

School Choice and Institutional or Familial Habitus: Reciprocity in Parents-School Relationships

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Abstract : This paper explores the student intake policies in high-performing private schools in Iran by studying both sides involved in the school choice processes, parents and the school leaders. It is based on in-depth interviews with 27 parents and private schools' staff and principals supplemented by ethnographic observation in two private schools in Tehran. From the Bourdieusian point of view, this paper argues that the school leadership engineers the composition of private schools' students via different gatekeeping strategies, and these strategies represent and reconstruct the school's institutional habitus. It further explores the ways that parents who look for quality education among non-state education providers deal with the school's institutional habitus based on their familial habitus and possessed economic, social, and cultural capital. The conclusion highlights that investigating school choice as a reciprocal process between family and school leadership can shed more light on the ways that an exclusive environment has been created in some high-performing private schools for certain class strata maintaining a distance that needs to be kept from 'others.' In a broader sense, this paper engages into an exploration of social inequality reproduction through private education.

Keywords : institutional habitus, private education, school choice, social inequality, student intake

Conference Title : ICASE 2022 : International Conference on Advanced Sociology of Education

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 15-16, 2022