

## Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Social Justice\*

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### Abstract

*Problem Statement:* Social justice addresses inequality in society, including economic inequality, global migration, racism, xenophobia, prejudice against disabled people, and class discrimination. In Turkey, social studies curriculum aims to cultivate active, democratically minded citizens who value justice, independence, peace, solidarity, tolerance, freedom, and respect and demonstrate critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, social participation, and empathy.

*Purpose:* Since social justice education affects teachers' values, beliefs, experiences, practices, and views on social justice, we aimed to understand social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of social justice.

*Methods:* Following a phenomenological research design selected in accordance with maximum variation sampling, we recruited 10 teachers for our sample. We collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews with the teachers and classroom observations of four of them. We analyzed data by following an inductive approach.

*Findings:* Teachers perceived the concept of social justice in terms of equality, justice, discrimination, human rights, respect, and tolerance. Teachers expressed their sensitivity to equalitarianism, as well as their efforts to prevent discrimination in their daily lives, abide by social rules, protect the environment, and not violate disabled citizens. A few teachers

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reported their active engagement in the activities of non-governmental organizations, and all teachers generally indicated that the development of their perceptions of social justice had been affected by their families, educational backgrounds, living environment, and the schools where they work. The teachers expressed not discriminating students, exhibiting positive attitudes toward them, and to some extent, demonstrating aspects of human rights, democracy, and environmental protectionism during lessons. However, teachers indicated no perceptions of struggles against injustice and did not report having experiences with such struggles during lessons. In general, their experiences were affected by their perceptions, their experiences in non-governmental activities, curricula, and course textbooks, and the socio-cultural structure of their schools.

*Conclusions and Recommendations:* Social studies teachers' perceptions of social justice were consistent with their experiences demonstrated during lessons. The teachers mentioned several examples of historical and recent social injustice, but did not conduct any discussions or solicit suggestions about how to overcome such injustices. It is thus necessary to reconsider pre- and in-service training programs within the context of social justice and education.

*Keywords:* Social justice, Social studies, Citizenship education, Social justice education, Phenomenology

### Introduction

The 21st century has been a period characterized by increased interaction among different social, cultural, and economic classes, as well as the emergence of phenomena such as income injustice and worker migrations, all due to industrialization and the development of the global economy. Such developments have consequently also brought social justice to the fore of various agendas. For Bell (2007, p. 4), *social justice* refers to;

Both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure... a society in which individuals are both self-determining and interdependent.

Social justice responds to economic inequalities in society and the rise of militarism, global migration, international human trafficking, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, prejudice against disabled people, and class discrimination (Adams et al., 2010; Apple, 2004). By the same token, protecting and improving fundamental human rights-for instance, the right to work, to protest, to participate in democracy, and to have medical care, housing, and education-inform basic understandings of social justice (Grant & Gibson, 2013). Devoted to creating a fair society, social justice ensures that individuals can live freely and autonomously in safety without being discriminated (Commission on Social Justice, 1998). Social justice also ensures that differences are accepted in societies, that discrimination is

reduced, and that disadvantaged individuals can express themselves and be empowered (Brooks & Thompson, 2005; Grant & Gibson, 2013). In effect, social justice promotes empathy, courtesy, tolerance, and ethics in establishing social tranquility and in creating democracies and pluralistic societies (Ciardiello, 2010).

The gradual development of understandings of social justice has assigned to education the role of teaching students values such as living together in peace, respecting differences, acting against unfair practices, and considering cultural diversity to be a kind of richness. Teaching such values, as well as skills needed in support, is known as *social justice education* (Au, 2009; McGee & Hostetler, 2014). Raising individuals with clear sense of social justice in turn requires citizenship curriculum based on the ideals of social justice, as part of an education that involves considering the distribution of justice and reasons why unfair practices exist (Grant & Agosto, 2008). It additionally entails empowering disadvantaged groups of society that are unable to fully enjoy financial, political, and educational rights (Lund 2006), struggling against unfair practices that economically disadvantaged people face (Sleeter & Grant, 2007), strengthening global justice and respect for humanity, and improving individual ethics (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Other fundamental tenets of social justice education include ensuring that every individual develops skills and competences (Tungaraza, 2007) and eliminating social and financial inequalities by establishing pluralistic, democratic communities in schools (Furman & Shields, 2003). To those ends, social justice education is a process that encourages criticism and change in society by helping children to learn how to understand other people's values and beliefs, as well as to define and resolve injustice around the world (Bell, 2007). It aims to nurture citizens who can understand diversity and intergroup interaction, criticize social institutions, and cooperate with different individuals (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). In that sense, social justice education is nourished by humanistic education, which emphasizes individualism in planning educational activities (Patterson, 1973); feminist education, which emphasizes improving the fundamental human rights of women in society (Hooks, 1981); multicultural education, which advocates curricula that address different cultures (Banks, 1993); critical education, which views social events with a critical lens (McLaren, 2003); and reconstructionism, which aims to foster individuals who care about the well-being of all of society (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009).

Of all academic subjects, social studies encompasses courses that are equipped to advocate social justice and provide citizenship education (Lewis, 2001; McGee & Hostetler, 2014; Ross, 2006; Rubin & Justice, 2005). Social studies lessons aim to ensure that children who live in an independent, pluralistic, and democratic world become active citizens who are aware of and sensitive toward cultural differences and can make wise decisions, both in their private lives and about social issues (NCSS, 1994). Teaching social justice in social studies lessons began during the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930s and became revitalized with reform movements demanding economic, gender, and citizenship equality during the 1960s (Good, 2010). A robust social studies education should emphasize individuals' ability to approach social issues with a sense of fairness, to respect cultural differences, to take individual and social responsibility, to struggle against injustices and inadequacies, and to strive to build a better world (NCSS, 1994). In North America and West European countries, for example, social studies lessons addressing social

justice are delivered to students among the broader themes of human rights, democracy, and environmental awareness (Wade, 2004). In Turkey, by contrast, although social studies curricula in 2005 made no direct reference to social justice despite its general aim to foster active, democratic citizens, they did seek to instill values such as justice, independence, peace, solidarity, sensitivity, trustworthiness, tolerance, freedom, respect, affection, and benevolence, as well as skills of critical thinking, communication, problem solving, social participation, and empathy, all of which are inherent in social justice (MEB, 2005).

