

Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Understandings about the Nature of the Social Studies

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Abstract

Social studies is one of the main courses of the elementary and middle school curriculum in Turkey. Social studies took educators attention because it prepares students as exemplary citizens. The term of social studies has been started to use at the end of 1960's in Turkey. Thus, there have been several definitions and classification of the social studies. Understanding the nature of the social studies is crucial for pre-service social teacher because they will teach this course two-three years later. The purpose of this study is to investigate pre-service social studies teachers' understandings about the nature of the social studies. The author used descriptive survey model in this study. The sample consisted of 309 pre-service social studies teachers from a public university in the middle west of Turkey. The data were collected through Social Studies Preference Scale. The results indicated that Turkish pre-service social studies teachers have positive attitudes toward all of the three traditions of the social studies (Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission, Social Studies as Social Science, and Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry). Also, according to the results, male pre-service social studies had more positive attitudes than female pre-service social studies to the social studies as citizenship transmission tradition. In addition, participants in the lower grade level produced more superior acceptance on Reflective Inquiry traditions in comparison with students in the higher grades.

Keywords: Social Studies Traditions, Nature of the Social Studies.

Introduction

The study of human enterprise across space and time, which is one of the main components of the social studies, has always been part of the education (Ross, 2006a). However, the course of social studies has emerged and been part of the school curriculum at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States to the response of the press of cultural,

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racial, and gender differences (Crocco, 2004; Kilinc, 2012). The most accepted idea about the origin of the social studies is that the term of social studies was introduced in 1916 by the National Education Association's (NEA) 1916 Committee on Social Studies (Ross, 2006b; Singer, 2005).

From the birth of the social studies in 1916, several definitions of social studies have been proposed by scholars (Clements, Fielder, & Tabachnick, 1966; Evans, 1988; Hanna, 1957; Nelson, 1994; Singer, 2005; Wesley, 1937). Each of the definition has different point of view about the social studies. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) announced a comprehensive definition of the term in 1994, to reach general definition after decades of debate regarding the definition and goals of the social studies.

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences (NCSS, 1994, p.3).

The term of social studies has been started to use as a school subject at the late 1960's in Turkey. It became part of the elementary school curriculum in 1968 (Öztürk, 2012) and middle school curriculum at the beginning of the 1970's (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2007). Except for the period of 1985-1997, social studies has been taught at both elementary and middle schools. In the last curriculum change, social studies course encompasses a variety of social science disciplines and civics (Açıklalın, 2011). After the last change of social studies curriculum in 2005, the main purpose of social studies was proposed "to provide an opportunity and appropriate environment for individuals to understand and make contributions to themselves, the society in which they live on the basis of their own demands and skills, within the framework of the General Aims of Turkish National Education" (Safran, 2005).

As well as United States, there have been several definitions of the social studies in Turkey (Doğanay, 2005; Sönmez, 1997). According to Açıklalın (2011), defining social studies and placing it as an independent course in the elementary and middle school curriculum is important for teachers. Similarly, understanding the nature of the social studies is crucial for pre-service social studies teachers because they are going to be teaching this course. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate pre-service social studies teachers' understandings about the nature of the social studies.

Social Studies Traditions

Social studies course is considered as one of the main elements of school curriculum because it prepares young generations as citizens (Kilinc, 2012). According to Fenton (1966), social studies aims to prepare students to be exemplary citizens, teach students how to think, and to pass cultural heritage to them. Indeed, as Parker asserted, "without historical understanding, there can be no wisdom; without geographical understanding, no cultural or environmental intelligence. Without civic understanding, there can be no democratic citizens and, therefore, no democracy" (Parker, 2012, p. 3). This is why social studies is considered as a crucial lesson by educators.

The social studies curriculum has been an ideological battleground throughout the twentieth century because of its importance (Kilinc, 2012; Ross, 1997). Difference point of view about social studies for its definition (Metcalf, 1963) and purpose arises because of several reasons. According to Engle (1980), the problem is threefold: Ambiguity within the

profession and among people generally over goals, lack of clarity as to the relationship between the social studies and the social sciences, and failure to make necessary distinctions between the role of scholarship and that of teaching. On the other hand, Kennedy (1979) asserted that lack of epistemological agreement caused this ambiguity.

