



The Panoptic Function of the Examination: Hidden Curriculum, Disciplinary Power, and Control

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Abstract

This study discusses the possibility of considering examinations in the modern school not merely as technical instruments for measuring academic achievement, but also as disciplinary mechanisms operating within the hidden curriculum of schooling. Drawing on Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power, the examination is evaluated as a school practice that renders the student visible, compares, classifies, documents, and directs the student toward self-regulation. The study was designed as a descriptive and interpretive inquiry that re-examines quantitative data from a completed master's thesis with a specific focus on examinations. The data were obtained from 242 students enrolled in an Anatolian high school in the city center of Uşak during the 2011–2012 academic year. The findings were evaluated through frequency and percentage distributions. The results show that approximately half of the students regularly perceive examinations as instruments of control and surveillance; similarly, approximately half think that examinations have a learning-facilitating function. Although some descriptive differences were observed in relation to gender, these differences were not interpreted as indicating causality or statistical significance. The study argues that the pedagogical and disciplinary functions of examinations cannot be sharply separated from one another; while examinations regulate learning, they also operate as instruments of the hidden curriculum that shape students according to institutional norms.

Keywords

Michel Foucault,
Disciplinary power, Hidden
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1. Introduction

In modern education systems, examinations are often regarded as technical instruments designed to measure students' academic achievement, identify learning deficiencies, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. From this perspective, an examination is a pedagogical assessment tool that reveals the distance between curricular objectives and student performance. However, from the standpoint of critical sociology of education and philosophy of education, examinations are not neutral practices that merely measure cognitive competencies. They are also practices that shape students' positions within school, their perceptions of success, their study habits, and their relationship with institutional expectations.

The concept of the hidden curriculum offers an important theoretical framework for understanding these implicit functions of examinations in school life. The notion of the hidden curriculum, conceptualized by Jackson (1968) and further developed by critical educational thinkers such as Apple (1979), Giroux (1983), and Lynch (1989), shows that learning in school is not limited to the knowledge, skills, and outcomes specified in the formal curriculum. Alongside subject content, students also learn to adapt to authority, use time in a regulated manner, compete, comply with rules, and position themselves within categories of success and failure. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) discussion of cultural reproduction and Bowles and Gintis's (1976) analysis of the relationship between schooling and the socio-economic order also demonstrate that school is not merely a neutral institution for transmitting knowledge; it also functions as a site that reproduces social norms, hierarchies, and modes of compliance. In this respect, the examination can be regarded as one of the central school practices in which the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum intersect.

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power makes it possible to understand this implicit function of examinations at a deeper level. For Foucault, modern power is not merely a force that prohibits, represses, or punishes; it is also a productive network of relations that defines,

regulates, and directs individuals according to particular norms (Foucault, 1975, 1980). Disciplinary institutions regulate individuals' conduct not only through external rules but also through practices of measurement, recording, comparison, and normalization. In this respect, the school is an important site in which the student is formed both as a learning subject and as an individual evaluated within institutional expectations.

At this point, the educational function of the examination acquires a dual character. The same examination practice may be perceived by students, on the one hand, as an instrument of control and surveillance and, on the other, as a tool that helps them establish a study routine, plan their learning process, and improve academic performance. From a Foucauldian perspective, this dual perception points not so much to a contradiction as to the productive character of modern power. The examination is not merely a mechanism that places the student under pressure; it also regulates the ways in which students study, evaluate themselves, and orient themselves toward success.

This study aims to re-evaluate the disciplinary function of examinations within the hidden curriculum of schooling from a Foucauldian perspective. More specifically, it examines students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control and their views on the role of examinations in facilitating learning. Thus, the examination is discussed not merely as a technique of measurement and assessment but as a school practice in which processes of learning, control, success, and subjectivation intersect.

1.1. Problem Statement

Examinations are regarded as indispensable tools for measuring learning outcomes and determining academic achievement in education systems. However, their impact on school life cannot be explained solely by their measurement and assessment function. Examinations also influence students' understandings of success, authority, studying, and self-evaluation. For this

reason, the examination is not only a technical instrument of the formal curriculum but also an operative component of the hidden curriculum.