In social justice education, teachers' values, beliefs, experiences, practices, and views about social justice (Bender-Slack & Raupach, 2008) affect students' views about social justice as well (Banks & Banks, 2007). Teachers in social justice education should accordingly provide students with examples of social injustice in society, as well as activities involving critical thinking, conflict resolution, problem solving, and project production, and encourage students to question the rules of society and their rationales. They should moreover make sure that students' ideas are respected and valued, respect and improve students' individual differences, help students to feel secure, foster their awareness and sensitivity about cultural diversities in social life, and promote their active participation in the classroom, the school, and society (Ayers, 1998; Wade, 2004).

Among studies on social justice, which have gradually expanded during the last decades, research in Turkey on educational policies and with school principals (Polat, 2007; Tomul, 2009; Turhan, 2007) has revealed shortcomings in the treatment of income inequality. For one, while the administrative aspects of social justice have been addressed in these studies, its class-based aspects have remained largely ignored. International studies on social justice, by contrast, have focused on school administrators (Bruccoleri, 2008), the development of social justice curriculum (Henderson, 2009), preservice teachers (Lee, 2011), and student perceptions (Storms, 2012). Meanwhile, other research has examined social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of social justice (Bender-Slack & Raupach 2008; Samuels, 2014) and their in-class practices (Good, 2010; Philpott, 2009; Robertson, 2008). However, our literature review revealed that research about social justice education has yet to address how social studies teachers perceive and understand social justice, as well as experience social justice in their classrooms.

In response to that gap in the research, we aimed to understand social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of social justice in social studies lessons. In this study, we therefore sought to answer four questions:

1. What are social studies teachers' perceptions of social justice?
2. What are social studies teachers' perceptions of social justice education?
3. What are social studies teachers' perceptions of the role of social justice in social studies?
4. What are social studies teachers' experiences of social justice in social studies?

## Methods

### *Research Design*

We conducted this study according to a qualitative research design, which offers opportunities for richer depictions of situations and phenomena when participants are teachers (Mertens, 2005). More specifically, we followed a design of phenomenological research, which generally attempts to define participants' experiences and understandings, as well as explore associations between phenomenon and individuals (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenological studies, interpretations are made about a concept or phenomenon in light of participants' expressed experiences (Creswell, 1998). In our study, the phenomenon was the concept of social justice, which we sought to clarify in terms of social justice educators' perceptions and classroom experiences.

### *Participants*

Since perceptions of social justice are affected by personal traits, social and cultural settings, and working conditions (Grant & Gillette, 2006), we used maximum variation sampling to recruit teachers for our study. We selected teachers according to their professional experience, the socio-economic status of the students they teach, their awareness of social justice, their philosophy of life, and their educational background. To form a diverse sample of teachers, we recruited from faculty at schools of different socio-economic status. The teachers, who varied in terms of professional experience, age, department where they earned their degree, and membership in non-governmental organizations (NGO), were informed of the study, and volunteers were recruited into the sample. Ultimately, our sample included 10 social studies teachers, all of whom participated in two individual semi-structured interviews, each at two points in time. Between those times, we applied maximum variation sampling to select four of the 10 teachers to be observed in their classrooms. To that end, we considered five factors: the diversity of the socio-economic status of the schools where they taught, the regions of Turkey where they were raised and earned their degrees to teach social studies, their membership in professional organizations or NGOs, and their self-report about engaging in practices related to social justice in their social studies classes. Table 1 presents the demographic and professional information of participating teachers.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic and Professional Information of Participating Teachers*

Name	Data collection source	Type of school	School's SES	Years as teacher	Union member?	Degree program or department	Degree earned
Yigit	Interview, observation	State	Middle-low	6	Yes	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's

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<b>Ersin</b>	Interview, observation	State	Low	10	Yes	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Gulcan</b>	Interview, observation	Private	Upper	11	No	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Mustafa</b>	Interview, observation	State	Middle	18	Yes	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Gulten</b>	Interview	Private	Upper	11	No	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Melek</b>	Interview	Private	Upper	12	No	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Okan</b>	Interview	State	Low	9	Yes	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Ercan</b>	Interview	Private	Upper	11	No	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's
<b>Ahmet</b>	Interview	State	Middle	17	Yes	History department	Master's
<b>Emine</b>	Interview	State	Low	5	No	Social studies teaching program	Bachelor's

*Note.* All names have been changed; SES = Socioeconomic status

### *Data Collection*

We collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews and observations of participants. Developed based on previous research (Good, 2010; Lee, 2011; Robertson, 2008; Samuels, 2014) and expert opinions, we finalized the interview guide following pre-interviews. Using the guide, we interviewed 10 social studies teachers twice from November 25 to December 3, 2014. During the first interview, we asked teachers questions to clarify their perceptions of social justice, whereas during the second interview, we asked them general and personal questions designed as a result of our analysis of initial interviews at a macro level. During the latter interviews, the four teachers selected to be observed were asked questions about their statements in the first interview and about their statements, attitudes, and behaviors witnessed during observations in their classrooms.