Several researchers in the field studied the foundations of the social studies and identified some approaches (Engle, 1960; Fenton, 1966; Newmann, 1975). Engle (1960) described three rationales for the social studies. The first approach conceived social studies as social sciences. The second approach viewed social studies as mainly concerned with developing good citizen. The third approach was the unreflective inculcation or imposition of certain content and values (Stanley, 1985). In their studies, Barth and Shermis (1970) and Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977, 1978) highlighted this problem and offer a new point of view to the social studies. They identified three major traditions to the teaching of social studies:

- Social studies as citizenship transmission
- Social studies as social sciences
- Social studies as reflective inquiry.

Table 1. *Three traditions of the social studies* (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977, p. 67).

Traditions	Purpose	Method	Content
Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	Citizenship is best promoted by inculcating right values as a framework for making decisions.	Transmission: Transmission of concepts and values by such techniques as textbook, recitation, lecture, question and answer sessions, and structured problem solving exercises.	Content is selected by an authority interpreted by the teacher and has the function of illustrating values, beliefs, and attitudes.
Social studies as Social Sciences	Citizenship is best promoted by decision making based on mastery of social science concepts, processes, and problems.	Discovery: Each of the social sciences has its own method of gathering and verifying knowledge. Students should discover and apply the method that is appropriate to each social science.	Proper content is the structure, concepts, and processes of both the separate and the integrated social science disciplines.
Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry	Citizenship is best promoted through a process of inquiry in which knowledge is derived from what citizens need to know to make decisions and solve problems.	Reflective Inquiry: Decision making is structured and disciplined through a reflective inquiry process which aims at identifying problems and responding to conflict by means of testing insights.	Analysis of individual citizen's values yields needs and interests which, in turn, form the basis for student self-selection of problems. Problems, therefore, constitute the content for reflection.

Moreover, Newmann (1975) asserted new classification after these researchers. According to him environmental competence is one of the crucial components of the social studies. He also emphasized the importance of critical thinking skills for dealing daily issues (Stanley, 1985). In addition, in his book, *Social Studies Wars*, Evans (2004) identified five main competing camps which struggled at different times to retain control of social studies or to influence its direction. These camps are traditional historians, mandarins, social efficiency educators, Deweyan experimentalists, and social re-constructionists. All of the definitions and classifications of social studies had impacts on other countries' understandings of the nature of the term.

The development of the social studies in Turkey was mainly impressed with the United States. The most accepted classification in Turkey is Barr, Barth & Shermis's (1978) classification that includes three social studies traditions: citizenship transmission, social science and reflective inquiry (Kaymakçı & Ata, 2012). Understanding this classification is important, because social studies curriculum development in 2005 was mainly affected by these three social studies traditions. Indeed, the social studies curriculum change in 2005 highlighted both social science and reflective inquiry traditions besides citizenship transmission (Ata, 2006). Thus, several researches have been conducted in Turkey to explore how these traditions conceptualized by teachers (Doğanay & Sarı, 2004; Kozan, 2002; Özmen, 2010, 2011). However, there have been very few studies that explore pre-service social studies teachers' perception of the nature of the social studies (Açıklın, 2011). For this reason, the purpose of this study is to investigate pre-service social studies teachers' understandings about the nature of the social studies. Therefore this study focuses on the following research questions:

- To what extent are pre-service social studies teachers' attitude levels about the traditions of the social studies classified by Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1978)?
- Are there any significant differences between male and female participants' perception of social studies traditions?
- Are there any significant differences pre-service social studies teachers' perception of the social studies traditions by grade levels?

Method

In this study, descriptive survey model was used. In general, descriptive survey studies are concerned with assessing attitudes, opinions, preferences, demographics, practices, and procedures (Gay, Airisian, & Mills, 2006). Survey research involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. Survey research is useful for documenting existing community conditions, characteristics of a population, and community opinion (Guyette, 1983). It is also an efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad spectrum of individuals and educational settings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Sample

The participants of the study were selected through convenience sampling during the 2012-2013 academic year. A convenience sample is described as a group of individuals who conveniently are available for study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The sample consisted of 309 pre-service social studies teachers from a public university in the middle west of Turkey. The author has included 1st – 4th grade pre-service social studies teachers to the study. A total of 322 pre-service social studies teachers participated in this research. The author excluded 13

of the participants from the study because they did not fill out the whole scale. Table 2 and Table 3 have some information about participants' gender and grade level.

