

An Investigation on the Level of Conscious Consumerism of Primary School Students in Terms of Various Variables

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the level of conscious consumerism of primary school students. For that purpose, a 19-item scale consisting of three sub-dimensions was developed. In order to test construct validity and reliability, the scale was administered on 113 students studying in Sakarya. In accordance with the data obtained, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted for construct validity purposes. The scale with a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of .77 accounts for 49.5% of the variance. The sub-dimensions of the scale are "consciousness of consumer responsibility", "consciousness of quality" and "consciousness of budget-price". The fit index values which obtained from confirmatory factor analysis showed that the three-dimensional level of conscious consumerism scale fit well. The scale was administered on 473 4th grade students- 223 females and 250 males- who studied in Sakarya during the educational year of 2009-2010. The study concluded that there were meaningful differences in consciousness of consumer responsibility, consciousness of quality and the whole scale depending on the educational status of mothers. Results were discussed in light of literature and some suggestions were given for further studies.

Key Words

Primary School, Social Studies Lesson, the Level of Conscious Consumerism, Consciousness of Consumer Responsibility.

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Social studies is a lesson that focuses on human beings and their lives, and has a prominent place in the curriculum of primary education (Doğanay, 2004). Social studies constitutes an important part of the fundamental and general knowledge human beings in a certain society have about the life-style of that society, its place among the world societies, and its connections with various nations. Social studies are comprised of those subjects which are included in the curriculum of primary education in the form of such lessons as history, geography, instruction of citizenship and human rights; which are selected from such disciplines as sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology- which are actually called “social sciences”- and which are made to be suitable for the age of students and to have more concrete and simple characteristics (Sözer, 1998). It should be noted that an important issue requiring great care during the process of composing the content of social studies is that social studies is inter-disciplinary and that it is essential to enable primary school students to develop an integrated approach to the circumstances and phenomena related to social sciences by composing the content through selections from different disciplines and by integrating the subjects (Öztürk, 2006; Sağlam, 2007). The content of social studies lesson should be composed by arranging significant parts of living areas via an active attempt, not by gathering circumstances and phenomena together in an encyclopedic manner to force students to memorize them (Varış, 1994). Within this context, an important objective of social studies lesson is to provide students with the type of knowledge and skills that will enable them to face their own decisions, to be economical consumers and to make proper decisions on things about economy. Students should be taught such knowledge and skills through real-life experiences (Akınoğlu, 2005). The reason for this is that education is the life, not preparation for it. Therefore, social studies should include whatever issue and problem exist in life and students should be taken to life (Sönmez, 2002). When it comes to human life, an important part of the life is linked with economy (Hanna & Jacks, 1987). This makes it necessary to teach production, distribution and consumption in terms of their effects on human life (Akhan, 2009).

It is vital that starting from primary education students be endowed with those experiences that will provide them with the opportunity to carry out activities which will enable them to decide how to spend their time and money. Activities regarding production, distribution and con-

sumption provide students with crucial skills, including making appropriate decisions. Furthermore, they prepare students for being conscious concerning relevant issues and thinking about potential consequences of options before starting a new job (Brophy & Alleman, 2007). This is especially important that it is more difficult for today's consumers to make decisions. Today's consumers are exposed to the effects of commercials, news, e-mails containing advertisement brochures and confusing short messages. Moreover, the increase in the number and variety of products and the growing number of shopping malls make it complicated for consumers to make decisions and thus consumers have difficulty in making a choice (Hafstrom, Chae, & Chung, 1992; Fan & Xiao, 1998; Walsh, Mitchell, & Thurau, 2001). Here, it becomes extremely important for primary school students to have an idea of how to make a decision about a product while they are shopping. While they are shopping within a school, students have a direct chance to make decisions about what they purchase. An example of this would be the products bought from school canteen (Cleland, Worsley, & Crawford, 2004). From that point of view, primary education proves to be the life itself rather than just an institution preparing students for it. This indicates the importance, efficiency and role of primary education and social studies which aim to train conscious consumers.

