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ATINER's Conference Paper Series
SOS2017-2402

An Outlook on Attitudes towards Different Cultures at Schools Conductıng Alternative Educatıonal Approaches

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An Introduction to
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

This paper should be cited as follows:

Şanver, M. and Erakkuş, O. (2018). **"An Outlook on Attitudes towards Different Cultures at Schools Conducting Alternative Educational Approaches",** Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: **SOS2017-2402.**

An Outlook on Attitudes towards Different Cultures at Schools Conducting Alternative Educational Approaches

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Abstract

There are various education models, different than mass education, referred to as 'alternative educational approaches'. These approaches have got some overall features like that; they have the individuals on their sight, they approach the individual integratedly, humane qualities are taken in account, they prioritize preparing for life more than exams etc. There are similar features in mass education model as well, however they are carried out mostly by educators' personal efforts. It can be said that expectations of the government and preparations for exams are in the foreground in conventional mass education mostly. In this study, correspondences were exchanged with various schools from different countries, which state that they apply alternative educational approaches. The schools were asked questions like: 'Why did you prefer this approach?', 'Would you give information about the educational applications at your school?' Although multiculturalism, relationships with the members of different cultures, races, religions etc. were not included in the questions, specifically, the school administrators and program coordinators who answered the questions mentioned these subjects. Montessori and International Baccalaureate schools where the study were conducted, these subjects were emphasized as acknowledging other cultures, respect to the differences, solution of disagreements, global citizenship, respect to the others' rights, intercultural awareness, international educational perception.

Keywords: Alternative educational approaches, intercultural education, school atmosphere.

Social Change and Alternative Education

Human beings are living creatures having both biological and social aspects. The individual is prepared to become a member of thr society from the moment he/she is born. The individual has an interaction with other individuals and surrounding environment. Life, itself can be defined as a learning process.. This process lasts lifelong, from the cradle to the grave (Demirel, 2012: 7-8). In this lifelong learning process, individuals benefit from a variety of sources. One of these is formal education in which the individual is addressed before adulthood. Throughout history, people have educated their children with the desire to convey their knowledge, experiences, values and cultures to them. Following rapid social transformation and change the current education system, classical schooling, has been critisized for beingfar from meeting the needs of the individual and the society. Educating students through rote learning, their ducking the issues when they encounter with everyday problems because they do not know how to behave, and having difficulties in creating any original opinion about the solution of any problem are the focal points of the discussions. However, these problems can not be solved systematically (Memduhoğlu, Mazlum and Alav, 2015). Exam-focused mass education can not prepare individuals for life, and moreover, causes individuals with different characteristics to be unhappy and sometimes to be pushed out of the system. There have also been some good practices in mainstream education, but these have been carried out by individual efforts more than systematically. At the beginning of the 20th century, humanbeings were approached as machines in many fields. In the education process, the needs of the society rather than the needs of the individual and the expectations of the power holders were foregrounded. According to Hesapçıoğlu and Dündar, offering to individuals different education oppurtinuties means increasing the benefits obtained from schooling. And also, considering single, standardized education system as meeting all needs is an illusion and confinement (Hesapçıoğlu & Dündar, 2008: 55).

Various educational approaches have been proposed and implemented for reducing education problems as well as for meeting the different needs. These approaches are generally referred to as "alternative education" in the literature and the implementing institutions as 'alternative schools'. Alternative education, basically, can be defined as aiming to offer different learning experiences to the students other than conventional schooling. From that point of view; it is possible to accept any school, presenting to the students an education with philosophy and principles different than mainstream schooling as 'alternative school'. This model is embodied in schools that generally, offering innovative and flexible education program taking students' individual interest and needs as the basis (Kaya & Gündüz, 2015: 11). Montessori, Reggio Emilia inspired, International Baccauralate (IB), Warldorf schools and homeschooling can be given as examples of alternative educational approaches. According to Jerry Mintz, the quality of schools is so low ,so that many parents and teachers are trying to develop methods that could be an alternative to the existing educational system which is clearly failing. More and more parents are becoming aware of

alternative options. As parents are becoming conscious about choices, it is hoped that the current system will evolve to meet the needs of the students. However, parents should not expect the system to change and should undertake the responsibility of educating their children. They should learn what their options are and choose the best for their child (Mintz, 2010: 4-7).

