

Making Shoes Instead of Going to School? Child Labour in Turkey

Introduction to a simulated discussion between stakeholders

To introduce this topic, first watch together with your group the 17-minute documentary “Schuhe statt Schule” (*Shoes instead of School*) produced by GEW, the German Teacher’s Union, about child labour in the Turkish shoe industry (German sub-titles only)

→ www.gew.de/aktuelles/detailseite/neuigkeiten/doku-schuhe-statt-schule-mit-begleitmaterial-fuer-den-unterricht

Background

Ferhat (12) and Abdullah (14) both live in the Turkish city of Adana. Nearly every day after school as well as at weekends, the two boys have to go to work in order to help their families out. In a small business they glue shoe parts together for international shoe manufacturers, unprotected when handling hazardous substances and thereby putting their health at serious risk. Though they have clear wishes for their professional future, they first need a school-leaving certificate in order to realise their dreams. Like them, their employers in the shoe production workshop where they work, also started out life in that shoe factory – and have remained ever since.

What will become of Ferhat and Abdullah? These two young Turkish boys exemplify the fate of millions and millions of other children round the world who are forced to financially support their families, risking their chances of a professional future of their own. 2012 was the last year the Turkish government statistically recorded any cases of child labour within its territory.

Execution

The discussion starts with the presentation of a fictitious case study and the individual stakeholder groups represented in the roleplay. The various roles, (teachers, parents, etc.) and their respective positions are then allotted to the students. Each group can also give itself its own name and is allowed fifteen minutes to familiarise itself with the case and to formulate arguments. It then sends one representative to participate at the “fishbowl” conference in the middle of the classroom, which is moderated by the teacher or the students. Everyone else observes the conference. If a member of the group comes up with a good argument, then the person in the middle can be replaced. The objective is to come up with potential solutions. Afterwards, the simulated discussion will be evaluated by everybody present.

Conflicts of Interest: Case Study Ferhat

Ferhat is twelve-years-old and after school he has to glue shoe parts together until ten o’clock at night in a small business in Turkey. The highly toxic glue can cause paralysis and headaches. His parents depend on him for financial support. The shoes Ferhat glues together are produced for an international shoe brand. Two of his five siblings are chronically ill and need to take medication regularly. This prevents his mother from going out to work, and, as a waiter, his father does not earn enough money for the family’s upkeep.

Ferhat used to be top of his class, but barely moved up at the end of this school year. Ferhat’s teacher has repeatedly tried to talk with his parents, yet they insist that their son must continue to work in order to bring money into the home. The alarmed teacher then informs the school administration, who, in turn, contacts a local organisation for child protection. The reality is that many students have to work and study at the same time, which is why their school performance is constantly getting worse. The school administration wants to draw the public’s attention to this problem of child labour in their region.

With this pressure to bring the matter to the public’s attention, the child protection organisation succeeds in organising a meeting with a high-ranking government representative as well as a company representative from Eleganza, the shoe manufacturer. The parents’ association and the school administration also take part in this discussion. All participants in the discussion hope for a more robust local control of child labour and a commitment to political measures that in future will more strictly control and limit child labour across the entire country.

Questions for Evaluation

- How did you succeed with your roles? How did you feel?
- What objectives did you pursue and what were you able to concretely achieve?
- With whom did you work well or poorly?
- Which group wielded the least influence? Why?
- Which concern by which group did you personally find most important?
- From your standpoint, how realistic are the arguments put forward and the outcome of the discussion?

Role Cards

Parents' Representatives at the School in Adana

- They want that their children attend school regularly and graduate.
- They want to offer their children a good future.
- Some parents need their children's income, so there is a conflict of interest within the parents' association.

School Administration at the School in Adana

- They are aware that some of their students have to work to support their families in addition to attending school on account of financial hardship.
- They have witnessed first-hand how these working students' performance have deteriorated to such an extent that often they no longer attend classes at all.
- They want to ensure that these students are no longer absent from school because of the fact that they have to go out and work.
- They demand an end to child labour across the region.

Activists from the Organisation for Child Protection

- They demand that the government take all the necessary legal measures to protect children and prevent child labour not only in the region but across the entire country.
- They call upon the company, *Eleganza*, not only to assume their responsibilities but also to control and stop child labour in their supply chains.
- They threaten to report this case of child labour across social media networks and to discredit *Eleganza's* prestige among its clientele.

Government Representatives

- Officially, they are against child labour, but at the same time do not want to alienate any international companies.
- In order to strengthen their competitiveness and to retain international companies in Turkey, they do not want to restrict production conditions.
- They are afraid of upsetting *Eleganza* lest the company suffers any production stoppages and thus risk losing a major overseas investor.

Company Management from the Shoe Manufacturer *Eleganza*

- Allegedly, they were not aware about the poor working conditions and the use of child labour by their local supplier.
- They want to maintain their low production costs in Turkey, which ensures them high profit margins when selling shoes in Europe.



You can find supplementary materials for the classroom here (in German only):

→ www.gew.de/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=65221&token=a42221426c386fab0a594d36c65b802a06cdf35&sdownload=&n=Schuhe_statt_Schule_-_Material_zum_Film.pdf