The problem addressed in this study arises from the fact that examinations are perceived by students both in relation to control and in relation to the support of learning. This dual perception suggests that the pedagogical function of the examination and its disciplinary effects cannot be entirely separated from one another. Accordingly, this study opens for discussion the question of how examinations function as a regulatory practice within the hidden curriculum of schooling.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the disciplinary function of examinations within the hidden curriculum of schooling through Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. Accordingly, the examination is considered not merely as a technical assessment tool for measuring students' academic achievement, but as a school practice that affects students' learning processes, perceptions of success, forms of self-evaluation, and relationship with institutional expectations.

In this context, the study descriptively examines the extent to which students perceive examinations as instruments of control and surveillance, their views on the role of examinations in facilitating learning, and how these perceptions are distributed in relation to gender. However, the primary aim of the study is not merely to present these findings as quantitative results, but to discuss the pedagogical and disciplinary meaning of examinations within school from a Foucauldian perspective.

1.3. Research Questions and Significance of the Study

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students perceive examinations as instruments of control and surveillance?
2. Do students think that examinations have a function in facilitating learning?
3. How are students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control and as elements that facilitate learning distributed by gender?
4. How can students' perception of examinations both as instruments of control and as practices that facilitate learning be interpreted in terms of Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power?

The study is significant in that it treats the examination not merely as a technical instrument of measurement and assessment, but as a disciplinary practice operating within the hidden curriculum of schooling. The question of what kind of understanding of learning, form of self-regulation, and perception of success examinations produce in students is a fundamental issue for philosophy of education. Therefore, the study aims to contribute not only a technical but also an ethical, political, and pedagogical dimension to discussions of measurement and assessment.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Disciplinary Power in Foucault

Foucault's analysis of modern power is based on a relational understanding that does not regard power merely as a centralized, repressive, and prohibitive force. According to this view, power is not simply an external coercion directly exercised by the dominant over the dominated; rather, it is a productive network of relations operating through social institutions, discourses, forms of knowledge, and everyday practices. Power does not merely repress the individual; it defines, positions, and directs the individual toward particular forms of conduct (Foucault,

1975, 1980; McHoul & Grace, 1993). From a Foucauldian perspective, therefore, the subject is not understood as an autonomous entity located outside power, but as a form of existence constituted within specific discursive and institutional practices.

Disciplinary power is a form of power that operates in modern societies particularly through institutions such as the school, the prison, the barracks, the hospital, and the factory. These institutions place individuals in specific spaces, organize their time, monitor their conduct, and transform them into comparable units of performance. The aim of discipline is not merely to secure obedience, but also to produce efficient, orderly, measurable, and governable individuals. Foucault's concept of "docile bodies" points to both the bodily and mental dimensions of this process. Over time, individuals learn to regulate themselves according to institutional norms without the need for direct external coercion.

In this respect, one of the most important characteristics of disciplinary power is that it appears ordinary and natural through everyday practices. Timetables, spatial arrangements, performance records, reward and punishment mechanisms, and assessment processes continuously attach individuals' conduct to particular criteria. In this way, the individual is constituted not merely as a member of a group, but as a distinguishable and governable singularity. In the context of schooling, this process becomes concrete especially through practices such as examinations, grading, and records of achievement.

2.2. Hidden Curriculum and Normalization in School

The hidden curriculum refers to the values, norms, and patterns of conduct that are not explicitly taught in school but are transmitted to students through everyday educational practices. While the formal curriculum determines what knowledge and skills are to be taught, the hidden curriculum teaches students how they are expected to behave within school life, how they should relate to authority, how they should use time, and how they should understand success. For this reason, the school is not merely an institution that transmits knowledge; it is also a site

of socialization that produces particular forms of subjectivity and reproduces social relations (Apple, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Lynch, 1989; Yüksel, 2002).

The operation of the hidden curriculum often takes place not through direct instruction but through the organization of school life and repeated institutional practices. School bells, classroom seating arrangements, the teacher–student hierarchy, examination schedules, grading systems, and practices of reward and punishment are part of these implicit learning processes. Through these practices, the student learns not only subject content, but also how to wait, compete, be compared, be evaluated, and accept the judgment of institutional authority. In this respect, the hidden curriculum can be understood as an implicit pedagogical mechanism operating between the visible instructional program of the school and the reproduction of the social order.

In this context, there is a strong relationship between the hidden curriculum and disciplinary power. Through Foucault’s concepts, the school can be understood as a disciplinary space that regulates students’ conduct according to particular norms. The hidden curriculum is the pedagogically naturalized form of this discipline. Alongside the explicitly stated academic aims of the school, the student also learns, in more implicit ways, the norms of being a “successful,” “compliant,” “hardworking,” “orderly,” and “responsible” student.