Education has been used as an instrument to reach some ends. The methods that have been applied in the education, and the attributed meanings to it have been critisized/discussed. But, if it is considered from different viewpoints, it will be possible to implement different models and could result in the full self-actaulization of individuals. And so that, if positive outcomes of education mount up, the critiques such as 'parroting', 'prejudicing', 'passivating' will be void (Denizel Güven, 2005: 8).

Societies have their own cultures, values and lifestyles. Societies also acquire new values over time. These acquisitions are new gains. On the other hand, the disappearance of some values leads the individuals to have some problems and gaps in life, and to lose harmony. (Akbaba, 2014: 236). After the destruction of the values; in every condition, the elements like being successful, continuously being in the pursuit of higher social status, earning more, foregrounding self-interests emerges. It is not possible for every individual in society to be at the top. It makes people unhappy because the desired life can not be reached. In particular, economic crises shake individuals and crime is sought in others within the framework of defense mechanisms in human psychology. During economic crises, for unemploymentand other social problems, especially those with different ethnicity can be seen as responsible. This situation raises racism and creates hostility towards 'the others' On the other hand, today's societies are becoming multi-cultural in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, by means of transportation, circulation and technology, or in the already multicultural societies, it is understood that democracy can not be realised and services will be ineffective and inefficient without different voices and understanding the needs and inner worlds of different social groups. (Özgür, 2014: 170).

Schools can play an important role in developing peace and tolerance among individuals. Classrooms can be seen as venues where knowledge, good manners, opinions, attitudes both are presented and shared. Diversity in the classrooms should be interpreted as cultural richness. Clasrooms are soils where tolerance grows. School life has effects both today and, since the students are the future of the society, also in the future (Doğan, 2002: 100). Transformation from societies of nation-state towards multi-cultural and diverse societies has generated questions and made some changes in education systems, as well. In societies consisting of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, education policy might consider education of the religion carefully. To this end, educators in diverse societies have worked on developing different models for the education of religion (Okumuşlar, 2007: 262). As one of the most important issue for an individual and a society, the education of religion, should employ modern and pedagogical methods to be succesfull. The aim of education of religion should be guidance for thinking, interpretation, making choice,

inference and responsibility. Both religion and modern pedagogy refuse dictating some beliefs, excluding different interpretations, radical conservatism, daunting, taboo generating religious teaching (Ayar & Güneş, 2002). Understanding different cultures and beliefs, coexistence are also in the foreground in religion education of alternative schools. Despite the attempts made in solving social problems, those who couldn't find relief for social problems are anxious about the future. And there will might be new problems (Tokol, 2016: 463). According to Serpil, "*Human value hinges upon its profitable value. So now people are richer but not necessarily happier. Humans control the machine, but the dominant profit-based paradigm stays the same. It's time to notice that there's something above information and knowledge: wisdom. It's the internal voice in all of individuals, it is the conscience-wisdom that is rooted in knowledge-in-action. Happiness must be (re)connected to internal reasons rather than the external*" (Serpil, 2016: 9).

Education is expected by the society to provide adaptation to social changes and to propose solutions to social problems. When compared to the mainstream education concept, it is stated that alternative education approaches are more humanistic and individuals are handled holistically. Alternative education has different suggestions about individual's preparation for life, self-definition; individual-society, individual- environment and individual- god relations.

Method

The purpose of this research is to identify the view/attitude of schools implementing alternative educational approaches towards different cultures in their shools. Within the scope of the research, correspondence through e-mails with various schools known as implementing alternative educational approaches took place. And also, citations from schools' websites and handbooks etc. are included in findings. These schools were chosen randomly from different countries. The schools that agreed to participate in the research was asked questions such as "Why did you choose this approach?", "Could you give information about the education practices of your school?". Multiculturalism, relations with members of different cultures and beliefs, etc. weren't directly included in the questions. However, the answers of the school administrators or program coordinators who answered the questions focused on these topics.