The first author conducted classroom observations totaling 126 lesson hours—that is, roughly 30 hours with each of the four teachers—for 5 months from December 3, 2014, to May 14, 2015. By grade level, the classes observed covered social studies coursework in 5th, 6th, and 7th grade and all units of the courses except the first. As such, the first author observed all units of social studies. Altogether, teachers were observed addressing issues of social justice in units titled “Workers for Society” in 5th grade, “The Adventure of Democracy” in 6th grade, and “Living Democracy” in 7th grade.

Adopted the role of participant as observer, the first author observed events developed during lessons taught and took field notes (Glesne, 2012). While taking notes, the observer focused on whether each teacher mentioned topics related to social justice during lessons and whether they provided examples of social injustices, as well as noted activities employed to raise students’ awareness of social justice, the teacher’s behavior, teacher-student relations, and the general climate of the class.

### *Data Analysis*

We inductively analyzed data obtained via semi-structured interviews and participant observations in five steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glesne, 2012). In the first step, we transferred data to the computer and read them several times for better understanding, while in the second, we analyzed data in depth to identify patterns. In the third, we coded data using NVivo 10 and, in the fourth, categorized generated codes in order to generate both specific and general themes. Fifth and lastly, we synthesized categorized codes in order to yield primary themes. In reporting findings, we took direct quotations from interviews and observation data, all identified by using the participants’ pseudonyms. For the sake of validity and reliability, we performed triangulation by confirming data from semi-structured interviews and observations (Patton, 2014). We solicited expert opinions during data analysis (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2012) and shared data with participants for their approval. Ultimately, we identified four primary themes and 15 subthemes, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Themes and Subthemes of Data Collected During Interviews and Classroom Observations*

Themes	Subthemes
Perceptions of social justice	<p>Meaning of social justice            (i.e., being equal, being tolerant, being respectful to human rights, being non-discriminatory, being fair)</p> <p>Characteristics of people with a sense of social justice            (i.e., empathy, obedience of the law, respect of human rights, acceptance of different cultures)</p> <p>Role of sociocultural structure for developing perceptions of social justice            (i.e., families sensitive to social issues play a greater role, university education is important, people working in private institutions experience more social injustice, cities with a powerful understanding of civil society are more effective)</p> <p>Social studies teachers' experiences with social justice            (i.e., attending non-governmental activities, non-discrimination, sensitivity to the environment, respect for different ideas, obedience of social rules)</p> <p>View of social justice in Turkey and the world            (i.e., problems for disabled people, problems for women, problems for businesses and employees, the exploitation of African countries)</p> <p>Relationship between social justice and media            (i.e., normalization of social injustice)</p>
Perceptions of social justice education	<p>Social studies teachers' perceptions of social justice education            (i.e., teaching the concept of social justice, teaching values, encouraging students to respect each other)</p>
Perceptions of the role of social justice in social studies courses	<p>Responsibilities of teachers in social justice education            (i.e., pay attention to individual differences, respect different identities, describe social injustices and proposed solutions, be a role model for students, be an active citizen)</p> <p>Meaning of social studies courses            (i.e., to nurture active citizens, to prepare individuals for life, to teach the social sciences)</p> <p>Aims of social studies            (i.e., To nurture active citizens, to teach the social sciences, to convey information about democracy and social rules)</p> <p>Social justice in social studies textbooks and curricula</p>
Experiences of social justice in social studies courses	<p>Teacher-student relationships in the classroom            (i.e., avoiding humiliating and degrading behaviors, trying to provide justice among students)</p> <p>Mentioning the dimensions of social justice            (i.e., Democracy, human rights, environmental protection, state social works)</p> <p>Activities performed in the context of social justice            (i.e., interviews, role-play)</p>

## Findings

### Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions of Social Justice

*Meaning of social justice.* Since the concept of social justice does not explicitly appear in social studies, course textbooks, or social studies programs, the teachers did not explicitly describe social justice to their students. However, they did mention concepts related to social justice. In interviews, the teachers defined *social justice* in terms of justice, discrimination, human rights, respect, and tolerance. Teachers who defined it especially in terms of equality emphasized interpersonal equality, equal opportunity, equality before the law, and the equal distribution of social opportunities. For example, Gulcan defined *social justice* as "treating people equally," Gulden as "equality for everybody before the law," and Ersin as "the equal distribution of resources," all by referring to different dimensions of social justice. At the same time, referring to issues of women's rights, Ataturk often stated the need to provide equal opportunities for women and men in society. By contrast, Ahmet and Emine mentioned distributional justice and defined *social justice* as "ensuring justice in the distribution of income and determining wages fairly."

Another meaning that teachers attributed to social justice referred to discrimination, particularly class-based, financial, and gender discrimination. For example, while defining *social justice*, Emine said that "social justice is not discriminating any individuals whatsoever—that is, not discriminating girls from boys or the rich from the poor or people raised in villages from people raised in cities." By extension, Ahmet and Yigit stressed the protection of disadvantaged groups in society, whereas Okan defined *social justice* by saying simply, "It is protecting people's rights." Defining *social justice* as respecting individuals and showing tolerance to others, Gulcan frequently told her students during lessons that they should tolerate their peers and occasionally explained the importance of tolerance.

