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Toponymic Analysis of Public School Names in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus: A Study Based on the Pre-1974 Settlement Structure

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Abstract. *The aim of this study is to examine the current settlement names used in the names of public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in relation to the historical characteristics of these settlements prior to 1974 and to explore the role of school names in the public circulation of place names. The study was conducted within a quantitative research framework using a descriptive design based on document analysis. The research population consisted of 161 public schools operating under the Ministry of National Education during the 2025–2026 academic year. Data were obtained through a comparative analysis of official school lists provided by the Ministry of National Education and official and scholarly sources concerning historical settlements and place names. Schools containing current settlement names in their official names were identified, and these settlements were classified according to their pre-1974 historical characteristics into three categories: former Greek Cypriot-majority settlements, former Turkish Cypriot-majority settlements, and former mixed Greek Cypriot–Turkish Cypriot settlements. The findings revealed that 89 of the 161 public schools examined include a current settlement name in their official names. Among these schools, 48 (53.9%) are associated with settlements that had Greek Cypriot-majority characteristics before 1974, 22 (24.7%) with Turkish Cypriot-majority settlements, and 19 (21.4%) with mixed settlements. The analysis by educational level demonstrated that settlement-based naming practices are most prevalent in primary schools, whereas secondary education institutions more frequently employ names associated with individuals, historical figures, and institutional identities. Furthermore, the findings indicate that officially adopted current settlement names after 1974 have been reflected more extensively in public school names, particularly in areas characterized by Greek Cypriot-majority settlement patterns before 1974. The study concludes that school names function not merely as administrative identifiers of educational institutions but also as institutional mechanisms through which place names enter public discourse, historical and spatial transformations are represented, and spatial memory is reproduced. In this respect, the study contributes to interdisciplinary discussions in educational administration, critical toponymy, historical geography, and public memory studies.*

Keywords: *school naming, toponymy, place names, spatial memory, public identity, historical geography, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)*

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Şimali Kipr Türk Respublikasında dövlət məktəblərinin adlarının toponimik təhlili: 1974-cü ildən əvvəlki məskunlaşma strukturuna əsaslanan tədqiqat

Nazmiyə Hazar

Xülasə. *Bu tədqiqatın məqsədi Şimali Kipr Türk Respublikasının (ŞKTR) Milli Təhsil Nazirliyinə tabe olan dövlət məktəblərinin adlarında işlədilən müasir yaşayış məntəqəsi adlarını həmin məntəqələrin 1974-cü ildən əvvəlki tarixi xüsusiyyətləri ilə əlaqəli şəkildə araşdırmaq və yer adlarının ictimai istifadəsində məktəb adlarının rolunu müəyyənləşdirməkdir. Tədqiqat kəmiyyət yanaşması çərçivəsində sənəd təhlilinə əsaslanan təsviri tədqiqat modeli ilə aparılmışdır. Tədqiqatın baş məcmusunu 2025–2026-cı tədris ilində Milli Təhsil Nazirliyinin tabeliyində fəaliyyət göstərən 161 dövlət məktəbi təşkil etmişdir. Məlumatlar Nazirliyin təqdim etdiyi rəsmi məktəb siyahılarının tarixi yaşayış məntəqələri və yer adlarına dair rəsmi və elmi mənbələrlə müqayisəli təhlili əsasında əldə edilmişdir. Rəsmi adlarında müasir yaşayış məntəqəsi adları olan məktəblər müəyyənləşdirilmiş, həmin məntəqələr isə 1974-cü ildən əvvəlki tarixi xüsusiyyətlərinə görə üç kateqoriyaya bölünmüşdür: əvvəllər Kipr yunanlarının çoxluq təşkil etdiyi yaşayış məntəqələri, Kipr türklərinin çoxluq təşkil etdiyi yaşayış məntəqələri və Kipr yunanları ilə Kipr türklərinin birgə yaşadıqları qarışıq yaşayış məntəqələri. Nəticələr göstərmişdir ki, araşdırılan 161 dövlət məktəbindən 89-nun rəsmi adında müasir yaşayış məntəqəsinin adı yer alır. Bu məktəblərdən 48-i (53,9%) 1974-cü ildən əvvəl Kipr yunanlarının çoxluq təşkil etdiyi, 22-si (24,7%) Kipr türklərinin çoxluq təşkil etdiyi, 19-u (21,4%) isə qarışıq əhalinin yaşadığı məntəqələrlə əlaqəlidir. Təhsil pillələri üzrə təhlil göstərmişdir ki, yaşayış məntəqələrinin adlarına əsaslanan adlandırma ibtidai məktəblərdə daha geniş yayılmışdır. Orta təhsil müəssisələrində isə şəxslərin, tarixi şəxsiyyətlərin adlarından və müəssisənin kimliyini əks etdirən adlardan daha çox istifadə olunur. Bundan əlavə, nəticələr göstərir ki, 1974-cü ildən sonra rəsmi şəkildə qəbul edilmiş müasir yaşayış məntəqəsi adları, xüsusilə həmin tarixədək Kipr yunanlarının çoxluq təşkil etdiyi ərazilərdə dövlət məktəblərinin adlarında daha geniş əks olunmuşdur. Tədqiqatda belə nəticəyə gəlinir ki, məktəb adları təhsil müəssisələrini fərqləndirən inzibati adlar olmaqla yanaşı, yer adlarının ictimai diskursa daxil olmasını, tarixi və məkan dəyişikliklərinin təmsil edilməsini, eləcə də məkan yaddaşının yenidən istehsalını təmin edən institusional mexanizmlər kimi çıxış edir. Bu baxımdan tədqiqat təhsilin idarə olunması, tənqidi toponimika, tarixi coğrafiya və ictimai yaddaş tədqiqatları sahələrində fənlərarası müzakirələrə töhfə verir.*

Açar sözlər: *məktəblərin adlandırılması, toponimika, yer adları, məkan yaddaşı, ictimai kimlik, tarixi coğrafiya, Şimali Kipr Türk Respublikası (ŞKTR)*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Educational Infrastructure, Space, and the Production of Public Meaning

Educational systems are not merely institutional structures through which knowledge and skills are transmitted; they are also spatial organizations shaped by social, demographic, political, and historical processes. The location, distribution, and accessibility of educational institutions are closely associated with population structures, settlement patterns, public policies, and regional development dynamics. Therefore, the spatial distribution of educational institutions has become an important field of inquiry not only in educational sciences but also in educational geography, human geography, public administration, and regional planning (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2010; Holloway & Jöns, 2012).