The correspondence including the questions were addressed during 2014-2015 period. Descriptive analysis method was used in this study.

Findings

Information below was acquired in relation with schools implementing alternative educational approaches towards different cultures in education. A school principal stated the following:

Morals, ethics and citizenship are taught as a part of the daily lessons. Religion is not taught as dogma, rather we expose children to many religions, helping them to understand that people worship in many different ways. We teach children the importance of finding their own moral path, while respecting the views and religious beliefs of others. We emphasize on a daily basis that we respect each other. We model grace and courtesy and teach children positive ways to resolve conflict. It is very important to teach children to be respectful and kind to others. It is the primary value we teach at the school. (Woodland Hill Montessori School, 14-18 aged, Montessori, USA)

It seems that in this school, acknowledging other religions, respect to different view points were given importance. Using grace and courtesy in Montessori schools' education program in order to resolve conflicts is remarkable.

The principal of another school in the phrases:

In the Upper Elementary (9-12 year olds) and adolescent classrooms these topics are discussed as parts of general education, civics, world cultures. I believe the best way for students to learn about values, character, morals, ethics, religion, citizenship is by applying those concepts to everyday life so that they see them as something pertinent to their life and not as something extrinsic. (Montessori School of Celebration, 2.5-15 aged, Montessori, USA)

Getting acquaintance with different culture is in the curriculum of this school which is implementing Montessori approach. Generally in alternative schools, practises with holistic approach are adopted. And also, within the concept of teaching, instead of knowledge transmission, practises of knowledge acquisation are evident.

Statements of another school principal:

Montessori lessons continually emphasize gratitude, appreciation, responsibility for actions etc... Vision - Our vision is a community of confident, compassionate, and engaged citizens who think globally, act responsibly and collaborate successfully to create a humane world. (Montessori Academy of London, 18 months of age to 14 years of age, Private, Montessori, Canada)

Montessori approach is prefered by a great deal of religiously based or non religiously based organisation. Practices within the scope of Global citizenship was conducted in schools. Culture post, corners and activities are created and organized in those schools. Students get to know both their own cultures, beliefs and traditions and get acquaint with other countries' cultures, beliefs and traditions.

The answer to our question from another school:

We use a Peace Education curriculum that supports good values, ethics, and citizenship. We do not have a policy per se, but work from an agreed upon set of values and a code of conduct that encourages Respect,

Communication, Conflict Resolution, Self-Awareness, Personal and Social Responsibility, Kindness, Compassion, Empathy and Community Service. (Jarrow Montessori School, 18 months - 12 years old, Private, Montessori, USA)

It is understood that students' acquiring positive behaviours and developing positive relationships with individuals in the society are valued in this school. It may be thought that students who are at peace with themselves, who cares others' rights, who empathize with others, who is at the community service would be far from racism.

The statements of another school principal:

The Head Teachers give lessons to the students on grace and courtesy and all are aware of the Treaty of Waitangi. The Wā Ora Montessori community is guided by strong moral values that include: We believe good people create good people. We are sensitive to other people's needs and feelings and we want the best for each other. Our ways of acting promote respect and altruism and we consciously work to increase the capacity of all members of our school community for sharing and working together. The teachers at Wā Ora Montessori believe in educating and nurturing every aspect – intellectual, physical, emotional and social – of your child. This holistic learning journey leads young adults to be sure of their ability to contribute positively to the world. Opportunities to practise newly acquired social skills – grace, courtesy and respect for others – occur naturally within everyday class life. This allows the positive aspects of the child's personality to assert themselves and become habits. (Wa Ora Montessori School, 18 months – 18 years, Private- state funding, Montessori, New Zeland)

Treaty of Waitangi is an agreement treaty made between New Zeland's natives Maorians and the British. After compliance with the term of this agreement was mentioned, emphasis was placed on the understanding of other people's needs and feelings. Within the scope of the concept of holistic education; grace, courtesy and respect for the rights of others are being practiced in daily school atmosphere.