In this article, the examination is treated as one of the central practices through which the hidden curriculum becomes concrete within the school. On the surface, the examination is directed toward determining what the student has learned; at the implicit level, however, it affects how the student uses time, evaluates the self, accepts the criteria of authority, and becomes positioned within categories of success and failure. For this reason, the examination is not

merely an outcome of the hidden curriculum, but an important school practice that makes its operation visible.

2.3. The Function of Examination as a Disciplinary Technology

The examination performs both a pedagogical and a disciplinary function in the modern school. Pedagogically, it is used to determine students' levels of learning, identify deficiencies, and evaluate the instructional process. From a Foucauldian perspective, however, the examination operates beyond the process of measurement and assessment; it functions as a mechanism that incorporates the student into the institutional field of knowledge and control. For this reason, the examination can be regarded as a disciplinary technology situated at the intersection of knowledge production and the exercise of power (Foucault, 1975; Hoskin, 1979).

According to Foucault, the examination is a distinctive technique that brings together hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment. While hierarchical surveillance makes the student's performance observable, normalizing judgment interprets that performance according to particular criteria. Thus, the examination does not merely determine what the student knows; it also affects the student's position within the school, the ways in which the student is judged as adequate, and the student's future educational possibilities.

One of the most important consequences of the examination is the production of visibility. Through examination, the student is institutionally recognized not only by being present in the classroom but also through performance. The examination paper, grade, grade point average, and promotion status record the student's educational history. These documents transform the student's performance from a temporary event into data that can be stored, compared, and used for subsequent decisions.

This recording process also means the documentation of individuality. Grade charts, student files, and records of achievement incorporate the student's strengths and weaknesses, competencies, deficiencies, and level of development into the institutional memory of the

school. Thus, in the modern school, the examination functions not only as a measurement tool but also as a technique of archiving and administration.

Examination results position students within categories such as successful/unsuccessful, sufficient/insufficient, hardworking/not hardworking. These categories do not merely indicate academic level; they also affect the student's value within the school, conformity to expectations, and future educational orientations. For this reason, the classifications produced by examinations have disciplinary and institutional consequences alongside pedagogical decisions.

Another effect of the examination is that the student learns to regulate his or her own conduct according to examination criteria. The student plans study time, compares achievement with others, identifies deficiencies, and seeks to improve performance. In this process, control does not operate merely as an external pressure; it becomes a mode through which the student monitors and directs his or her own conduct. In this way, the examination contributes to the formation of practices of self-regulation within the school.

The disciplinary operation of examinations is not limited to students. Teachers, too, become observable and assessable through examination results, achievement indicators, annual plans, classroom practices, and administrative evaluation processes. Therefore, the examination should not be understood as a one-directional mechanism of control operating only upon students, but as part of a broader disciplinary network that connects different actors within the school through performance criteria, recording systems, and assessment practices.

In conclusion, the learning-facilitating function of the examination and its disciplinary function cannot be sharply separated from one another. The examination may direct students toward studying, regulate the learning process, and improve academic performance. Yet this productive effect does not eliminate its disciplinary character. On the contrary, the examination is able to

regulate learning precisely because it organizes students' time, conduct, and modes of self-evaluation. In this respect, the examination functions in the modern school as a dual mechanism that both supports learning and shapes the student according to institutional norms.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a descriptive and interpretive study that re-examines quantitative data from a completed master's thesis with a specific focus on examinations (Temir, 2013). The original data collection process of the study was based on the survey model. The survey model is one of the research approaches that aims to describe an existing situation within its own conditions (Karasar, 2002).

This article does not address the entire data set; instead, it focuses on findings related to students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control and the role of examinations in facilitating learning. The study has a two-level structure. At the first level, students' views on examinations are described through frequency and percentage distributions. At the second level, these findings are interpreted through Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and the hidden curriculum. In this respect, the study combines the descriptive presentation of quantitative findings with a theoretical discussion grounded in philosophy of education and sociology of education.

3.2. Study Group

The data of the study were obtained from students enrolled in an Anatolian high school in the city center of Uşak during the 2011–2012 academic year. The study group consisted of 242 students studying at the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade levels.