The perspective of educational geography approaches schools not simply as physical spaces where instructional activities take place, but as spatial institutions embedded within specific historical, social, and political contexts. This approach examines where educational institutions are concentrated, which population groups they serve, how they are related to settlement structures, and how regional inequalities emerge in access to educational services (Thiem, 2009; Holloway & Jöns, 2012). From this perspective, the formation of school networks cannot be explained solely by current student populations; rather, it should be understood as the outcome of the interaction among historical settlement processes, public investments, transportation opportunities, and administrative policies.

Place names (toponyms) are not merely geographical markers that identify spatial locations; they are also symbolic instruments through which historical processes, political authority, collective memory, and social identities become visible in public space. The critical toponymy approach argues that place names carry ideological, cultural, and political meanings, while naming practices function as mechanisms through which power relations, identity politics, and collective memories are reproduced (Azaryahu, 1996; Alderman, 2008; Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2010). Accordingly, school names should not be considered merely as administrative labels for educational institutions; rather, they represent significant toponymic elements reflecting historical memory, spatial belonging, and public identity.

Approaches that conceptualize space not as a passive physical location but as a continuously produced phenomenon shaped by historical, economic, social, and political relations provide an important theoretical foundation for analyzing educational institutions (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2010). From this perspective, the locations of schools are not solely outcomes of current population densities; they also represent spatial manifestations of long-term social transformations and the organization of public services. Therefore, examining educational infrastructure in relation to historical settlement patterns contributes to understanding how educational services are organized and how spatial continuities are maintained over time.

The spatial distribution of educational services is also closely associated with debates on spatial justice. Harvey's (1973) social justice perspective and Soja's (2010) theory of spatial justice emphasize that access to public services is not only an economic issue but also a geographical one. The concentration of educational institutions in certain areas or their limited availability in particular settlements may produce different consequences in terms of access to educational opportunities, transportation conditions, and regional development. Accordingly, contemporary approaches to educational planning consider not only current student populations but also population movements, settlement characteristics, demographic changes, and spatial inequalities (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2018).

Within this framework, school mapping has become one of the fundamental planning tools used in the spatial analysis of educational infrastructure. The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) defines school mapping as a strategic approach aimed at identifying the existing distribution of educational institutions, forecasting future educational needs, ensuring efficient resource allocation, and grounding educational investments in evidence-based criteria (UNESCO-IIEP, 2009). Contemporary school mapping studies extend beyond simply determining the number of schools and increasingly incorporate demographic movements, migration processes, settlement structures, and regional development indicators.

Nevertheless, the spatial organization of educational infrastructure is not solely the outcome of contemporary planning decisions. Particularly in societies experiencing conflict, population movements, and political transformations, public institutions may preserve traces of previous settlement patterns. As a major component of public services, educational institutions provide important indicators through which population movements, spatial restructuring, and institutional transformations can be examined (Bollens, 2000; Bollens, 2007). Therefore, analyzing educational institutions from a historical-spatial perspective enables a deeper understanding of institutional continuities and transformations between the past and the present.

This study does not examine the settlements in which public schools are physically located; rather, it focuses on the historical origins of current settlement names used in school names. Within this framework, the study approaches school names through the perspective of critical toponymy and aims to reveal how officially adopted settlement names after 1974 have become visible and institutionalized in public space through educational institutions.

1.2. Post-War State-Building, Settlement Transformation, and the Reconstruction of Public Space

Wars and subsequent processes of political restructuring transform not only state boundaries and social structures but also settlement patterns, the spatial organization of public services, and the symbolic dimensions of public space. Particularly during the establishment of new states or the reorganization of existing state structures, forced migration, population movements, and changes in settlement arrangements require the restructuring of education, healthcare, and other public services in accordance with emerging demographic and administrative conditions (Bollens, 2007; Newman, 2006).

State-building processes in post-conflict contexts involve not only the formation of political institutions but also the development of institutional capacities, the organization of public services, and the reconfiguration of public space. In this sense, the reconstruction of educational infrastructure constitutes an important dimension of broader processes of political and spatial transformation.

Studies on divided societies demonstrate that political and demographic transformations do not completely eliminate previous spatial patterns; rather, these patterns may continue to influence contemporary social and institutional structures through infrastructure networks, public institutions, and settlement arrangements (Bollens, 2000; Pullan, 2011). From this perspective, educational institutions should not be considered merely as structures responding to current social needs; they may also function as spatial indicators through which historical transformations become visible.

In this study, the concept of historical settlement characteristics is not used to define contemporary social identities or present-day demographic structures. Instead, it is employed as a historical analytical variable for examining the spatial patterns reflected through educational institutions. In other words, the study

aims to investigate how previous settlement configurations may have left spatial traces within contemporary educational infrastructure.

1.3. Historical Settlement Geography of Cyprus and the Reorganization of Educational Infrastructure after 1974

The island of Cyprus has a multi-layered settlement geography shaped by different political administrations, population movements, and social transformations throughout history. The island's strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean and successive changes in political sovereignty have contributed to the continuous reconfiguration of settlement patterns and social structures. Therefore, understanding the contemporary spatial organization of Cyprus requires an evaluation that extends beyond current administrative boundaries and demographic distributions and considers historical processes and settlement transformations (Hill, 2010; Bryant, 2010).

Following the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1571, settlement policies implemented by the Ottoman administration significantly influenced the island's demographic and cultural structure. Population transfers and settlement practices carried out in different regions strengthened the presence of the Turkish population on the island and contributed to the emergence of new settlement characteristics. Following the beginning of British administration in 1878, administrative structures, transportation networks, and the organization of public services were reconfigured, and the development of educational institutions was also shaped by these transformations (Hill, 2010).

Although the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 introduced a bi-communal constitutional framework, subsequent political tensions and social divisions significantly affected settlement patterns. Particularly after 1963, increasing security concerns and population movements contributed to greater spatial separation between communities in certain settlements, while the provision of public services and the functioning of institutions were also influenced by these developments (Dodd, 2010; Nevzat, 2005).

The year 1974 represents a major turning point in the historical and spatial organization of Cyprus. The large-scale population movements that followed the events of this period resulted in the emergence of distinct demographic and administrative structures in the northern and southern parts of the island. The relocation of populations to new settlement areas required not only the reorganization of housing and economic activities but also the restructuring of education, healthcare, and other public services (Hatay, 2007; Bryant, 2010).