*Characteristics of individuals with a sense of social justice.* Teachers defined individuals with a sense of social justice as those who respect people and human rights and are democratic and helpful. Mustafa reported that a sense of social justice requires individuals to display respectful attitudes and behaviors, even toward people whom they do not like. Similarly, he told students that people with a sense of social justice should be empathetic: "It's so important, children. Empathy is, for example, thinking that, 'If there was injustice, if it happened to me, then how would I feel?'" Okan also emphasized that individuals with a sense of social justice should have empathy and consider not only themselves, but also others both near and far in social relations: "A person with a developed sense of social justice thinks about people who are inferior to him or her, about people who are economically worse off." While characterizing individuals with a sense of social justice, by some contrast, Emine and Okan pointed out the behavior of helping others, while Ersin and Gulden stated that such individuals are respectful of human rights. Highlighting respect and tolerance of different cultures, Emine, Mustafa, and Gulcan all stated that what characterizes individuals with a sense of social justice is an ability to embrace another's differences and display tolerance. While teaching, Gulcan also mentioned respect for diversity, with expressions such as, "Democracy requires pluralism. There

are various kinds of people in Turkey, from A to Z, yet we should value them because they are all human." Pointing to Denmark as an example, Yigit posited that abiding by laws and rules is an important step toward becoming a person who cares about social justice and emphasized the importance of being intrinsically motivated to abide by rules, instead of doing so simply to avoid punishment. Gulden emphasized the primary responsibilities of citizenship (i.e., paying taxes and voting) of individuals with a sense of social justice: "For people to have a sense of social justice, they need to be aware of their responsibilities. Responsibility is an important concept." Ahmet argued that an individual with social justice should, in addition to the above characteristics, be knowledgeable about how to defend his or her rights: "An individual with a developed sense of social justice should first know how to demand. ... One must defend his or her rights. Even if a situation has nothing to do with him or herself, one must defend the rights of weak people." Mustafa added that an individual with a sense of social justice must give voice to any unjust treatment, even when it happens to someone else: "When anything unfair occurs, I empathize with the affected person and ask myself how I would feel in such a case." Melek defined people with a sense of social justice as those who struggle against injustices, by saying that "individuals with a strong sense of social justice should be able to react, point to relevant injustices, and offer more appropriate ways of acting, even if the issues don't concern them." Unlike the other teachers, however, Okan regarded environmental awareness as a distinguishing feature of people with a sense of social justice.

*Effects of sociocultural conditions on perceptions of social justice.* Teachers stated that in developing their perceptions of social justice, they were primarily affected by their families and education, although also by the institutions in which they work, the cities where they live, and certain other people. They expressed the belief that the concept of social justice is not usually explicitly developed in families, but a learned set of values that amount to a concern for social justice. Teachers who grew up in democratic families stated that they had observed and experienced many values—equality, respect, tolerance, participating in decision-making processes, helpfulness—in their family settings since an early age. Some teachers also remarked that facing financial difficulties in their families raised their awareness of social justice. Referring to this family, Ahmet stated, "The difficulties that we faced with financial issues, as well as educational, cultural, and health-related ones ... affected the formation of our thoughts and feelings." He similarly acknowledged that his family taught him to treat people equally and help people in need, by saying, "I mean, not to discriminate among people and to protect the weak: those values constitute the essence of social justice. We learned those values in family settings. In my family, I witnessed the behaviors of sharing with and helping neighbors or some institutions or organizations from time to time, all of which involved protecting the weak." Raised in families with cultural features considerably different from the rest of the society's, Mustafa and Ahmet stated that they learned the values that they considered to relate to social justice, including not to discriminate, to embrace differences, and not to humiliate people, in their families. In general, however, the teachers expressed that they could learn about issues concerning social justice more thoroughly in higher education, not only because the issues were covered more comprehensively there, but because they had matured.

Interestingly, whether the teacher's institution in which he or she worked was public or private influenced his or her views about social justice. Whereas teachers working in private schools stated that they faced and suffered from injustice in terms of income inequality, teachers in state schools stated that they did not experience any social injustice in their institutions. For example, Yigit reported, "There is no money circulating around [in state schools]. I mean, everybody is paid a salary by the government, so there's no injustice. ... But in private schools, there was. I used to work in a private course center, where there was considerable social injustice." Other teachers mentioned that some incidents of social injustice that they experienced in cities where they live have affected their perceptions of social justice. However, Emine, Ercan, and Ersin, who work in eastern Turkey, stated that they have encountered incidents of gender discrimination and violations of human rights. Teachers also added that they had been affected by the influence of historical figures such as Atatürk, as well as close relatives and teachers, as models of social justice. Indeed, some teachers associated Atatürk's principle of populism with social justice. Meanwhile, Mustafa associated social justice with his former English teacher's tendency to give equal voice to students, accept them, and exchange ideas with them.

*Everyday experiences with social justice.* Some teachers noted their sensitivity to equalitarianism and their efforts to reduce discrimination in their daily lives, abide by social rules, protect the environment, and not violate disabled citizens. More particularly, some teachers reported their active involvement in NGO activities aimed at environmental awareness and improving human and women's rights. For example, Gulcan stated that she volunteered for the city council of the town where she works and serves as a member of its women's council, which she said helped women of poor socioeconomic status by offering vocational courses to them. In a similar vein, Ersin mentioned the problems of miners in Turkey and proposed solutions. Other teachers claimed that media play an important role in developing individuals' perceptions of social justice. Asserting that Turkish media generally works against the development of social justice among individuals, teachers complained that television programs normalize social injustice and the characters who exhibit it. Contrary to negative aspects of media, however, other teachers stressed media's ability to broadcast unheard voices that advocate social justice to the masses, especially social media's ability to rapidly mobilize individuals.

*Social justice in Turkey and the world.* Some teachers criticized problems experienced by disabled people, women, and workers in Turkey in terms of social justice. Mentioning problems related to the notion of the social state, they supported their claim that social justice is too undeveloped in Turkey with examples from their daily lives. In general, they attested that the presence of sound social state works is evidence of social justice and that people suffer social injustice in many countries. Yigit pointed out the dictatorship in North Korea, where people cannot even watch television or access the Internet. He also mentioned investments made by globally recognized corporations that exploit workers in East Asia and other social injustices around the world. While some teachers admitted that in some countries, the notion of social justice is better advocated than in Turkey, others opined that exploitation and injustice are generally prevalent around the world.