Of the participants, 148 were female and 94 were male. Accordingly, 61.2% of the study group consisted of female students and 38.8% of male students. In terms of grade-level distribution,

21.5% of the students were in the 9th grade, 25.2% in the 10th grade, 25.6% in the 11th grade, and 27.7% in the 12th grade.

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The data were collected through a questionnaire. In developing the questionnaire, Aka's (2004) study on disciplinary power techniques and the production of individuality from a Foucauldian perspective was used as a basis, and items were constructed in line with the literature review. In the first stage, a 70-item questionnaire form was prepared and submitted to field experts for review. It was then revised in accordance with expert feedback. As a result of this process, a 54-item questionnaire form was developed for use in the study.

This article does not consider the entire questionnaire; rather, it focuses on two items directly related to examinations. The first item aimed to determine the extent to which students perceived examinations as instruments of control, while the second aimed to identify students' views on the role of examinations in facilitating learning. Students' responses were evaluated through the options "Never," "Sometimes," "Often," and "Always." Blank responses are also shown separately in the tables.

3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods were used in the analysis of the data. Students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control and their views on the learning-facilitating role of examinations were presented through frequency and percentage distributions. In addition, the distribution of these views in relation to gender was evaluated descriptively.

In this study, the direct relationship between perceiving examinations as instruments of control and regarding examinations as elements that facilitate learning was not tested. Similarly, no statistical significance test was conducted according to gender. Therefore, no causal or relational conclusions were drawn in interpreting the findings; instead, the distributions

obtained were interpreted through Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and the hidden curriculum.

The primary aim of the study is not to produce generalizable statistical results, but to describe how examinations are perceived by students and to open these perceptions to discussion from the perspectives of philosophy of education and sociology of education. For this reason, the findings were evaluated within a descriptive and interpretive framework.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This article is not based on a new data collection process. The data used in the study are archival data collected as part of a previously completed research project. No identifying information about the participants is included in the article, and the data are used only in the form of aggregated frequency and percentage distributions.

Since the data were collected during the 2011–2012 academic year and only anonymized and aggregated findings are used in the article, no information that could violate participant confidentiality is included. The limitations of the study are further discussed in the conclusion section.

4. Findings

This section examines students' views on examinations in two main dimensions. First, students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control and surveillance are examined. Second, students' views on the learning-facilitating role of examinations are evaluated. The findings are presented through frequency and percentage distributions according to gender. Blank responses are also shown separately in the tables.

4.1. Findings on the Perception of Examinations as Instruments of Control

The distribution of students' perceptions of examinations as instruments of control is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of perceptions of examinations as instruments of control

Gender	Response	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Blank	Total
Female	N	29	31	12	62	14	148
	%	19,6	20,9	8,1	41,9	9,5	100,0
Male	N	24	20	20	26	4	94
	%	25,5	21,3	21,3	27,7	4,3	100,0
Total	N	53	51	32	88	18	242
	%	21,9	21,1	13,2	36,4	7,4	100,0

According to Table 1, a considerable proportion of students perceive examinations as instruments of control and surveillance. Of the total participants, 36.4% stated that examinations “always” function as instruments of control, while 13.2% stated that they do so “often.” Accordingly, approximately half of the students (49.6%) think that examinations regularly perform a controlling function.

When considered in terms of the gender, 41.9% of female students stated that examinations are “always” instruments of control, whereas this rate was 27.7% among male students. By contrast, the rate of “often” responses among male students (21.3%) was higher than that among female students (8.1%). This distribution indicates that female students were more concentrated in the “always” category, while male students were more concentrated in the “often” category. However, when the “often” and “always” responses are considered together, the rates at which female and male students perceive examinations as instruments of control appear to be close to one another.

This finding suggests that examinations are perceived by students not only as tools for measuring academic achievement, but also as part of the mechanisms of surveillance and

regulation within the school. This interpretation is not based on a claim of statistical significance, but on a descriptive evaluation of the frequency and percentage distributions presented in the table.