The reorganization of the educational system in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) required the sustainable provision of educational services in accordance with the changing demographic structure. During this process, the utilization of existing school buildings, the establishment of new educational institutions, the restructuring of school networks, and the continuation of educational services across different settlements became central administrative concerns. Accordingly, the contemporary distribution of public schools should be understood not only as a response to current population needs but also as a consequence of historical transformations and settlement processes.

However, establishing a direct causal relationship between historical settlement characteristics and the contemporary distribution of educational institutions would not be methodologically appropriate. In this study, historical settlement characteristics are not considered the sole determinants explaining the location or distribution of educational institutions; rather, they are used as an analytical classification variable for examining spatial patterns. Thus, the study adopts a descriptive and comparative approach

to explore how historical settlement configurations may be reflected within contemporary educational structures.

1.4. Literature Gap and Original Contribution of the Study

International studies examining the spatial distribution of educational institutions have primarily focused on school accessibility, educational equity, regional disparities, school planning, and the effective allocation of public resources (Holloway & Jöns, 2012; Thiem, 2009). These studies demonstrate that educational infrastructure is not merely a pedagogical component but also a reflection of broader social and spatial processes.

However, research examining the relationship between educational infrastructure and historical settlement patterns in post-conflict societies remains limited. Although existing studies have extensively addressed the spatial transformation of divided societies, population movements, and the effects of political boundaries, the role of educational institutions within these transformations has received comparatively less attention (Bollens, 2007; Pullan, 2011).

Research on Cyprus has largely focused on political history, international relations, population movements, and social transformations (Bryant, 2010; Dodd, 2010; Hatay, 2007). Nevertheless, comprehensive research systematically examining all public schools operating in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus according to pre-1974 historical settlement characteristics, educational levels, and administrative regions remains limited.

This study seeks to address this gap by integrating educational geography and historical settlement geography within a common analytical framework. The first contribution of the study is to make the spatial patterns of educational infrastructure visible through a comprehensive dataset developed according to the historical settlement characteristics associated with public school names in the TRNC. The second contribution is to propose a methodological approach in which historical settlement patterns are considered as an analytical variable for examining educational institutions. The third contribution is to provide an empirical case for broader discussions concerning the spatial continuity and transformation of public services in post-conflict societies.

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in its focus not on the physical locations of public schools, but on the historical origins of current settlement names used in school names and the role of educational institutions in the public circulation of place names. Specifically, the study examines the extent to which officially adopted settlement names after 1974 are represented in public school names and how these representations vary according to historical settlement categories.

In this respect, the study argues that educational institutions are not merely structures providing educational services; they also function as public mechanisms through which current settlement names become visible in everyday use and through which forms of spatial belonging are institutionally reproduced.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How are current settlement names used in public school names in the TRNC distributed according to their pre-1974 settlement characteristics?

Research Question 2: How does the distribution of current settlement names used in school names according to pre-1974 settlement characteristics vary across educational levels?

Research Question 3: How does the use of current settlement names originating from pre-1974 Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, and mixed Turkish–Greek Cypriot settlements differ in public school naming practices?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Toponymy and the Social Functions of Place Names

Toponymy is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that examines the origins, meanings, uses, and transformations of place names over time. Place names are not merely descriptive labels identifying geographical locations; they are also significant indicators reflecting societies' historical experiences, cultural heritage, political structures, and collective memories (Alderman, 2008). In this respect, toponyms serve as symbolic elements that establish connections between the past and the present, while also functioning as important instruments through which states organize, regulate, and re-signify public space.

Within the toponymy literature, changes in place names are not regarded merely as linguistic transformations. Particularly following political transitions, wars, population movements, and processes of institutional restructuring, renaming practices are considered visible manifestations of new political and social orders within public space (Azaryahu, 1996). Therefore, place names provide important insights into how societies define space and which historical narratives they choose to make visible in the public sphere.

The critical toponymy approach emphasizes that place names are not neutral geographical references; rather, they constitute important components of power relations, identity construction, and public memory processes (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2010). From this perspective, toponyms function as symbolic mechanisms through which societies interpret their past, negotiate collective identities, and construct shared understandings of belonging. Consequently, the study of place names provides valuable opportunities for understanding how historical narratives and social meanings are embedded within everyday spatial practices.

2.2. Place Names, Public Memory, and Educational Institutions

Place names represent among the most frequently encountered symbolic markers in public space. Their continuous reproduction through everyday practices, official documents, maps, and the names of public institutions enables them to become embedded within collective memory (Light & Young, 2014). Therefore, continuously used public institutions such as educational organizations may function as important institutional mechanisms through which place names are transmitted across generations.

Schools are not only educational settings where teaching and learning activities occur; they are also public institutions through which states and societies become visible in everyday life. School names are repeatedly used by students, teachers, families, and local communities, allowing them to become part of the social memory embedded within daily practices. Accordingly, school naming practices should not be understood merely as technical administrative decisions within educational management; they also influence how place names circulate, become normalized, and gain public recognition.

From this perspective, settlement names incorporated into school names can be considered symbolic elements that shape how individuals perceive and define their surrounding environments. Through their continuous repetition within educational contexts, place names contribute to the development of spatial belonging and support the social acceptance of officially recognized names of places. Thus, educational institutions serve not only as providers of public services but also as important actors in the reproduction and circulation of spatial meanings.

2.3. Transformation of Settlement Names in the Context of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

The political and demographic transformations experienced in Cyprus after 1974 affected not only settlement structures but also the naming of places. Numerous settlements located in the northern part of the island were assigned new names, and these names gradually became incorporated into official documents, maps, and public institutions (Bryant, 2010; Hatay, 2007). This process may be understood not merely as an administrative arrangement but also as part of the broader reconfiguration of public space and the institutionalization of a new settlement order.

Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), educational institutions became significant components of this transformation. The preference for current settlement names in the naming of newly established schools, as well as in the naming practices of existing educational institutions, contributed to the institutional recognition and everyday use of these names. In this way, school names transformed settlement names into public symbols that were reproduced not only through official records but also through daily educational practices.

This study focuses precisely on this relationship between educational institutions and place-name reproduction. The aim is not to determine the historical settlement characteristics of the locations where public schools are physically situated; rather, it is to examine the pre-1974 historical characteristics of current settlement names used in school names and to reveal how these names have been institutionalized through educational institutions.