### Social Justice Education in Social Studies

*An outlook on social justice education.* The teachers indicated that social justice education generally involves teaching concepts such as social justice, as well as ensuring the equality of opportunities in education, providing free extra-curricular courses, awarding grants, and most practically, teaching values such as equality, justice, helpfulness, and the acceptance of differences. They moreover emphasized the need to teach students concepts related to social justice, environmental awareness, and the government's role in perpetuating and mitigating social justice and injustice in society. They also argued that, for effective social justice education, teachers should respect different identities and thoughts, treat students equally, not discriminate among them, ensure reliable and valid evaluations, take individual differences into account, take critical approaches, and work with NGOs. Some teachers added that students should be taught the government's role in safeguarding social justice, that their acceptance of differences should be fostered, and that financially disadvantaged students should be better supported. The teachers additionally remarked that to teach students values such as social justice, people should take action and achieve some degree of coordination among schools, families, and the environment. Most teachers agreed that teachers of social justice education should be role models for students and that subjects related to social justice should definitely be included in social studies curricula. However, teachers also asserted that despite learning objectives already included in social studies curricula regarding different dimensions of social justice, content and activities in textbooks and workbooks remain limited.

*Experiences of social justice during social studies lessons.* We observed that although teachers did not explicitly address the concept of social justice in their social studies lessons, they did mention topics of social justice, provided relevant examples, engaged activities to improve values related to social justice, and fostered learning environments supporting social justice via positive communication with students. In their lessons, teachers mentioned democracy, human rights, environmental awareness, and social government works, while within the context of human rights, they mentioned many rights and freedoms included in the curriculum, including the right to live, the right to privacy, the right to demonstrate peacefully, and the rights of disabled people, women, and children. They also described issues concerning human rights not included in the curriculum, including capital punishment, US independence, and feudalism. For example, Yigit lectured about how British colonies in North America protested for their rights and freedoms in 1776 and ultimately achieved national independence. In their lessons, teachers mentioned the topics of cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, empathy, freedom of thought, a respect for differences, and non-discrimination, all within the context of human rights. However, we observed that some teachers tended to make statements containing overgeneralizations that were liable to cultivate prejudices among students. In their lessons, some teachers also mentioned the concepts of opposition, national sovereignty, pluralism and democracy, legal equality, political equality, and justice. At the same time, Ersin, Mustafa, and Yigit addressed fundamental concepts of democracy, including multinationalism, law, constitutionalism, court systems, and the limits of freedom, the last of which Ersin addressed directly as "where the others'

freedom begins”: “We have the right to be educated, but we do not have the right to behave however we want, because if we begin to behave however we want, then we may violate others’ right to get education.” Although some teachers additionally described the historical development of democracy to their students, many teachers remarkably did not mention environmental awareness in relation to social justice in their lessons. In fact, only Gulcan, Yigit, and Mustafa touched upon the devastation of forests, animals’ health, the protection of historical and cultural property, environmental activities, and NGOs founded for the purposes of environmental awareness. Gulcan and Mustafa also briefly devoted some time to works supported by social governments. In that respect, some teachers provided examples of the roles of governments in terms of ensuring social justice during the time of pre-Islamic Turkish states. As a historical example, Yigit explained, “Yusuf Has Hacib suggested to potential rulers that they should be equal, fair, and respectful to everybody—that they should not commit any injustices, not commit fraud, give everybody what they deserve, not harm, kill, torture, or put the people in misery in any way, and feed them, for if people get hungry, then they will riot.” By contrast, Gulcan and Mustafa pointed to more recent examples, including the Institution for the Protection of Children, the construction of housing for people in need, and the creation of environments promoting free thought.

In lessons, teachers also referred to social and historical events both compatible and incompatible with social justice. Yigit, Melek, and Emine reported that they mostly addressed the principle of populism and the abolishment of the sultanate, whereas Mustafa described Jews who migrated to the Ottoman Empire from Spain:

Once the Spanish people judged the Jews for being from a different race and put pressure on them, the Ottoman Empire invited them to their lands. They were invited to İstanbul, and after arriving there, they lived in peace in Ottoman society. Ottomans benefited from them; the government benefited from those who were good at commerce, intelligent, art, and state affairs. In fact, they both benefited and facilitated the integration of Jews, which helped the Ottoman Empire grow.

Teachers also commented on social justice by associating it with the principle of populism, as well as the freedoms of religion and conscience and the rights of workers and employees, while teaching about human rights. They moreover provided historical examples of injustices during the Middle Ages in Europe and the Age of Exploration, including exploitation and slavery, examples from the Ottoman Empire, and some antidemocratic administrative practices. In his class, Mustafa told students, “My friends! You know, Western civilization was in poverty during the Middle Age. But they weren’t naturally poor; they were forced into poverty. Feudal lords caused all of their poverty. They seized the people’s lands by force. They coerced people to work like slaves and impoverished them.” He and other teachers also described acts of social injustice in societies such as North Korea, among refugees, and even some related to Uygur Turks. Gulden reported even discussing Syrian refugees in a more recent social studies lesson.