4.2. Findings on the Role of Examinations in Facilitating Learning

Students' views on the learning-facilitating role of examinations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Distribution of views on the role of examinations in facilitating learning

Gender	Response	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Blank	Total
Female	N	26	28	16	65	13	148
	%	17,6	18,9	10,8	43,9	8,8	100,0
Male	N	31	19	18	20	6	94
	%	33,0	20,2	19,1	21,3	6,4	100,0
Total	N	57	47	34	85	19	242
	%	23,6	19,4	14,0	35,1	7,9	100,0

According to Table 2, a considerable proportion of students think that examinations have a function in facilitating learning. Of the total participants, 35.1% stated that examinations “always” facilitate learning, while 14.0% stated that they do so “often.” Accordingly, approximately half of the students (49.1%) regard examinations as a practice that supports learning.

When considered in terms of the gender, 43.9% of female students stated that examinations “always” facilitate learning, whereas this rate was 21.3% among male students. By contrast, 33.0% of male students stated that examinations “never” facilitate learning. This rate was 17.6% among female students. This distribution suggests that female students accept the learning-regulating function of examinations at a higher rate than male students.

This finding indicates that, from the students' perspective, examinations are not perceived solely as instruments of pressure and control; they are also seen as practices that regulate learning behavior and direct students toward studying. However, this result does not imply statistical significance or a causal explanation.

4.3. Integrated Evaluation of the Findings

When the two tables are considered together, it can be seen that students perceive examinations as dual-function tools. On the one hand, approximately half of the students regard examinations as regular instruments of control and surveillance. On the other hand, approximately half of the students also think that examinations facilitate learning. This suggests that the pedagogical and disciplinary functions of examinations in school life can be experienced together by students.

In terms of the gender, female students had higher rates in the "always" response category regarding the perception of examinations as instruments of control, whereas male students had higher rates in the "often" category. In the findings concerning the learning-facilitating role of examinations, it is noteworthy that female students' positive responses were higher than those of male students. These distributions indicate that the pedagogical and disciplinary functions of examinations may be perceived differently by different student groups.

Nevertheless, these findings should not be directly interpreted as indicating that female students are more "compliant" or that male students are more "resistant." The results are based only on descriptive distributions. Therefore, interpretations concerning the gender should be approached with caution, and it should be acknowledged that the sociological, pedagogical, and cultural reasons underlying differences in examination perceptions can only be explained through more detailed research.

In this context, the perception of examinations as both instruments of control and tools for learning offers a finding worthy of discussion in relation to Foucault's understanding of

disciplinary power. The examination is not merely a tool that controls the student; it may also operate as a productive mechanism that regulates students' study habits, use of time, forms of self-evaluation, and orientation toward achievement. Thus, the findings provide a basis for discussing the examination as a disciplinary technology that renders students visible, classifies them, and directs them toward self-regulation within the hidden curriculum of schooling.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that examinations are perceived by students as dual-function tools. While a considerable proportion of students regard examinations as instruments of control and surveillance, another considerable proportion state that examinations have a learning-facilitating function. This seemingly contradictory situation becomes more understandable within the framework of Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power. For Foucault, modern power is not merely a force that represses, prohibits, or punishes; it is also a productive network of relations that produces, regulates, and directs individuals toward self-regulation according to particular norms (Foucault, 1975, 1980). In this respect, the examination can be discussed as a disciplinary technology that produces both surveillance and learning behavior within the school.

5.1. The Dual Function of Examination Between Control and Learning

The research findings suggest that students do not view the examination merely as a tool for measuring academic performance, but also perceive it as part of the control mechanisms operating within the school. This interpretation is consistent with Foucault's account of the examination as a distinctive technique in which hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment are combined (Foucault, 1975). Through examination, the student is evaluated not only in terms of what he or she knows, but is also institutionally defined through achievement level, study habits, compliance with rules, and performance. Thus, alongside being a

pedagogical subject, the student is also placed within an educational position that can be recorded and compared.

At the same time, the fact that approximately half of the students regard examinations as elements that facilitate learning shows that examinations are not experienced solely as instruments of pressure and control. This does not necessarily contradict the disciplinary character of examinations. On the contrary, from a Foucauldian perspective, the perception of examinations as facilitating learning points to the productive dimension of power. Examinations may direct students toward studying, compel them to plan their time, encourage them to monitor their performance, and lead them to evaluate themselves according to norms of achievement. The assessment literature also emphasizes that examinations and assessment arrangements can have strong effects on what, how, and how much students study (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004).

In this context, the pedagogical and disciplinary functions of examinations cannot be separated by clear boundaries. Examinations may support students' learning processes; however, they often do so through being measured, compared, ranked, and subjected to expectations of institutional approval. Therefore, the fact that examinations facilitate learning does not mean that they are neutral or merely pedagogical tools. On the contrary, it is necessary to question under what conditions, according to which norms, and within which relations of power learning is organized in school.