Accordingly, this study brings together educational administration and critical toponymy perspectives by examining the role of school names in the public circulation of settlement names within the context of the TRNC. Through this approach, educational institutions are conceptualized as symbolic public spaces where historical transformations, spatial meanings, and place-based identities become visible and reproduced.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive document-based research design using a quantitative content analysis approach to examine the contemporary settlement names used in the names of public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), with particular emphasis on the historical settlement characteristics of these names prior to 1974.

In the first stage of the research, the official names of 161 public schools operating during the 2025–2026 academic year were examined, and the main naming patterns used in school names were identified. The analysis revealed that school names were derived from various sources, including statesmen, educators, historical figures, literary personalities, individuals with significant contributions to the social and

cultural memory of the Turkish Cypriot community, national and historical events (e.g., 20 July), philanthropists, expressions representing institutional or professional identities, and settlement names. In some cases, settlement names were used together with cultural or symbolic expressions (e.g., Güzelyurt Portakal Çiçekleri Kindergarten and Güzelyurt Kurtuluş High School).

In accordance with the purpose of the study, only school names containing contemporary settlement names were included in the analysis. Each contemporary settlement name identified in school names was classified according to the historical settlement characteristics of the relevant settlement unit before 1974 as a Greek Cypriot settlement, Turkish Cypriot settlement, or mixed Greek Cypriot–Turkish Cypriot settlement.

Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study is not the entire set of public schools, but the contemporary settlement names used in school names. The aim of the study is not to classify the settlements in which schools are physically located; rather, it seeks to reveal the historical origins of contemporary settlement names appearing in school names and to evaluate the patterns of their public use through educational institutions after their adoption following 1974.

3.2. Research Population and Data Sources

The research population consists of all public schools operating under the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus during the 2025–2026 academic year. No sampling procedure was employed; instead, the entire research population was examined through a complete enumeration approach.

The study included:

- pre-primary education institutions, special education schools, and primary schools affiliated with the Department of Primary Education,
- lower secondary schools and high schools affiliated with the Department of General Secondary Education,
- vocational and technical high schools affiliated with the Department of Vocational Technical Education.

A total of 161 public schools were evaluated within the scope of the research.
The following sources were used to construct the dataset:

- official updated school lists provided by the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC,
- institutional records of relevant education departments,
- official information and promotional resources provided by school administrations,
- scientific studies addressing the historical characteristics of settlements,
- historical population and settlement records,
- official sources related to changes in place names.

Private schools, universities, private course centres, and temporary educational units were excluded from the study.

3.3. Data Collection and Coding Process

The data collection and coding process was conducted in four stages.

In the first stage, the current official names of the 161 public schools constituting the research population were identified. In the second stage, all school names were examined individually, and schools containing contemporary settlement names were determined. The analysis revealed that 89 of the 161 public schools

had names directly based on contemporary settlement names. Schools whose names were based on personal names, historical figures, professional fields, or institutional identities and did not contain settlement names were excluded from the analysis.

In the third stage, each contemporary settlement name used in school names was evaluated according to its historical settlement characteristics before 1974 using historical sources and was coded as a Greek Cypriot settlement, Turkish Cypriot settlement, or mixed Greek Cypriot–Turkish Cypriot settlement.

In the fourth stage, additional variables, including educational level, district, and educational administrative unit, were added to the dataset for each school. Thus, the final dataset to be used in statistical analyses was established.

3.4. Classification of Historical Settlement Characteristics

The primary analytical variable of the study is the historical settlement characteristic of the settlements from which the contemporary settlement names used in school names originate. Within this framework, settlements were classified into three categories:

Greek Cypriot settlement: Settlement units that were predominantly inhabited by the Greek Cypriot population before 1974.

Turkish Cypriot settlement: Settlement units that were predominantly inhabited by the Turkish Cypriot population before 1974.

Mixed Greek Cypriot–Turkish Cypriot settlement: Settlement units where both communities lived together or where both communities constituted significant proportions of the population before 1974.

During the classification process, scientific studies, historical population research, and settlement records concerning the historical demographic characteristics of settlements were comparatively examined (Bryant, 2010; Dodd, 2010; Hatay, 2007). In cases where differences existed among sources, commonly accepted historical records were taken as the basis.

This classification was not used to define contemporary population structures, ethnic identities, or property relations; rather, it was employed solely as an analytical variable for examining the historical origins of contemporary settlement names used in school names.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies (n), percentage (%) distributions, and cross-tabulations were used to demonstrate the distribution patterns related to educational levels, districts, and historical settlement characteristics.

The analysis process was conducted in four stages. In the first stage, the official names of the 161 public schools included in the research were examined, and school names were classified according to their content characteristics. This analysis indicated that school names could be categorized according to different naming sources, including personal names, historical figures, philanthropists, national and cultural values, institutional identities, and settlement-based names.

In the second stage, only schools containing contemporary settlement names were included in the analysis. In cases where contemporary settlement names were used together with historical, cultural, symbolic, or value-based expressions (e.g., Güzelyurt Kurtuluş High School, Güzelyurt Portakal Çiçekleri Kindergarten, and Oğuz Veli Middle School), the presence of the settlement name was considered sufficient for inclusion in the study.

In contrast, schools whose names included only personal names, historical figures, national commemorations and events, philanthropists, or institutional identities without any contemporary settlement name (e.g., Namık Kemal High School, Bekir Paşa High School, 20 July Science High School, and Bülent Ecevit Anatolian High School) were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the primary inclusion criterion was not the general naming approach of schools but rather the presence of a contemporary settlement name within the school name.

In the third stage, contemporary settlement names used in school names were identified and classified into three categories according to their historical settlement characteristics before 1974: Greek Cypriot settlement, Turkish Cypriot settlement, and mixed Greek Cypriot–Turkish Cypriot settlement. This classification was based on the historical origin of the settlement name reflected in the school name rather than the location of the school itself.

In the final stage, the obtained data were evaluated through frequency and percentage calculations. In addition, cross-tabulations were created according to educational level, district, and educational administrative unit variables to conduct comparative analyses. Through these analyses, the historical origins of contemporary settlement names used in school names and their distribution patterns across educational levels and administrative units were identified. Accordingly, the usage patterns of officially adopted contemporary settlement names after 1974 within public school naming practices were descriptively examined.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

To enhance the accuracy of the dataset, the collected data were validated comparatively through multiple official and scientific sources. Data related to public schools were cross-checked with the updated official school lists of the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC and institutional records of relevant education departments. The historical characteristics of contemporary settlement names used in school names were verified through official records and scientific sources addressing the historical settlement structure of Cyprus.