Another respondent says:

There is a discipline called personal and social education which contains more moral, psychological features. We support multicultureness, respect all religions. (Astana Miras International School, 3-18 years old, Private, IB, Kazakhistan)

This school's education concept consists of multiculturalism and respect for different beliefs. Actually, one of International Baccauralate's aim is to educate students as world citizens.

Another answer:

Student do care about one another, and rally round to help those with problems, whether they are academic, social or personal. They are also involved in community outreach. (Canadian International School, 3-18, Private, IB, Japan)

It is important for individuals to learn their rights within the development process, as well as to learn to respect the rights of other individuals. It seems that in this school to value other individuals is emphasised. It is hoped that individuals with this awareness will have effective communication with members of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and beliefs.

The responsible person for Arel Schools says:

AREL Schools are committed to: Provide the necessary background to be able to communicate and understand global issues and gain a greater understanding of other cultures by using foreign languages efficiently, promote national and international understanding, encourage children to think about and discuss the national and international problems and be able to suggest solutions for those problems. With International Baccalaureate Programmes, which have commonality in AREL Schools' principles, we aim to raise students who is respectful to humans and the environment, Curriculum; Promotes respect towards the beliefs and values of the other cultures, Intercultural Awareness: It is concerned with developing students' attitudes, knowledge and skills as they learn about their own and others' social and national cultures. By encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, intercultural awareness fosters tolerance, respect and empathy. AREL Schools aim to raise citizens who are self confident, lifelong learners and who consider themselves as world citizen, who take the advantage of the opportunities of education in optimum levels. For this reason an education programme which constantly supports students' progress is applied. (Arel Schools, 3-18 years, Private, IB, Turkey)

At Arel School, the skills that an idividual will need in the life are gained. Besides, it is understood that elements such as world citizenship, intercultural awareness are also included in the curriculum. These issues have an important place in IB concept. 'IB learner profile' aims to develop learners who are: Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators Principled, Principled, Open-minded, Caring, Risk-takers, Balanced Reflective as was stated in th IB's website (http://www.ibo.org/benefits/learner-profile/ date of access: 22.06.2017).

The words of a school principal from Netherland:

Essentially our educational policy is based on the "IB Learner Profile" there is great importance placed on respect and honesty and the understanding that others may have an opinion different than your own and it may also be correct. (IS Hilversum, 4-19, IB, Private-State subsidized, Netherland).

"In IB system, IB students are expected to explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others. They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment" (http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/recognition/learnerprofile-en.pdf, date of access: 22.06.2017).

An assessment from Australia is as follows:

Our vision is every student will graduate with an international awareness and the knowledge, skills and capacity to meet the challenges of a changing world. Our mission is to provide a rich and supportive school life in which students develop the knowledge to pursue future pathways, the skills to be successful and the capacity for social and intercultural awareness. Particulalrly the three core values that are strived for - Distinction, Diversity & Respect. (The Norwood Morialta High School, 5-13, Private, IB, Australia).

Also it is understood from this text that intercultural awareness was emphasised in this school which implements the IB program in Australia.

A school from Sweden says:

Being an international school with over 50 nationalities, our vision is to enable students to learn, develop, grow, and fulfill their potential in an international environment, which is student-centered, safe, nurturing and rich with opportunities to learn. We value: cultural diversity, ethical and caring behaviour. Through working together we aim for our students; to show empathy, compassion and respect towards others; to act with integrity and honesty; to display openness and respect for the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities to be compassionate to the needs and feelings of others; (Stockholm International School, 12-17 age, Private, IB, Sweeden).

Students from very different nationalities study together in this school. Parents living in different countries for various reasons prefer schools that implement the IB cirriculum as much as possible. Students interacting with each other in a multicultural environment may leave a positive impact on students.

Students learn about importance of loyalty to country and value of sharing and caring (Crescent Islamic Montessori School, 3-12 age, Private, Montessori, USA).