Table 2. *Information about participants' gender*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Female	169	54.7
Male	140	45.3
Total	309	100

Table 3. *Information about participants' grade level*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Freshmen	59	19.1
Sophomore	89	28.8
Junior	86	27.8
Senior	75	24.3
Total	309	100

Data Collection Tool

The author used Social Studies Preference Scale, which was translated to Turkish by Kaymakçı and Ata (2011). The original version of the Social Studies Preference Scale was developed by Barr, Barth and Shermis (1978). A five point Likert scale (strongly disagree -1, disagree -2, neither agree nor disagree -3, agree -4, strongly agree -5) was used to identify the level of participation on the questions. Each social studies traditions has 15 items, five items for purpose, five items for method, and five items for content. The general rule of the scale is that the lower your total score the more strongly you disagree with the statement in the cell and, conversely, the higher the number the more strongly agree with the statement in the cell.

Each of the items in the scale has a corresponding number in the matrix below (See Table 4). For instance if one strongly disagree with the statement 4, the researcher place 1 next to the number 4. Total rating in each cell at the place marked "cell total". To reach tradition total, one should add together the three cells totals in each column (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1978).

According to this calculation the lower score would be 5, and the higher score would be 25 for each cell; and the lower score would be 15 and the highest score would be 75 for each patter.

Table 4. *Social studies traditions*

	Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	Social Studies as Social Science	Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry
<i>Purpose</i>	4	9	17
	14	15	24
	29	18	26
	30	31	34
	37	44	42
	Total	Total	Total

Table 4 (Cont.). *Social studies traditions*

	Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	Social Studies as Social Science	Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry
Method	12	11	1
	19	38	16
	20	41	22
	23	43	28
	33	45	32
	Total	Total	Total
Content	5	2	8
	10	3	13
	21	6	25
	39	7	27
	40	36	35
	Total	Total	Total
Tradition			
Total			

Tablo 5. *Interpreting the Matrix*

Dimensions (Purpose, Method, and Content)	Tradition (Citizenship, Social Science, and Reflective Inquiry)
5 to 9 Strongly disagree	15 to 30 Strongly disagree
10 to 15 Disagree	31 to 45 Disagree
16 to 20 Agree	46 to 60 Agree
21 to 25 Strongly Agree	61 to 65 Strongly Agree

White (1982) calculated the reliability coefficients for the various subscales of the survey and found that the survey is reliable (citizenship transmission .81, social science .78, and reflective inquiry .77). The general Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated by Doğanay and Sarı (2004) in Turkey and it was found .88. Kaymakçı and Ata (2011) found the Cronbach alpha internal consistency for citizenship transmission tradition .83, for social science tradition .81, and for reflective inquiry .88. The author calculated the Cronbach alpha internal consistency of the whole Social Studies Preference Scale for the study .89. Also the author has calculated Cronbach alpha for each dimension and found that it was .79 for Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission, .83 for Social Studies as Social Science, and .70 for Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry.

Analysis of the Data

The data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, independent sample t test, one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in a statistical package program. $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level was taken as the basis for significance test between groups.

Findings

The following findings emerged from this study in order to obtain pre-service social studies teachers' understandings about the nature of the social studies.

Findings Associated with First Research Question

Social Studies Preference Survey was used to explore how pre-service social studies teachers feel regarding social studies education. The result of the Social Studies Preference Survey showed that all of the three traditions of social studies preference emerged from the analysis of participants' responses.

Table 6. Tradition scores and rank order for the entire sample of pre-service social studies teachers

Tradition	N	M	SD
Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	309	57.43	7.89
Social Studies as Social Science	309	60.65	7.22
Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry	309	59.70	7.01

According to the results (see Table 6), participants expressed that social studies as social tradition ($\bar{X} = 60.65$) is the most accepted tradition. The second most accepted tradition is social studies as reflective inquiry ($\bar{X} = 59.70$). Social studies as citizenship transmission tradition ($\bar{X} = 57.43$) is the less accepted tradition by pre-service social studies teachers. In other words, the result of the survey showed that participants favor social studies as social science tradition over others.

On the other hand, if the findings of the study were addressed by considering Barr, Barth and Shermis (1978) work, it is appeared that participants accepted the tradition that mixes all three traditions, social studies as citizenship transmission and social science and reflective inquiry. According to this tradition, participants accepted all of the three traditions' perspectives about social studies.

Table 7. Participants' attitude levels about the traditions of the social studies

	Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	Social Studies as Social Science	Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry
Purpose	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
Method	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
Content	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Tradition	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree

Findings Associated with Second Research Question

Independent-sample t tests were conducted to evaluate whether there was a difference between male and female pre-service social studies teachers on the perception of social studies traditions (Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission, Social Studies as Social Science, and Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry). The test was significant $t(307) = -1.98, p = 0.04$ for social studies as citizenship transmission tradition. Male pre-service social studies ($\bar{X} = 58.40$) had more positive attitudes than female pre-service social studies ($\bar{X} = 56.62$) to the citizenship transmission tradition. The author calculated effect size ($d = -.23$) and found it was small (Cohen, 1992). According to t-test there are no other significant differences between genders on the perception of Social Studies as Social Science and Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry.