5.2. The Operation of the Hidden Curriculum through Examinations

The findings suggest that examinations play an important role in the operation of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to the norms, values, and patterns of conduct that are not explicitly stated in the formal curriculum but are continuously experienced by students in school life (Apple, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983;

Jackson, 1968; Lynch, 1989; Yüksel, 2002). Within this framework, the examination does not merely determine whether the student has learned the subject content; it also teaches the student the form of studenthood expected by the school.

A student preparing for examinations often learns to use time in a regulated manner, work toward specific goals, position himself or herself within a competitive environment, accept the judgment of authority, and make sense of himself or herself within categories of success and failure. In this process, the student's learning experience may become associated less with curiosity and the search for meaning than with performance, grades, ranking, and criteria of competence. For this reason, the examination can be understood not merely as an outcome of the hidden curriculum, but as one of its important carriers.

Foucault's approach to the relationship between knowledge and power is important for understanding this operation. The examination simultaneously produces knowledge and exercises power. While the student's knowledge is measured, new knowledge about the student is also produced: the student's grade, level of achievement, deficiencies, competence, progress, and position in the ranking are recorded. In this way, the examination turns the student into both an object of knowledge and a target of disciplinary regulation. Hoskin's (1979) account of the historical role of examinations in modern education also supports this interpretation by showing that examinations operate not only as pedagogical instruments but also as institutional technologies of recording and classification.

This operation is not limited to students. Assessment and performance indicators may also regulate teachers, schools, and educational processes around particular goals, criteria, and expectations of accountability. Ball's (2003) discussion of performativity is important in showing how performance indicators in contemporary educational institutions may transform teachers' professional judgments and pedagogical decisions. In this respect, the examination

can be considered part of a broader disciplinary network in which not only students but also different actors within the school become observable, comparable, and assessable.

The function of examinations within the hidden curriculum becomes even more visible in contemporary assessment environments. Online examinations and remote proctoring practices, in particular, show that examinations are not merely tools for measuring students' knowledge; they may also produce regulatory effects on students' bodies, spaces, behaviors, digital traces, and privacy. Recent studies on online proctoring systems discuss how such systems can transform assessment into a more intensive field of surveillance through techniques such as artificial intelligence, biometric verification, behavioral monitoring, and automated flagging of suspicious conduct (Heinrich, 2025; Mutimukwe et al., 2025). Although the present study does not directly examine online examination practices, students' perception of examinations as instruments of surveillance gains a broader meaning when considered alongside contemporary debates on surveillance, privacy, and student autonomy in current assessment regimes.

5.3. A Cautious Interpretation of the Gender

The findings show that, in some response categories, female students' rates of viewing examinations both as instruments of control and as elements that facilitate learning are higher than those of male students. The higher rates of female students especially in the "always" category are noteworthy. However, this finding should not be interpreted as a statistically significant difference or as a causal explanation based on gender. Since the data are based only on frequency and percentage distributions, interpretations concerning gender should remain descriptive and cautious.

Within this framework, it may be suggested that female students may have perceived examinations in a way more closely aligned with the school's expectations of order, achievement, studying, and self-regulation. However, this should not be explained through a

direct or essentialist interpretation that female students are more “compliant” or that male students are more “resistant.” Such an interpretation would both exceed the limits of the data and risk reducing gendered educational experiences to simplistic categories.

The discussions of scholars such as Gilligan (1982) and Walkerdine (1989) indicate that, in educational processes, female students have often been more strongly associated with expectations of being orderly, responsible, hardworking, and compliant students. The descriptive findings of this study also suggest that examinations may intersect with such expectations. Nevertheless, in order to ground this interpretation more strongly, qualitative studies that examine students’ examination experiences in greater depth are needed.

The higher rate of male students stating that examinations “never” facilitate learning may suggest a more distant attitude toward examinations. However, this should not be directly interpreted as “resistance” either. Foucault’s approach to the relationship between power and resistance indicates that wherever power operates, different forms of encounter and response may also emerge (Foucault, 1976). In this context, the lower rate at which male students accept examinations as tools that support learning may be interpreted as a different experience of, or distance from, the disciplinary operation of examinations. The reasons for this, however, can only be explained through more detailed research.