During the coding process, the same predetermined classification criteria were applied consistently to all settlement units. Following completion of the coding process, the dataset was reviewed again to identify and resolve potential inconsistencies. Historical settlement characteristics were used solely as an analytical variable, and no conclusions were drawn regarding contemporary population structures, ethnic identities, or property relations.

The detailed explanation of the data collection process, classification criteria, and analytical procedures; the explicit identification of data sources; and the consistent application of the same criteria throughout the analyses contribute to the methodological transparency, replicability, and reliability of the study.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings obtained regarding the spatial and institutional distribution of public educational institutions operating in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The institutions examined within the scope of the study were evaluated according to their affiliated educational administrative units, educational levels, districts, and the pre-1974 historical characteristics of the settlements associated with the institutions. The findings are presented first through an analysis of the institutional structure and distribution of public educational institutions by educational level, followed by comparative analyses based on district distribution and historical settlement characteristics.

4.1. Distribution of Public Educational Institutions by Educational Administrative Units

Within the scope of the study, a total of 161 public educational institutions operating in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus were examined. The institutions were categorized into three main groups based on their affiliated educational administrative units. Accordingly, the institutions were classified as those affiliated with the Directorate of Primary Education, the Directorate of General Secondary Education, and the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education.

The findings indicate that public educational institutions are not evenly distributed among educational administrative units. Of the 161 institutions examined, 110 (68.3%) are affiliated with the Directorate of Primary Education, 38 (23.6%) with the Directorate of General Secondary Education, and 13 (8.1%) with the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education.

Table 1
Distribution of Public Educational Institutions by Educational Administrative Units

Educational Administrative Unit	Number of Institutions (n)	Percentage (%)
Directorate of Primary Education	110	68.3
Directorate of General Secondary Education	38	23.6
Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education	13	8.1
Total	161	100.0

As presented in Table 1, the majority of public educational institutions included in the study are affiliated with the Directorate of Primary Education. The fact that institutions under the Directorate of Primary Education constitute approximately two-thirds of all institutions indicates that primary education institutions have a substantial numerical predominance within the public education system of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

A total of 38 institutions affiliated with the Directorate of General Secondary Education represent approximately one-fourth of all institutions. Among these institutions, 16 provide education at the lower secondary school level, while 22 provide education at the upper secondary school level. Accordingly, within general secondary education institutions, upper secondary schools are more numerous than lower secondary schools.

The 13 institutions affiliated with the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education constitute 8.1% of all institutions examined. This finding indicates that vocational and technical secondary education institutions have a relatively limited numerical presence among the public educational institutions included in the study.

Overall, the distribution of public educational institutions in the TRNC demonstrates a clear predominance of primary education institutions in terms of institutional numbers. However, this evaluation, based solely on the number of institutions, does not provide direct evidence regarding student enrollment, institutional capacity, teacher distribution, or the level of access to educational services. Therefore, subsequent sections present detailed analyses of institutions according to educational level, district distribution, and the pre-1974 historical settlement characteristics associated with the current settlement names used in school names.

Distribution of Public Educational Institutions by Educational Level

Within the scope of the study, the 161 public educational institutions examined were evaluated under six main categories based on their functional positions within the education system and the educational levels to which they are affiliated. These categories consist of public primary schools, pre-primary education institutions, special education institutions, lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools affiliated with the Directorate of General Secondary Education, and vocational and technical secondary education institutions.

The classification according to educational levels not only reveals the distribution of public educational institutions in terms of institutional numbers but also demonstrates the levels at which educational services are concentrated and which types of institutions play a determining role in the spatial organization of the education system.

The findings indicate that primary education levels have a substantial predominance among public educational institutions in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Of the 161 institutions examined, 80 (49.7%) are public primary schools, 23 (14.3%) are pre-primary education institutions, 7 (4.3%) are special education institutions, 16 (9.9%) are lower secondary schools, 22 (13.7%) are upper secondary schools, and 13 (8.1%) are vocational and technical secondary education institutions.

Table 2
Distribution of Public Educational Institutions by Educational Level

Educational Category	Number of Institutions	Percentage (%)
Public Primary Schools	80	49.7
Pre-primary Education Institutions	23	14.3
Special Education Institutions	7	4.3
Lower Secondary Schools	16	9.9
Upper Secondary Schools	22	13.7
Vocational and Technical Secondary Education Institutions	13	8.1
Total	161	100.0

As shown in Table 2, public primary schools represent the educational category with the highest proportion among the institutions included in the study. Constituting approximately half of all

institutions, primary schools represent the most widely distributed institutional structure through which basic education services are spatially organized within the public education system of the TRNC.

Following primary schools, the highest institutional concentrations are observed in pre-primary education institutions and upper secondary schools. The fact that pre-primary education institutions constitute 14.3% of all institutions with 23 schools indicates that early childhood education has become an established and distinct area of service provision within the public education system. The 22 upper secondary schools represent 13.7% of all institutions. The relatively similar number of upper secondary schools and pre-primary education institutions suggests that educational services at the secondary level are organized around specific institutional centers.

Lower secondary schools, with 16 institutions (9.9%), and vocational and technical secondary education institutions, with 13 institutions (8.1%), constitute the remaining educational categories examined in the study. When lower and upper secondary institutions are considered together, general secondary education institutions account for 38 institutions, representing 23.6% of all public educational institutions.

Special education institutions constitute the category with the lowest numerical proportion, with 7 institutions (4.3%). However, the relatively limited number of special education institutions does not indicate a lower level of importance within the education system. Special education services require a distinct planning approach due to differences in student needs, requirements for specialized personnel, and physical infrastructure characteristics compared with other educational levels.

Overall, the distribution demonstrates that approximately two-thirds (68.3%) of public educational institutions in the TRNC consist of institutions providing primary-level education and special education services. This distribution indicates that basic education services occupy a central position within the institutional structure of the public education system.

Nevertheless, examining the number of institutions by educational level alone does not allow for definitive conclusions regarding the quality or accessibility of educational services. Comparisons based solely on institutional numbers remain limited unless factors such as student capacity, population distribution, service areas, and spatial locations of institutions are also considered. Therefore, the following section examines the spatial distribution of public educational institutions not only according to educational levels but also in relation to districts and the pre-1974 historical characteristics of the settlements associated with the current settlement names used in school names.