Social groups within a country may also prefer alternative education as an education system. The cultural values of the social group and the integration into the country residence are given together in these schools. Alternative education approaches is commited to provide education more appropiate to human nature instead of putting people into a certain mold and putting students into a continous racing and exam focused atmosphere. Understanding others and respect for others is a part of alternative education approaches. Social groups who prefer a more humanistic life, where selfishness isn't forefront, prefer alternative educational approaches in their schools. Parents with these kind of anxieties from any world view also prefer alternative schools. Parents come together to bring about various kinds of formations/associations.

The vision of another school:

In our programme, students will inquire and try to acquire knowledege and values that are personally, locally and globally significant. "S/he will get a deeper understanding of the concepts". "S/he will develop a range of life skills". "S/he will develop positive attitudes towards other people and surroundings". "S/he will be given chances to take responsibility and participate in social service". It is vital that there is also focus on the development of personal attitudes towards people, towards the environment and towards learning, attitudes that contribute to the well-being of the individual and of the group. The attitudes that the students should internalize and demonstrate are: appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect and tolerance.

In IB student profile, they understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience. They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment. Parents contribution is asked as "Expose your child to different festivals, celebrations and traditions. Encourage your child to listen when others speak and learn about different perspectives. Guide him /her in developing empathy towards people living in different conditions and people coming from different backgrounds." (It was taken from the school handbook. İstek Barış Pre-School and Primary School, 3-11 years, Private, IB, Turkey).

In this school which implements the IB program, self-recognition and community, healthy development and recognition of different cultures, empathy

with other individuals, creating opportunities to interact with people with different cultural background are among the noticeable features.

Words of a school from Norway:

Our international curriculum allows International School of Bergen's students to evolve into confident individuals and caring citizens of the world. Our core values are; coming together and working towards a common goal, being true, fair and honest to ourselves and others, supporting, motivating and valuing others, treating others as we wish to be treated, embracing and celebrating individual and cultural diversity... All learners can experience success, gain self confidence, become self-directed learners and become positive contributors in a community of different cultures. The IB curriculum has an international perspective that recognizes and welcomes the diversity of student experiences and backgrounds. As a IB school, ISB strives to develop internationally minded students who demonstrate the attributes of the IB learner profile. (International School of Bergen, 3-18 age, Private, IB, Norway).

It is understood from that one of the main aim of the international curriculum is to bring up individual with good personality while it recognizes individuals diverse experiences and backgrounds. Personality itself consists of good attributes such as self confident, caring, being honest and fair, strong learning habit, positive minded. This international curriculum claim that an individual cultivated with a good personality will be more of a good and caring world citizen, thereby embracing and celebrating other individuals and other cultures. Such a person will value cultural diversity, difference living experiences of different people and communities. Therefore, it would be difficult even almost impossible for an individual nurtured through this medium to be a racist or to practice racism.

A school from Australia says:

The Child as a Spiritual Being: Maria Montessori saw children as far more than simply scholars. In her view, each child is a full and complete human being, the mother or father of the adult man or woman she will become. Even when very young, the child shares with the rest of humanity hopes, dreams, and fears, emotions and longing. From Montessori's perspective, this goes beyond mental health to the very core of one's inner spiritual life. Our school consciously designs social communities and educational experiences that cultivate the child's sense of independence, self-respect, love of peace, passion for self-chosen work done well, and ability to respect and celebrate the individual spirit within people of all ages and the value of all life.
Universal Values: We deliberately teach children not only appropriate patterns of polite behaviour, but seek to instil basic universal values within the core of the child's personality. These values include self-respect, acceptance of the uniqueness and dignity of each person we meet, kindness,

peacefulness, compassion, empathy, honour, individual responsibility and courage to speak from our hearts.
Global Understanding: We are multicultural. We attract a diverse staff and student body that represents many ethnic backgrounds, religions, and international backgrounds as well as actively celebrating our diversity. The curriculum is international in its heritage and focus, and consciously seeks to promote a global perspective.
Service to Others: Montessori's spiritual perspective leads our school to consciously organise programs of community service ranging from daily contributions to others within the class or school setting, to community outreach programs that allow children and adults to make a difference in the lives of others. The fundamental idea is one of encouraging a purposeful coexistence and stewardship.
Responsibilities: Students have the responsibility to allow others to feel safe. They have the responsibility to speak and treat others with respect. They have the responsibility to hear and respect the feelings of others. They have the responsibility to accept the gender, culture and differences of others. (It was taken from the school handbook. Elenora Montessori School, 3-18 age, Private, Montessori and IB, Australia).

