility was usually with the elder sisters or aunts. In the village culture, mothers had responsibilities related to livestock as well as home responsibilities. They helped their husbands in the care of animals. It was understood that the number of children was high in the culture studied and that they got married immediately after reaching the legal age of marriage. It was observed that there were situations where the mothers could not take responsibility for their children if they married before completing their maturity. If the mother used positive language about the village school at home, the child reflected the situation by being a student.

In village culture, the father was the most respected and feared person in the family. When the father had a negative perception of education in the culture studied, the mother was the most important person to change this understanding. When the families who cared about their children's education were observed, it was understood that the mothers were the most willing. They were also a source of resistance for fathers to stand up against traditional culture.

In parent-teacher meetings, parents expect the teacher to be angry with the student and to apply strict discipline. The village culture and the culture where the teachers received their undergraduate education clashed with each other. No matter how well the teachers taught, they had difficulty complying with the traditional understanding of education.

It was understood that one of the most important factors that shaped the meaning of being a student in the village was the teacher. The findings revealed that the perception of being a student in the village varied according to the attitudes and behaviours of teachers. According to the interviews with the students, it was observed that the teachers who could direct their interests, wishes and abilities and spent time with students were loved. The teachers who gave utmost importance to students' lessons emphasised that students should continue until the end of their education. If the teacher was able to place the understanding that "education is a basic need" in the village culture, the village school gained value; therefore, being a student in the village gained value. Although the financial savings of the people living in the researched village were enough, the living standard of their children was not equal to their financial savings. As a result, it was understood that the village culture's main situation was the lack of education. In the culture under study, money existed to be saved, not spent. This situation also affected the students. Students could feel worthless because their basic needs were not met or cared about enough. Students' perceptions of self-esteem and self-respect gave certain meanings to their understanding of being a student, which was another characteristic. The age-related perception of value caused the children to feel worthless and could never reach the value given to the elders who went to secondary and high school even if they were also students and learnt how to read and write.

Village culture imposed various responsibilities on the student. The high number of children in the same family obliged students to assist in the lessons of their siblings. Parents in the village culture were not interested in their children's school responsibilities, with some exceptions. This responsibility could turn into a repetition for the students, who helped their siblings, to recall some subjects. In the village culture studied, the students also had certain contributions to the home economy. In cases where the father could not stay at home due to working outside the village in big cities, the children's responsibilities on animal husbandry increased. Although the fathers lived in the village, the children were responsible for grazing the sheep or cattle. They also had responsibilities in the processes of animals' care, feeding, and milking. According to their culture, the students acted by thinking that they had to fulfil these responsibilities. The students acquired many vital knowledge and skills while fulfilling these responsibilities.

Life in the village culture turned into meaningful school life in terms of benefiting from the opportunities of being a good individual. It was understood that this situation could be a situation that fed, improved, and increased the advantages of being a student in the village. At the same time, the researched culture's refusal to invest in the future of a child's education and the low value given to the child could reflect negatively on the state of being a child. In conclusion, while the contribution of being a child in the village to being a student in the village had benefits in terms of responsibility and moral aspects, it could bring various difficulties in terms of students' educational future.

One of the most important gains of being a student in the village for many girls was to pave the way to reach school. The school in the village was perceived as a safe haven for the families. The families might not want to send their children to other educational institutions outside the village, showing people they 'did not know' as a reason. Since the school was in the village, the student also felt safe. Going to their families at lunch break, spending time with them, and coming to school supported this environment of trust. The fact that the village school was not crowded could make the students feel special.

Being a student in a village brings along a life surrounded by impossibilities. These impossibilities are not only valid for the students of this village; it is also true for many students in various parts of the world where village culture lags far behind modern culture (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Ericson & Shultz, 1981; Michaels, 1981; Heath, 1983). However, it was understood that the students developed various solutions to these impossibilities and exhibited inventions or creativity that supported their brain development in many areas. The students designed toys for themselves. Not fulfilling every request of the students instantly in the village culture made them patient.

Being a student in the village provided many opportunities to observe the seasons and nature. The students' feeling the seasonal transitions deeply to observe the nature offered many opportunities even from the school garden. It was understood that the students used the facilities in the village well and were generally successful in transferring the observations to their lessons.