Table 3
Distribution of the use of settlement names in school names by educational level

Educational Level	Total Number of Schools (n)	Schools Using Settlement Names in Their Names (n)	Percentage (%)	Schools Not Using Settlement Names (n)	Percentage (%)
Primary Schools	80	53	66.3	27	33.7
Pre-primary Education	23	13	56.5	10	43.5
Special Education	7	5	71.4	2	28.6

Lower Secondary Schools	16	4	25.0	12	75.0
Upper Secondary Schools	22	8	36.4	14	63.6
Vocational High Schools	13	6	46.2	7	53.8
Total	161	89	55.3	72	44.7

Table 3 presents the distribution of the use of settlement names in the official names of 161 public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), according to educational level. The findings indicate that 89 schools (55.3%) have names directly derived from current settlement names, whereas 72 schools (44.7%) use alternative naming patterns, including personal names, historical figures, institutional identities, foundation names, or other symbolic references.

When evaluated according to educational levels, the highest rate of settlement-name usage is observed among special education institutions, with 71.4%. This is followed by primary schools (66.3%) and pre-primary education institutions (56.5%). In contrast, the use of settlement names is considerably lower among lower secondary schools affiliated with the Directorate of General Secondary Education (25.0%) and upper secondary schools (36.4%). Among vocational high schools affiliated with the Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education, the rate of settlement-name usage was identified as 46.2%.

These findings indicate that different naming approaches are adopted across educational levels. Particularly in primary schools and pre-primary education institutions, names associated with the settlements in which schools are located appear to be more commonly preferred. Conversely, at the secondary education level, names emphasizing individuals, historical figures, foundations, and institutional identities are more frequently observed. Therefore, Table 3 establishes the fundamental classification framework for the subsequent analysis, in which only the 89 schools containing settlement names in their official titles are examined in terms of their historical settlement characteristics.

Table 4

Distribution of current settlement names used in school names according to their pre-1974 historical settlement characteristics

Pre-1974 Historical Settlement Characteristics of Current Settlement Names Used in School Names	Number of Schools (n)	Percentage (%)
Schools using current settlement names that were Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974	48	53.9
Schools using current settlement names that were Turkish Cypriot settlements before 1974	22	24.7
Schools using current settlement names that were Turkish–Greek Cypriot mixed settlements before 1974	19	21.4
Total	89	100.0

As presented in Table 4, among the 161 public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC, 89 schools were identified as having current settlement names directly incorporated into

their official school names. This table presents the distribution of only these settlement names according to their pre-1974 historical settlement characteristics.

The findings demonstrate that the current settlement names used in school names are predominantly derived from settlements that had a Greek Cypriot character before 1974. This finding does not indicate that these educational institutions are physically located in former Greek Cypriot settlements. The focus of the study is not the geographical location of schools but rather the historical origin of the current settlement names reflected in school names. Therefore, the findings demonstrate the extent to which settlement names adopted after 1974 have become institutionalized in public usage through educational institutions.

The results show that 48 (53.9%) of the current settlement names used in school names originate from settlements that were characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974, 22 (24.7%) originate from settlements characterized as Turkish Cypriot settlements, and 19 (21.4%) originate from Turkish–Greek Cypriot mixed settlements.

These findings reveal that current settlement names used in the naming of public schools in the TRNC are largely derived from areas that had a Greek Cypriot settlement character prior to 1974. In other words, the current names of settlements renamed after 1974 are more extensively reflected in school names, particularly in areas that historically had Greek Cypriot settlement characteristics.

This pattern indicates that school names function not merely as administrative identifiers of educational institutions but also as symbolic mechanisms that contribute to the public visibility and everyday use of the officially adopted settlement names of the TRNC. In this respect, educational institutions operate as important public spaces through which place names are reproduced, circulated, and institutionalized within collective social memory.

Table 5

Distribution of current settlement names used in school names according to Pre-1974 settlement characteristics by educational level

Educational Level	Total Number of Schools (N)	Schools Using Settlement Names n (%)	Greek Cypriot Settlement n (%)	Turkish Settlement n (%)	Mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot Settlement n (%)
Primary Schools	80	53 (66.3)	33 (62.3)	12 (22.6)	8 (15.1)
Pre-primary Education Institutions	23	13 (56.5)	5 (38.5)	4 (30.8)	4 (30.8)
Special Education Schools	7	5 (71.4)	2 (40.0)	1 (20.0)	2 (40.0)
Lower Secondary Schools	16	4 (25.0)	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
Upper Secondary Schools	22	8 (36.4)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	2 (25.0)

Vocational and Technical High Schools	13	6 (46.2)	3 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (50.0)
Total	161	89 (55.3)	48 (53.9)	22 (24.7)	19 (21.4)

Table 5 presents the distribution of public schools using current settlement names in their official names according to the pre-1974 historical settlement characteristics of these settlement names by educational level. The percentages regarding the use of settlement names were calculated based on the total number of schools within each educational level, whereas the percentages related to Greek Cypriot, Turkish, and mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlement categories were calculated only among schools whose names contain a current settlement name.

As shown in Table 5, a substantial proportion of the current settlement names used in school names (53.9%) are associated with areas that were characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. In comparison, 24.7% of the settlement names used in school names originate from pre-1974 Turkish settlements, while 21.4% are associated with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements.

The proportion of schools using settlement names varies across educational levels. The use of settlement names was identified in 66.3% (n=53) of primary schools, 56.5% (n=13) of pre-primary education institutions, 71.4% (n=5) of special education schools, 25.0% (n=4) of lower secondary schools, 36.4% (n=8) of upper secondary schools affiliated with the Directorate of General Secondary Education, and 46.2% (n=6) of vocational and technical high schools.

Among primary schools using settlement names, 33 schools (62.3%) use current settlement names associated with areas classified as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974, 12 schools (22.6%) use names associated with Turkish settlements, and 8 schools (15.1%) use names associated with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements.

Among the 13 pre-primary education institutions using settlement names, five (38.5%) use current settlement names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements, four (30.8%) with Turkish settlements, and four (30.8%) with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements.

Among special education schools, two of the five institutions using settlement names (40.0%) have names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements, one (20.0%) with a Turkish settlement, and two (40.0%) with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements.

Among lower secondary schools, two of the four schools using settlement names (50.0%) have names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements, while the remaining two (50.0%) are associated with Turkish settlements. No lower secondary school using a settlement name associated with a mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlement was identified.

Among upper secondary schools affiliated with the Directorate of General Secondary Education, three of the eight schools using settlement names (37.5%) have names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements, three (37.5%) with Turkish settlements, and two (25.0%) with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements.