Montessori approach is applied in the school. However, in the last two years of the high school, IB Diploma Programme (DP) curriculum have been applied together. Multiculturalism, respect for others, global outlook and community service are concepts that are emphasised also in this school.
The opinions of English School of Kyrenia:

The English School of Kyrenia (ESK) endeavours to develop young people who are principled, inquiring and open minded communicators with a lifelong love of learning. We aim to inspire students to serve as compassionate global citizens through our challenging international educational programmes. At The English School of Kyrenia we believe, first and foremost, in the education of the whole person. The ethos and atmosphere prevailing in a successful school is driven as much by the pastoral care offered as by the curricula followed. Every facet of a child's many intelligences and talents is then given the opportunity to develop and blossom.
Our core values are, Respect, Honesty, Justice, Sincerity, Trust, Integrity. Individually and collectively, members of the ESK community recognize and respect the inherent dignity of every individual. We recognize that each of us shares the responsibility for creating a safe, nurturing and encouraging environment for all of us. We will develop and celebrate our strengths and, at the same time, we shall help others to overcome tasks which they find challenging. Our students appreciates personal cultures, values and histories. Seeks out and appreciates the value of other points of view, shows empathy, compassion and respect. Acts to make a positive difference. Students are encouraged to take part in community service to

gain an understanding of what it means to be a responsible citizen and to acquire first hand experience in participating in activities that benefit others in the wider community. (It's taken from the Parent & Student Essential Guidelines. The English School of Kyrenia, 3-18 age, Private, IB, Cyprus).

Individual is approached from a holistic perspective in alternative education approaches. This is also claimed at the school system called mainstream or mass education. Since the teachers performs this personally, it is achieved more through individual efforts rather than a systematic effort. Cognitive development can be said to be more prominent in the mainstream schools. It is understood that hidden curriculum is also utilized in alternative education approaches. Community service is included in the curriculum of alternative schools. The awareness of the individual of his own culture and the recognition of other people's culture, respect and tolerance for differences and living in harmony are among the factors emphasised in this school.

Results and Discussion

It has been pointed out from the research made on alternative education approaches of Montessori and International Baccalaureate schools that to be acquainted with different culture and beliefs, respecting differences, training towards resolving conflicts, to acquire global citizenship, respecting others' right and intercultural awareness are all emphasised. When the programmes of alternative schools analyzed it can be seen that not only cogninitive learning; but also self-awarenes, a holistic development, respect for the rights of every creatures are included in formal and implicit curriculum.

Students at alternative schools have chance to learn how to be in service of the society through experience and hence how to achieve both self-development and to be useful to other creatures (human, animals and all nature). Following that, they have oppurtinuty, first and foremost, to learn their culture and values, and also to see the others' values and beliefs, their differences. Therefore, instead of being discriminative against the others, they could be consious of diversity, coexistence and tolerance. And this will contribute to decrease hostility, vandalism in diverse societies.

Different educational approahes have created, designed and implemented different educational methods to nurture human mind and body into a good and sound personality. Generally these different educational systems have core universal values, human's bio-psychological, social cultural conditions and backgrounds as their operating principles. Nurturing the human mind through universal values and considering his/her anthroplogical conditions can make the human mind or individual to cultivate a universal positive consciousness, personality, and character. Such a character easily share, adapt and partake in a multiculutral world that we live in, without discriminating. Thus through these education systems possibility of being a racist hostile towards others is really

low or eliminated. However, the claim by these educational approaches to be able to nurture a sound positive mind against the possibilities of being hostile towards others can be argued against. For example, despite the level of education has been increasing and educational efforts being implemented in various countries, yet the rate of discrimination and racism has been high in these regions. Education has an important role in the society, but not solution of everything.

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