Table 8. *t*-tests table about social studies perceptions by gender

Tradition	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t	p	Effect size
Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission	Female	169	56.62	7.76	307	-1.98	.04	-.23
	Male	140	58.40	7.96				
Social Studies as Social Science	Female	169	60.37	6.97	307	-.757	.45	
	Male	140	60.99	7.54				
Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry	Female	169	59.71	6.74	307	.01	.99	
	Male	140	59.70	7.34				

Findings Associated with Third Research Question

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the effects of grade level (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior) on the three dependent variables (Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission, Social Studies as Social Science, and Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry). A significant difference was found among grade levels on dependent variables, *Wilks's* $\Lambda = .92$, $F(9, 737) = 2.67$, $p = .005$. The multivariate η^2 based on *Wilks's* Λ was small, .03.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on the dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA (See Table 9). The ANOVA on the Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry tradition was significant, $F(3, 305) = 2.76$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .026$; while the ANOVA on Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission tradition $F(3, 305) = .953$, $p = .41$ and Social Studies as Social Sciences $F(3, 305) = 1.09$, $p = .35$ were non-significant.

Table 9. One-way ANOVA results for social studies traditions by grade level

Tradition	Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p
Social studies as Citizenship transmission	Between Groups	178.108	3	59.369	.953	.415
	Within Groups	18997.6	305	62.287		
	Total	19175.75	308			
Social studies as Social Sciences	Between Groups	171.325	3	57.108	1.094	.1352
	Within Groups	15924.9	305	52.213		
	Total	16096.2	308			
Social studies as Reflective Inquiry	Between Groups	400.108	3	133.369	2.759	.042
	Within Groups	14746.1	305	48.348		
	Total	15146.2	308			

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVA for the Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry tradition consisted of conducting pairwise comparisons to find which grade level accepted the tradition most strongly. Each pairwise comparison was tested. First grade (freshmen) students produced significantly superior acceptance on Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry tradition in comparison with second graders (sophomore). There is no other significant differences amongst grade levels.

Conclusion

Over the past decades, different points of view can be seen in the literature both in the United States and Turkey. There are many ways of analyzing and explaining the nature of the social studies. Each approach can help sensitize educators and students to the nature of the social studies. It is crucial for pre-service social studies teachers to know social studies traditions because they are going to teach in this field. Knowing different social studies traditions helps teachers to design their courses. Social studies teachers should consider these traditions and examine the content of the social studies, handle with teaching methods and the reason why they are teaching social studies. After this process, they can either choose one of the traditions or create a new tradition by combining existing ones.

In this study, pre-service social studies teachers' understandings about the nature of the social studies were analyzed by considering gender and grade level. The findings of the study showed that Turkish pre-service social studies teachers have positive attitudes toward all of the three traditions of the social studies (Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission, Social Studies as Social Science, and Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry). Also, the results reveal that participants would rather social studies as social sciences traditions than Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry and Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission traditions. This findings support the results of previous researches (Doğanay & Sarı, 2005; Kaymakçı & Ata, 2012) that indicate same results. The results of the study also suggested that Turkish pre-service social studies teachers are struggling to define the boundaries of the three traditions. It can be concluded that by analyzing Table 7, participants accepted the tradition that mixes all three traditions.

The finding of the study reveals pre-service social studies teachers' attitudes toward social studies traditions did significantly differ by gender. According to the results, male pre-service social studies had more positive attitudes than female pre-service social studies to the social studies as citizenship transmission tradition. However, there are no other significant differences between genders on the perception of other social studies traditions. Previous researches (Kozan, 2002; Özmen, 2010) have come to different conclusion on the effect of gender that pre-service teachers' attitudes toward social studies traditions did not differ by considering gender. In addition, it is concluded from the findings of the study that there is a significant difference between grade levels on Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry tradition. Students in the lower grade level produced more superior acceptance on Reflective Inquiry traditions in comparison with students in the higher graders.

In general, this study showed that pre-service social studies teachers have positive attitudes towards all social studies generations. This result reveals that, as it was mentioned before by Açıkalın (2011), social studies teacher education programs in Turkey need more focus on the discussion about the nature of the social studies. Assisting pre-service social studies teachers to make necessary distinctions between these traditions will contribute the development of the field in Turkey.



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