Among vocational and technical high schools, three of the six schools using settlement names (50.0%) have names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements, while three (50.0%) have names

associated with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements. No vocational and technical high school using a current settlement name associated with a pre-1974 Turkish settlement was identified.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that, across all educational levels, a considerable proportion of the current settlement names used in school names originate from areas characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. The widespread use of settlement names particularly in primary schools enables students to encounter current settlement names from the early stages of their educational experiences, thereby reinforcing the public circulation of these names through educational institutions.

This finding indicates that school names are not merely administrative labels used to identify educational institutions; rather, they function as symbolic instruments that contribute to the public circulation of place names, the reproduction of spatial memory, and the institutional reinforcement of spatial belonging. The predominance of settlement names associated with pre-1974 Greek Cypriot settlements in school names demonstrates that place names serve not only geographical functions but also important roles in relation to historical continuity and public memory.

The critical toponymy literature emphasizes that place names play an active role in processes of political power, identity construction, and spatial belonging (Azaryahu, 1996; Alderman, 2008; Rose-Redwood et al., 2010). Within this framework, settlement names used in the naming of public schools in the TRNC can be interpreted not only as institutional identifiers but also as public representations of post-conflict collective memory and spatial identity.

Table 6

Evaluation of current settlement names used in school names according to Pre-1974 settlement characteristics

Pre-1974 Settlement Characteristics	Number of Current Settlement Names Used in School Names	Examples of Current Settlement Names	Evaluation
Schools bearing current settlement names associated with settlements characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974	48	Güzelyurt, İskele, Değirmenlik, Alsancak, Geçitkale	Current settlement names introduced after 1974 are widely used in school names.
Schools bearing current settlement names associated with settlements characterized as Turkish settlements before 1974	22	Lefke, Gönyeli, Mehmetçik, Beyarmudu	Current settlement names belonging to historical Turkish settlements continue to be used in school names.
Schools bearing current settlement names associated with mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974	19	Gazimağusa, Girne, Lapta, Karşıyaka	Current settlement names of areas with a mixed settlement history are represented in school names.
Total	89		

Table 6 presents an evaluation of the historical origins of the current settlement names used in school names. The analysis indicates that 48 (53.9%) of the current settlement names appearing in school names are derived from settlements that were characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. In comparison, 22 (24.7%) correspond to settlements characterized as Turkish settlements before 1974, while 19 (21.4%) correspond to settlements characterized as mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974.

When evaluated in terms of the historical origins of settlement names used in school names, these findings demonstrate that current settlement names associated with areas characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974 are used more frequently than those associated with other settlement categories. This finding suggests that settlement names adopted after 1974 have become widely incorporated into public usage through educational institutions and that school names have played an important role in the social circulation and institutionalization of these names.

In contrast, current settlement names associated with pre-1974 Turkish settlements and mixed Turkish-Greek Cypriot settlements appear to be used less frequently in school names. These findings indicate that current settlement names used in school naming practices function not only as geographical identifiers but also as symbolic instruments through which the post-1974 settlement order and understanding of public belonging are made visible within educational institutions.

According to the toponymy literature, place names function as symbolic instruments through which states make spatial sovereignty, collective identity, and public memory visible (Azaryahu, 1996; Alderman, 2008). The findings of this study support this perspective. The fact that a substantial proportion of current settlement names used in school names consist of settlement names adopted after 1974 demonstrates that educational institutions function as public spaces that contribute to the social acceptance and intergenerational transmission of these names.

Therefore, school names should not be considered merely as administrative labels identifying educational institutions; rather, they can be interpreted as visible manifestations of toponymic transformation within the education system. Through their continuous use in schools, settlement names become embedded in everyday public life and contribute to the reproduction of spatial memory and institutionalized forms of spatial belonging.

General Evaluation of the Findings

Within the scope of this study, the naming structures of 161 public schools actively operating under the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) during the 2025–2026 academic year were examined, and the relationship between school names and historical settlement structures was evaluated through document analysis. The findings revealed that 89 of the 161 schools had names directly based on settlement names, whereas the remaining schools were named after individuals, historical figures, institutions, or functional characteristics. When the historical settlement characteristics of the 89 schools bearing settlement names were examined, it was found that 48 schools (53.9%) were associated with settlements identified as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974, 22 schools (24.7%) with Turkish settlements, and 19 schools (21.4%) with mixed Turkish–Greek Cypriot settlements. This distribution indicates that the settlement names used in school names are largely based on the post-1974 settlement naming system.

When evaluated according to educational levels, settlement-based naming practices were found to be most prevalent among primary schools. The main reason for this pattern is that primary schools are

generally organized in direct connection with local settlements, and school names often reflect the settlements they serve. In contrast, the use of settlement names was relatively lower in secondary education institutions due to the greater prevalence of names based on individuals, historical figures, foundations, or institutional identities.

One of the notable findings of the study is that schools located in areas that were historically characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974 do not use former Greek place names in their official names; instead, they use the Turkish settlement names officially adopted after 1974. The use of examples such as Güzelyurt (Morfou), İskele (Trikomo), Değirmenlik (Kythrea), Alsancak (Karavas), and Geçitkale (Lefkoniko) in school names represents clear examples of this transformation. In contrast, it was observed that continuity in settlement names has largely been maintained in historically Turkish settlements such as Lefke, Gönyeli, and Mehmetçik.

Schools located in settlements with a historically mixed Turkish–Greek Cypriot population structure, such as Gazimağusa, Girne, Lapta, and Karşıyaka, are named according to their currently used Turkish settlement names despite their historically multicultural settlement characteristics. This indicates that school naming practices are not merely geographical identification processes; rather, they are also associated with the redefinition of public space, strengthening of administrative unity, and reconstruction of collective memory.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that school naming practices in the TRNC are not random practices or merely administrative procedures intended to identify locations. School names function as symbolic indicators reflecting historical settlement patterns, post-1974 place-name arrangements, and the reorganization of public space. Therefore, the names of educational institutions should be considered not only as administrative labels used within educational governance but also as concrete representations of the relationship between collective memory, spatial identity, and historical continuity.

5. Discussion

This study examined the naming structures of public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in terms of the historical origins of the current settlement names used in school names. The main finding of the study demonstrates that a significant proportion of the settlement names used in school names derive from the current names of areas that were characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. Among the 89 public schools using settlement names, 48 (53.9%) have names based on current settlement names of areas that were Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974 and were renamed after 1974. This finding indicates that school naming practices are not merely administrative procedures for identifying educational institutions; rather, they also play an important role in institutionalizing the new settlement structure and spatial belonging framework established after 1974 through the education system.