5.4. The Constitution of Learning through Control

One of the most important points of discussion in this study concerns how the relationship between learning and control is established in students’ minds. The findings suggest that examinations may be perceived by students as tools that both regulate learning and exercise control. This indicates that, in the modern school, learning is often intertwined with processes of measurement, assessment, and comparison.

Examinations may support learning to the extent that they direct students toward studying. Indeed, the literature on formative assessment shows that assessment can strengthen learning

under conditions such as appropriate feedback, clear criteria, and student participation in the assessment process (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Shepard, 2000). However, when assessment is organized solely around external measurement, ranking, and achievement pressure, students' learning processes may become dependent on control and performance expectations. Perrenoud's (1998) discussion of assessment and the regulation of learning is also important in showing that assessment functions not only as a tool for determining outcomes, but also as a mechanism that regulates learning processes.

At this point, rather than rejecting the pedagogical role of examinations altogether, it is necessary to question under what conditions examinations support learning and under what conditions they turn into disciplinary mechanisms of pressure. From the perspective of critical philosophy of education, the central issue is not the existence or absence of examinations, but what kind of subject the examination constitutes the student as. If the examination turns the student merely into a subject who competes, studies for grades, and constantly monitors his or her own performance, the meaning of learning becomes narrowed. By contrast, if assessment processes support students' thinking, interpretation, self-expression, self-evaluation, and active participation in the learning process, the disciplinary effects of examinations can be pedagogically transformed.

This discussion shows that the perception of examinations as facilitating learning should not be evaluated as either a wholly positive or a wholly negative result in itself. Examinations may regulate learning; however, this regulation may deepen students' relationship with knowledge, or it may reduce learning to testable indicators of achievement. Studies on high-stakes examinations show that test-oriented assessment cultures carry the risk of narrowing the curriculum, dividing learning into measurable fragments, reducing pedagogical diversity, and increasing competitive pressure among students (Au, 2007; Berliner, 2011; Wheldon &

Dobson, 2024). Although the present study does not directly examine high-stakes centralized examinations, students' perception of examinations as both instruments of control and tools for learning suggests that the regulatory effect of examinations on learning may have ethical and political consequences as well as pedagogical ones.

5.5. The Meaning of Examination from the Perspective of Philosophy of Education

Discussions of examinations are often limited to technical concepts such as validity, reliability, measurement error, achievement scores, and assessment standards. However, this study indicates that the examination should also be discussed as an ethical, political, and pedagogical issue. The examination affects not only what the student knows, but also the student's mode of existence within the school. How students perceive themselves, how they make sense of success, how they orient themselves toward learning, and how they relate to authority are closely connected to examination practices.

This discussion is related to broader philosophical debates on the ways in which an examination-based school culture can produce not only academic but also moral and existential messages about students. An examination-centered and deficit-oriented understanding of schooling carries the risk of evaluating students solely through their levels of achievement (Portelli & Bozkurt, 2026). This understanding produces implicit messages about students' worth, competence, and human possibilities. In this respect, the function of examination within the hidden curriculum is not only about what the student has learned, but also about how the student is recognized, classified, and imagined as possible by the school.

For this reason, the examination can be regarded as one of the powerful instruments of the hidden curriculum in the modern school. Through examination, the student is not merely measured; the student is also defined according to a particular norm of achievement, ranked, and directed to regulate the self in relation to this norm. This demonstrates the explanatory power of Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power in the field of education. The examination

operates as a dual mechanism that contains repression and productivity, control and learning, measurement and subjectivation at the same time.

In this framework, assessment practices should be considered not only in terms of short-term indicators of achievement, but also in terms of their contribution to students' long-term learning capacity, self-evaluation skills, and ability to sustain learning. In their approach to assessment oriented toward long-term learning, Boud and Falchikov (2006) emphasize that assessment processes should be structured not merely to document achievement, but also to support students' responsibility for future learning. Recent literature on assessment literacy also shows that teachers need to understand assessment not only as a measurement technique, but in relation to feedback, student participation, socio-emotional support, and the regulation of learning (Lei & Lei, 2026). Although this approach does not completely eliminate the disciplinary effects of examinations, it offers the possibility of transforming assessment into a more participatory, feedback-oriented, and learning-enhancing pedagogical practice.