By adopting traditional, teacher-centered instructional approaches, however, some teachers demonstrated teaching methods that were incompatible with the tenets of social justice. By contrast, Gulcan, Mustafa, and Melek used group work in

their lessons, thereby fostering a spirit of cooperation and solidarity among their students. Other teaching activities preferred by teachers included presenting examples of social injustice and discussing students' ideas about them. Other activities integrated into lessons addressing social justice involved identifying public opinions about human rights, preparing a so-called children's rights journal, comparing historical documents, and using role-play. Among unique activities, when the topic was women's rights, Gulcan invited women on the city council who perform women-oriented works to the classroom. Similarly unique, Ercan engaged a press release activity with his students about forming public opinion, and Yigit had his students compare the fundamental principles of the Code of Hammurabi, the Ottoman Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the French Revolution.

In terms of students' attitudes and behaviors during lessons, we observed that teachers did not tolerate humiliating or offensive dialogues among students and responded with constructive warnings against disruptive student behaviors. They were moreover careful not to discriminate among their students, but to be even handed toward them. While Emine said that she did not make any cultural or economic discrimination among her students, Okan stated that he sought to be democratic when asking students to give speeches. We additionally observed that some teachers—namely ones who stated that they took individual differences into consideration—attempted to improve students' self-confidence and sense of entrepreneurship. For instance, Yigit often sought to engage an Iranian girl into lessons.

Teachers' experiences of social justice during lessons were affected by their knowledge and perceptions of social justice, personality traits (e.g., work in NGOs and devotion to human rights), and their school's curriculum, textbooks, and sociocultural structure. Interestingly, the most significant indicator of a teacher's likelihood to address social justice during lessons is his or her engagement in union or NGO activities. Such teachers discussed social justice more often, usually by supporting those discussions with examples from their extracurricular work and activity.

*Difficulties with social justice.* Social studies teachers demonstrated various difficulties regarding their experiences with social justice while teaching lessons, which were typically affected by students, society, the lessons themselves, and the education system. Teachers stated that they faced challenges with the education system, including the hegemony of examinations, the overload of lessons, and the deprioritization of social studies courses. Regarding difficulties caused by students, teachers pointed out some students' reluctance to cooperate, their lack of effort in transferring knowledge into behavior, and their failure to develop learner autonomy, often owing to excessive supervision by their families. As for the social studies courses themselves, teachers complained that content related to social justice was often beyond students' level of maturity and too abstract to grasp, which precluded clear opportunities to practice aspects of the concepts in the classroom. Lastly, regarding problems related to society, teachers asserted that though social injustices have increased, since students encounter inappropriate models of social justice during their daily lives, teachers face greater difficulties in class. For instance, Yigit

expressed that income inequality in society is expanding, while Gulden averred that authorities' increasing failure to abide by rules governing the societies that they oversee offers only negative examples for their students.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our results indicate that teachers perceive social justice in terms of equality, justice, respect, tolerance, and human rights. Teachers' perceptions about social justice reflect their perceptions about people as well as their approaches to daily life experiences and events in their countries and around the world (Fujiyoshi, 2015). The teachers in our sample characterized individuals with a sense of social justice as people who are democratic, respectful of human rights and laws, helpful, empathetic, environmentally friendly, and both respectful and tolerant of differences among people, whereas only a few teachers mentioned that such individuals struggle against injustices in society. In a similar vein, teachers associated social justice with being equalitarian in their daily relationships and non-discriminatory, while only a few teachers referred to their social experiences as citizens. That teachers did not emphasize a struggle for or development of rights, both of which constitute the basis of social justice, arguably indicates their passive, republican, and task-based perceptions of citizenship. Such results resemble the findings of previous research in Turkey on teachers (Ersoy 2014; Ozturk, 2014), yet contradict the results of international studies on social studies teachers' perceptions and practices of social justice (Bender-Slack & Raupach, 2008; Good, 2010; Samuels, 2014), which might suggest that their perceptions are affected by the political, social, and cultural features of the society in which they live. That possibility takes support from the finding that teachers in our sample were affected primarily by their families and education, yet also by the cities in which they live, the institutions in which they work, and the characteristics of certain figures in history and their lives. Among other findings, Philpott (2009) and Samuels (2014) reported that various sociocultural factors, including families and education systems, play remarkable roles in forming social studies teachers' perceptions of social justice.

The perceptions of social studies teachers in our sample are consistent with their views on social justice education and their experiences in social studies lessons. Some teachers stated that social justice education involves teaching students the concept of social justice, ensuring the equality of opportunities in education, providing free extra-curricular courses, and teaching students values such as equality, justice, helpfulness, and tolerance of differences. We also observed that the teachers offered several examples of historical or recent social injustices, but did not hold any discussions about them or solicit any suggestions for their mitigation. During lessons, teachers moreover interpreted differences from a nationalistic perspective, not a multicultural one, and though addressing differences, particularly religious ones, at the global level, they refrained from referring to cultural differences at the local level. Nevertheless, inculcating students with some awareness of different cultures in social studies lessons is important for developing their cultural, ethnic, gender, and class-related identities, as well as crucial for social justice education (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

At the same time, teachers did not touch upon problems faced by minority groups and communities with different sociocultural characteristics at the local or global scale, nor did they brainstorm solutions for the problems or ways to effect social change in society. However, suggesting solutions for problems facing minorities and disadvantaged groups in social studies education has an important place in social justice education (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Welton et al., 2015). On a different note, although the teachers found social studies curricula suitable in terms of social justice, they emphasized that the quality of textbooks is insufficient. From a different perspective, however, Polat (2007) found that administrators and teachers working in primary schools think that curricula used in Turkey generally involves sexual, religious, and ethnic discrimination. In that sense, our findings of teachers' appreciation of social studies curriculum in terms of social justice might stem from their perceptions of social justice.