Place names are not merely geographical indicators used to identify locations. Studies in the field of toponymy demonstrate that place names play significant roles in the formation of collective memory, identity construction, and the representation of political authority (Alderman, 2008; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2010). Particularly in societies experiencing political transformation, the rearrangement of place names is considered not simply a linguistic change but also a component of the symbolic construction of a new public order (Azaryahu, 1996). In this respect, school names, as frequently encountered public symbols in everyday life, become institutional mechanisms that contribute to the recognition and adoption of new settlement names.

The critical toponymy approach argues that place names are not merely geographical references; rather, they function as important instruments of political power, collective memory, and identity construction (Rose-Redwood et al., 2010). The findings of this study indicate that school names in the TRNC serve a similar function. The current settlement names used in public schools become continuously repeated public markers in the daily lives of students, families, and local communities, thereby contributing to the incorporation of these names into collective memory.

In the context of the TRNC, numerous settlement names were changed or newly introduced following the settlement arrangements implemented after 1974. The findings of this study reveal that these newly adopted settlement names have been widely preferred in the naming of public schools. This result suggests that school names serve not only to identify the locations of educational institutions but also to strengthen the public use of new settlement names and facilitate their social acceptance.

Another significant finding of the study is that the use of settlement names differs according to educational levels. Settlement-based naming practices are most common among primary schools. The fact that primary schools operate directly at the neighbourhood and village level explains why settlement names are more frequently preferred in these institutions. In contrast, at the lower and upper secondary levels, names emphasizing individuals, historical figures, national values, or professional identities are more commonly used, resulting in a relatively lower proportion of settlement-based names. This indicates that school naming practices may serve different functions depending on educational levels.

The findings also demonstrate that current settlement names associated with historically Turkish settlements before 1974 and those associated with mixed Turkish–Greek Cypriot settlements continue to be used in school names. However, the higher prevalence of settlement names originating from areas characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974 suggests that there is a tendency for newly adopted settlement names to gain greater public visibility, particularly in these areas. Rather than being interpreted as a direct political preference, this situation can be understood as a reflection of the post-1974 settlement structure within educational institution naming practices.

Studies in the literature on educational institution naming have generally focused on names derived from individuals, historical figures, or ideological symbols. In contrast, research examining the historical origins of settlement names used in school names remains limited. This study contributes to addressing this gap by examining school names through the combined perspectives of toponymy, collective memory, and educational policies. Accordingly, educational institution names are evaluated not merely as administrative labels but as public symbols through which spatial memory and social belonging are reproduced.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that school naming practices in the TRNC are not merely technical processes related to educational administration. Rather, they represent a symbolic policy instrument that supports the adoption of newly established settlement names, contributes to the strengthening of spatial belonging, and plays a role in the reconstruction of public memory.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the naming structures of public schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in terms of the historical settlement characteristics of the current settlement names used in school names. Within the scope of the study, all 161 public schools actively operating during the 2025–2026 academic year were evaluated, and it was determined that 89 schools had names directly based on settlement names.

The findings demonstrate that the current settlement names used in school names largely originate from areas that were characterized as Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. Among the 89 schools using settlement names, 48 (53.9%) have school names based on the current names of settlements that were Greek Cypriot settlements before 1974. In contrast, current settlement names associated with Turkish settlements before 1974 are used in 22 schools (24.7%), while current settlement names associated with mixed Turkish–Greek Cypriot settlements are used in 19 schools (21.4%).

This finding constitutes the central result of the study. The findings indicate that the current settlement names used in school naming practices are largely rooted in areas that had Greek Cypriot settlement characteristics before 1974. This does not result from the use of former Greek place names in school names; rather, it reflects the incorporation of the new names assigned to these settlements after 1974 into the names of public schools. Therefore, the study demonstrates that the historical settlement structure is reproduced in contemporary school naming practices through currently used settlement names.

The findings further indicate that school names are not merely administrative expressions used to identify educational institutions; they also function as symbolic instruments contributing to the dissemination and public visibility of current settlement names. Particularly, the more frequent use of settlement names at the primary school level suggests that students encounter and recognize the settlements in which they live through these current place names from the early stages of their educational experiences. In this respect, schools can be considered public institutions that contribute to the visibility, normalization, and intergenerational transmission of newly adopted settlement names.

In conclusion, this study represents one of the first comprehensive studies examining the naming structures of public schools in the TRNC not only from an educational administration perspective but also through the framework of critical toponymy. The findings reveal that the current settlement names used in public schools increase the visibility of the settlement system established after 1974 within the public sphere and demonstrate that educational institutions function as important carriers of this process. In this sense, school names should be evaluated not merely as labels identifying educational institutions but also as symbolic indicators of spatial belonging, collective memory, and the institutionalization of place names within the education system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. Historical settlement data should be systematically considered in school naming processes. When determining new school names, the historical development of settlements, changes in place names, and cultural heritage elements should be evaluated together.
2. A digital inventory related to school names and settlement names should be established within the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC. This inventory should record information such as the establishment year of schools, the settlement in which they are located, the historical development of the settlement name used, and any previous name changes.
3. School naming policies should be examined regularly from the perspectives of educational history and toponymy. In this way, the ways in which settlement names become widespread in the public sphere through educational institutions can be monitored over the long term.
4. Greater emphasis may be placed on the historical development of settlement names within educational programs. Enabling students to understand the historical and cultural transformations of their surrounding environment may contribute to the development of spatial awareness and a sense of belonging.

5. Future studies may examine school names in relation to different variables. In particular, comparative analyses may be conducted on the use of personal names, historical figures, national symbols, and settlement names in school naming practices. Furthermore, comparisons between school naming policies in the TRNC and other countries may provide new research opportunities contributing to the international literature.

In conclusion, this study can be considered one of the first comprehensive studies examining the naming structures of public schools in the TRNC within the framework of the historical transformation of settlement names. The findings demonstrate that school names are not merely expressions identifying educational institutions; rather, they contribute to the public recognition of current settlement names, strengthen spatial belonging, and represent visible reflections of historical transformation within the education system. In this respect, the study contributes to the literature by examining school names through the perspective of critical toponymy and by highlighting the role of educational institution naming in the reproduction of historical memory, spatial identity, and public belonging.

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