6. Conclusion

This study has opened for discussion the possibility of considering examinations in the modern school not merely as technical tools for measuring students' academic achievement, but also as disciplinary mechanisms operating within the hidden curriculum of schooling. When evaluated within the framework of Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power, the examination functions as a school practice that renders the student visible, compares, classifies, documents, and directs the student toward self-regulation. For this reason, the educational meaning of examination should be discussed not only in the context of measurement and assessment, but also around the question of what kind of subject the student is constituted as.

The research findings suggest that students may perceive examinations as dual-function tools. While a considerable proportion of students regard examinations as instruments of control and

surveillance, another considerable proportion state that examinations have a learning-facilitating function. This indicates that the pedagogical and disciplinary functions of examinations are not entirely separate from one another. Examinations may direct students toward studying and regulate the learning process; however, this direction often operates together with processes of being measured, ranked, compared, and brought into conformity with institutional norms of achievement.

This dual structure can be explained through Foucault's view that power is not only repressive but also productive. The examination does not merely control the student; it may also produce forms of conduct such as study habits, time management, self-evaluation, and achievement orientation. Therefore, the perception of examinations as facilitating learning does not eliminate their disciplinary character. On the contrary, the disciplinary force of examinations derives from their capacity to organize learning within particular institutional norms.

The findings concerning the gender suggest that there are some descriptive differences in female and male students' views on the control and learning functions of examinations. The higher rates of "always" responses among female students are particularly noteworthy. However, these findings should not be interpreted as indicating a statistically significant difference or a causal explanation. More cautiously, it can be stated that examinations may be experienced differently by different student groups in relation to the school's expectations of order, achievement, and self-regulation. Yet this should not be approached through an essentialist interpretation suggesting that female students are more "compliant" or that male students are more "resistant."

The main conclusion of the study is that the examination can be interpreted as one of the powerful carriers of the hidden curriculum. Through examination, the student does not merely demonstrate knowledge of subject content; the student also enters into a relationship with the school's expectations of achievement, order, competition, time discipline, and compliance with

authority. In this way, the examination becomes a mechanism that shapes the student's learning experience and directs the student toward self-regulation according to a particular norm of achievement. This indicates that measurement and assessment practices should be discussed not only in terms of technical criteria such as validity and reliability, but also in terms of their ethical, political, and pedagogical consequences.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were obtained from students enrolled in a single high school during the 2011–2012 academic year. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all high school students. Second, since the study is based on descriptive data, no causal or relational conclusion was drawn between perceptions of examinations and perceptions of learning. Third, the findings concerning the gender were interpreted only through frequency and percentage distributions; the sociological, pedagogical, and cultural reasons underlying these differences were not examined in depth.

Future studies may re-examine the disciplinary and hidden-curriculum functions of examinations in different types of schools, different socio-economic contexts, and with more recent data sets. Qualitative studies, in particular, may reveal in greater depth how students experience examinations, what meanings they attribute to them, and how examinations affect self-regulation, anxiety, motivation, and perceptions of achievement. In addition, how alternative approaches to measurement and assessment produce different forms of learning and subjectivation in students may be considered an important area of inquiry for philosophy of education.

In conclusion, the examination can be regarded in the modern school not only as a practice that measures learning, but also as one that constitutes learning within particular norms. Therefore, understanding examinations does not only mean understanding how much students have learned; it also means questioning what kind of student, learning, and conception of

achievement the school produces. This questioning requires us to think of assessment not merely as a search for more accurate measurement, but also as a matter of establishing more meaningful, participatory, and pedagogical relationships that support long-term learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Shepard, 2000).

Thesis-Derived Publication Note

This article is derived from Recep Temir's master's thesis entitled *A Study on the Hidden Curriculum and Discipline in the Context of M. Foucault's Disciplinary Power: The Case of Sait Sabri Ağaoğlu Anatolian High School*, completed in 2013 at the Department of Educational Sciences, Institute of Social Sciences, Uşak University, under the supervision of Assistant Professor Hakan Gülveren. The present article does not aim to re-present the entire data set included in the thesis; rather, it focuses only on the examination-related findings and reinterprets these findings within the framework of Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and the hidden curriculum.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

This study is not based on a new data collection process. The data used in the study are archival data collected as part of a previously completed master's thesis (Temir, 2013). No identifying information about the participants is included in the article, and the data are used only in the form of aggregated frequency and percentage distributions.

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