Teachers' experiences with social justice during lessons were reportedly affected by not only their perceptions, but also their experiences with engagement in NGO activities, curricula and textbooks, and the sociocultural structure of their schools. We observed that teachers active in NGOs had greater awareness of social justice than other teachers, as well as were more sensitive and devoted more time to issues such as the right to legal resources and the responsibilities of the government. For example, teachers engaged in women's studies or environmental awareness in their daily lives devoted more time to teaching those topics in their lessons. We furthermore observed that teachers working in schools in which most students are of lower and middle socioeconomic status emphasized values of social justice more, whereas those in schools in which most students are of upper socioeconomic status prioritized topics covered by national examinations more than issues of social justice due to preoccupations with preparing students for exams.

Teachers attributed their failure to sufficiently address topics of social justice in their lessons to their schools' preoccupation with preparing students to take and pass national examinations. Findings from other research also suggest that education systems dominated by national exams do not support social justice education (Agarwal, 2012; Clarke & Sheelagh, 2006). Another problem that teachers face in their lessons is that their students frequently encounter incidents in their daily lives that are incompatible with understandings of social justice, which hinders the realization of educational goals at schools. That situation underscores the need to consider social and cultural environments in social justice education, as well as the need for cooperation between teachers and the extracurricular environment.

Our results also indicate that teachers have limited perceptions and experiences of social justice, as well as that programs and textbooks plays an important role in developing teachers' perceptions of social justice. For that reason, incorporating social justice into social studies textbooks and programs and increasing activities related to the issue can play an important role in developing teachers' perceptions. In particular, it is important to analyze and develop curricula and textbooks that can explicitly direct teachers' instructional experiences within the context of social justice education. In-service training programs for teachers should be revised as well, with a special emphasis on social justice and social justice education, and teachers should be provided with training programs about social justice and social justice education

during the in-service training process. To that end, future research on students' perceptions of social justice in Turkey using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the analysis of social studies textbooks and curricula in terms of social justice and related concepts, and experimental interventions testing the efficacy of social justice education via sample units in social studies lessons can make important contributions to the topic of social justice education.

### Limitations and Challenges

Although we interviewed all teachers in the sample, we observed only four of them, which was an amount determined to be most possible for the first author to conduct and process. As such, data gathered represent two rounds of interviews with 10 teachers and observations in the classrooms of four of them.

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## Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmenlerinin Sosyal Adalet Algı ve Deneyimleri

### Atf:

- Bursa, S., & Ersoy, A. F. (2016). Social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of social justice. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 64, 319-340

### Özet

*Problem Durumu:* 21. yüzyılda sosyal, kültürel ve teknolojik alanda yaşanan hızlı değişimler, ülkelerin vatandaşlarını küresel ve değişen koşullara uyumlu bireyler yetiştirmesini ve küresel vatandaşlık eğitimi vermesini gerekli kılmaktadır. Küresel vatandaşlık için gerekli olan çoklu bakış açısı geliştirebilme, eleştirel düşünebilme ve duyarlı olabilme gibi beceriler sosyal adalet eğitimi ile geliştirilebilmektedir. Kuzey Amerika ve Batı Avrupa ülkelerinde sosyal bilgiler dersi programlarında "Sosyal Adalet" adlı bir bölüm olarak verilmektedir. Türkiye'de sosyal bilgiler programında sosyal adalet kavramına doğrudan yer vermezken sosyal adaletle ilişkili olan birçok değere yer verdiği görülmektedir. Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenleri öğrencilerin sosyal adalet bilincinin gelişiminde önemli rol oynamaktadır. Öğrencilerin sosyal adalet bilinci öğretmenlerin sosyal adalet ilgili kişisel düşüncelerinden, inançlarından ve deneyimlerinden etkilenmektedir. Türkiye'de sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin sosyal adaleti nasıl anlamlandırıldığı, derslerinde sosyal adaleti nasıl deneyimlediği konusunda herhangi bir çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır. Bu nedenle Türkiye'deki sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin sosyal adalet algılarını ortaya çıkartmak ve bu bağlamda sınıf içerisinde sosyal adaleti nasıl deneyimledikleri konusunda bilgi sahibi olmak, Türkiye'de verilen sosyal bilgiler ve vatandaşlık eğitimi için önem taşımaktadır.

*Araştırmanın Amacı:* Bu araştırmanın amacı, sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin sosyal adalet algıları ve sosyal bilgiler dersindeki sosyal adalet deneyimlerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

*Araştırmanın Yöntemi:* Araştırma, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenoloji desenine göre gerçekleştirilmiştir. Öğretmenler, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden biri olan maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemeinden yararlanılmıştır. İlk aşamada

maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme ile belirlenen 10 öğretmen ile yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. İkinci aşamada, bu görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler doğrultusunda öğretmenlerin hayata bakış açısı, mesleki deneyimleri, buldukları okulun sosyo-ekonomik düzeyi, sosyal adalet konusundaki farkındalıkları, sosyal adalet eğitimine sınıf içerisinde yer verme düzeyleri gözetilerek görüşme yapılan 10 öğretmen arasından dört öğretmen belirlenmiştir. Belirlenen dört öğretmenin sınıfında sosyal adalet eğitimine ilişkin deneyimleri yaklaşık beş ay süresince katılımcı gözlem ile gözlenmiştir. Katılımcı gözlem sürecinin ardından tüm öğretmenlerle son görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler ve gözlemlerden elde edilen veriler NVivo 10 nitel veri analizi programı kullanılarak tümevarım analiz tekniği ile çözümlenmiştir.