The changes in the seasons were reflected in almost every area of the village primary school. The quality of education provided affected many situations, such as student attendance at school and transportation facilities. In the summer, the students took care of their younger siblings at home, agriculture, especially animal husbandry, apart from their school responsibilities. In the winter, the students spent more time at home, as well as other members of the family. This created a large amount of time for the family to meet the children's needs and be concerned with their academic success. For the students who had a house far from the village school, it was very difficult to reach the school when the ground was covered with snow. On the other hand, they learnt to deal with the difficulty in this way. They learnt to act together in solidarity with their friends and siblings between school and home. The students who adapted to the difficult conditions could also be stronger against difficulties related to their lessons. Being a student in the village in the spring season prepared many environments to be in touch with nature. It provided an opportunity for the teachers to teach their classes with what nature had to offer. Since teacher-student interactions occurred outside of the classroom, it increased the connection between them.

It was beneficial for students to go to school independently instead of transportation to develop a self-confident and courageous personality. The low number of students in the village school made the students feel more special. While the high number of children and the use of some homes by more than one family caused the students to be lost among the crowds at home, the situation could turn into an environment where

the children felt their own presence more. Although the small number of students in the village had benefits in terms of games and breaks, it caused the students to feel lonely while playing many games. They had difficulty finding friends that matched their interests and abilities. It could weaken the students' sense of cooperation and their individuality to come to the fore.

It was observed that the village culture shaped the content of the lessons and reflected what the students learned from it in their lessons. Students' working together, helpfulness, sense of responsibility, and curious attitudes and behaviours that followed their friends excessively stemmed from the influence of the village culture on the student and classroom culture. In addition, the students' examples, answers or questions in their lessons usually gained shape and content with what they learned from the village culture they lived in. However, what the students learned in the classroom culture did not integrate with their culture. According to the students living in the city, concepts studied in lessons and information needed in daily life were included in the textbooks. No matter the students did not want to leave the school after watching the world of the children who enthusiastically went to the zoo in an animation or cartoon, they eventually went home and performed their duty as a shepherd in the village culture that cared only for the economic value of animals. Although they frequently encountered concepts that were foreign to the village culture (e.g. traffic lights, medians, overpasses, and underpasses), they were unable to obtain satisfactory information from textbooks or their teacher and apply it to their lives (e.g. when they asked how animals could cross traffic light points).

The limitations experienced in other ethnographic studies are also partially valid for this study (Bilgili, 2016; Negis Isik, 2010; Ozoglu & Turan, 2015; Tas, 2010). The research is limited to the cultural structure of only one village. Researching rural areas may also cause various difficulties stated by some other researchers (Cakmak, 2005; Gunes, 2013; Ince, 2012; Ozdirek, 2011; Ozyurek, 2004; Yavas, 2007). The researcher's having the identity of the "teacher of the village" and at the same time being a student in a village primary school in his past educational life eliminated most of these limitations. This enabled the phenomenon "being a student in a village primary school" to be studied in depth with the perspectives of that culture from an ethnographical view.

The study revealed that cultural understandings affect many areas, students, and the life experiences of the village. It also deeply affect the status of being a student.

## Suggestions

With the cooperation of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, training can be given to families and students in villages. The way to the transition from primitive agriculture and animal husbandry to more professional ones can be paved. It can be ensured that a veterinarian and agricultural

engineer are brought together with the students at village primary schools at different times a month.

The pilot province implementation can be effective in the decisions made by the Ministry of National Education on many issues. The same implementation can be applied to village primary schools under the name of “pilot village”. In this way, village specialities can also be taken into account.

There is a need for an educational approach in which the students in villages can learn how to do agriculture and animal husbandry. Introducing the latest technology systems in gardening and animal husbandry to students may be more beneficial for students, their families, and the country’s economy.

Village life can be integrated with the education in the village. For this, a suitable coursebook and a teacher for the village can be selected. For example, students learn in their lessons the harms of tablet PCs which they have never used, perhaps never seen in their lives.

If the students in the village continue their education in the departments related to agriculture and animal husbandry within the scope of positive discrimination, offering additional points can make both students and parents more eager for education.

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