*Araştırmanın Bulguları:* Araştırmada öğretmenlerin sosyal adalet kavramını, öğretmenlerin sosyal adaleti eşitlik, adalet, saygı ve hoşgörü ve insan hakları olarak anlamlandırdıkları görülmüştür. Öğretmenler sosyal adaletli bireyi demokrat, insan haklarına ve yasalara saygı duyan, yardımsever, savunan, empati kuran, çevreyi koruyan ve insanlar arasındaki farklılıklara saygı ve hoşgörü gösteren kişi olarak tanımlamıştır. Sosyal adaletin temelinde eşitsizliklerle mücadele olmasına karşın sadece birkaç öğretmen toplumdaki eşitsizlikler için mücadele etmeyi dile getirmiştir. Öğretmenler, güncel yaşam deneyimlerinde eşitlikçi olmayı ve insanlar arasında ayırım yapmamayı sosyal adaletle ilişkilendirmiş ve sadece birkaç öğretmen sivil toplum deneyimlerinden söz etmiştir. Öğretmenlerin sosyal adaletin temelini oluşturan hak mücadelesi ve geliştirilmesine vurgu yapmaması, pasif, cumhuriyetçi ve görev odaklı vatandaşlık algısına sahip olduklarını gösterir niteliktedir. Öğretmenler, sosyal adalet konusunda öncelikle ailesinin ve eğitiminin daha sonra da yaşadıkları şehirlerin, çalıştıkları kurumların ve bazı kişi ve karakterlerden etkilendiklerini ifade etmiştir. Öğretmenler, sosyal adalet eğitimini fırsat eşitliği yaratmak, sosyal adaleti kavram olarak öğretmek ve öğrencilere sosyal adaletle ilgili değerleri kazandırmak olarak değerlendirmişler ve sosyal adalet eğitiminde öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerine olumlu model olması, farklı düşünce ve kimliklere saygı göstermesi gerektiğini dile getirmişlerdir. Öğretmenler sosyal adaletin, sosyal bilgiler dersi içerisinde önemli bir yeri olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Ancak sosyal bilgiler öğretim programı ve ders kitaplarında sosyal adaletin doğrudan yer almadığını söylemişlerdir. Ders içerisinde öğretmenlerin, sosyal adaletle ilişkin deneyimleri sınırlı kalmakta ve sosyal adalet algısı ile paralellik göstermektedir. Öğretmenlerin öğrencileri arasında ayırım yapmadıkları ve öğrencilerine karşı olumlu tutumlarda buldukları görülmesine karşın derslerinde tarihten ve günümüzden sosyal adaletsizlik içeren birçok örnekten bahsettikleri ancak bu adaletsizliklerin ortadan kaldırılması için neler yapılabileceğine dair tartışmalar ve çözüm üretme çalışmaları yapmadıkları görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte öğretmenler, derslerinde dezavantajlı grupların, yerel ve küresel düzeyde farklı sosyo-kültürel özelliklere sahip toplulukların karşılaştıkları sorunlara, bu sorunlarla ilgili olarak çözüm önerilerine ve toplumda nasıl sosyal değişim yaratılabileceğine yer vermemiştir. Öğretmenlerin derslerindeki sosyal adaletle ilişkin deneyimlerine, öğretmenlerin algılarının yanı sıra, STK'lara katılma gibi ders dışındaki deneyimleri, çalıştığı okulun sosyo-ekonomik düzeyi ve öğretim programları ve ders kitapları bağlamında şekillenmektedir. STK'larda etkin çalışan öğretmenlerin sosyal adalet konusundaki farkındalık seviyelerinin diğer

öğretmenlere göre daha yüksek olduğu ve hak arama, devlet sorumluluğuna vurgu yapma gibi konulara karşı daha duyarlı oldukları ve derslerinde bu konulara daha fazla yer verdikleri gözlenmiştir. Alt ve orta seviyede sosyo-ekonomik düzeyden öğrencilerin ağırlıkta olduğu okullarda öğretmenlerin sosyal adaletle ilgili değerleri daha fazla vurgulandığı görülürken, üst seviye sosyo-ekonomik düzeyden öğrencilerin ağırlıkta olduğu okullarda ise öğrencileri merkezi sınavlara hazırlama kaygısının daha etkili olmasından dolayı sınavlardaki soruları kapsayan konulara yönelik eğitim verildiği görülmektedir. Ayrıca, öğretmenler derslerinde kullandıkları etkin öğretim etkinlikleri sayı ve nitelik açısından çok sınırlı kalması sosyal adalet eğitimini desteklememektedir. Öğretmenler derslerinde sosyal adaletle yeterli yer verememelerini merkezi sınav sistemine bağlamıştır. Ayrıca, öğretmenler, öğrencilerin gündelik yaşamda sosyal adalet anlayışına uymayan örneklerle karşılaşmalarının eğitim sürecini olumsuz etkilediğini belirtmişlerdir.

*Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Öneriler:* Araştırma sonucunda, öğretmenlerin sosyal adalet kavramını sınırlı bir şekilde algıladıkları ve bu doğrultuda ders içi deneyimlerinin de sınırlı kaldığı görülmektedir. Öğretmenlerin sosyal adaletle ilişkin haksızlıklarla mücadele etme konusunda bir algıya sahip olmadıkları ve sosyal bilgiler dersinde böyle bir deneyim yaşamadıkları belirlenmiştir. Öğretmenlerin sosyal adalet algısının ve deneyimlerinin şekillenmesinde ders kitaplarının ve ders programının etkili olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu nedenle öncelikle sosyal bilgiler programı ve ders kitaplarının sosyal adalet açısından geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir. Ayrıca, sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerin farkındalıklarının artırılması için sosyal adalet ve eğitimi konusunda hizmet öncesi ve hizmet içi eğitim programlarının yeniden düzenlenmesi ilerde sosyal adalet bilinci gelişmiş bireylerin yetiştirilmesi için önem taşımaktadır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Sosyal adalet, sosyal bilgiler, vatandaşlık eğitimi, sosyal adalet eğitimi, fenomenoloji.