Primary schools are an educational stage during which individuals are prepared for social, cultural, and economic roles they will assume once they have grown up and provided with the most fundamental knowledge and skills for these roles (Yaşar, Sözer, & Gültekin, 2000). While preparing students for life and upper education stages, primary education also aims to school conscious producers and conscious consumers. In fact, the unit "From Production to Consumption" for 4th grades, associated with the learning field "Production, Distribution and Consumption" included in the Curriculum of Social Studies for Primary Education, includes the following educational attainments: "They make a distinction between their desires and requirements", "They associate their requirements with available resources", "They assess what they are going to buy in accordance with the criteria specified" and "They use their rights as a conscious consumer" (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2005). It can be thought that the earnings listed here should already be characteristics of a conscious consumer. Such attainments are indications of the fact that primary education aims to school conscious

consumers through social studies lessons. These achievements, that are included at Social Studies Curriculum (2005), are supported and reinforced by appropriate activities in other lessons. In this way, it is aimed to raise primary school students as conscious consumers.

It is known that the primary school education has an important role and responsibility on the growth of students as conscious consumers. The earnings listed in Social Studies Curriculum (2005) clearly indicate this. When the curriculums are examined closely, it is seen that there are three types of relations; in-course, with inter-disciplines and with other lessons. These relations necessitate the organization of all lessons in the primary school education in an integrated manner. As a result of this integrity and continuity, it is desired that the primary school education reaches its goals. In this regard, education of primary school students as conscious consumers must be considered. In Turkey, the consumerism levels of primary school students are regarded important for their educational earnings and their ability to comprehend a contemporary subject. One can find studies on conscious consumerism in the foreign literature (Sproles & Sproles, 1990; Fan & Xiao, 1998; Walsh et al., 2001). Tendency in consumption spree starts to become widespread nowadays. By considering this case, it is desired to raise conscious consumers by teaching following rules to primary school students; responding unlimited requirements with limited resources, considering basic needs in the first place while product purchasing, preventing extravagance, and preferring high quality, safe and affordable products. Nevertheless, there is not any domestic study about the level of primary school students' conscious consumerism. In response to this, the purpose of the present study is to analyze the level of conscious consumerism of primary school students. Specifically, the purpose is to find out whether the level of conscious consumerism of primary school students is affected by such variables as gender, school type, and their parents' income level, educational status of their mothers and educational status of their fathers.

Method

The study was conducted through the use of correlational study model, a comparative one. Study models attempt to describe a past or present condition as it was or is. The real objective of these models is to depict an existing state as it is. In correlative study models, there are at least

two variables, one of them being used for forming groups and the other one being used for determining whether there is a difference between groups (Karasar, 1994). With this comparison type relational quality screening study, it is aimed to examine levels of primary school students about conscious consumerism in terms of different variables.

Population and Sample

The population of the study is comprised of 4th grade students who studied during the educational year of 2009-2010 at the primary schools located in Serdivan and Adapazari, Sakarya. The sample of the study consists of 473 4th grade students- 223 of them (47 %) were females and 250 of them (53 %) were males- a type of non-probability sampling randomly (Karasar, 1994) selected from 6 primary schools, 2 of them being public and 4 of them being private, which have been thought to represent the population. The sample of the study has been taken from 4th grade because it is thought that the conscious consumerism is more emphasized at this grade of primary school. These students attend Mehmet Zorlu Primary School and Atatürk Primary School, and Sakarya University Foundation College, Doga College, Sahin College and Teksen College. In terms of the type of the school, 73 % of the students attend public schools while the remaining 27 % attend private schools. 3.6 %, 70.4 % and 26.0 % of the parents of the participant students had a low, intermediate and high income, respectively. It was observed that 2.5 % of students' mothers were illiterate, that 27.5 % of them were primary school graduates, that 12.7 % of them were secondary school graduates, that 31.7 % of them were high school graduates and that 25.6 % of them were university graduates; whereas 1.5 % of their fathers were illiterate, that 15.4 % of them were primary school graduates, that 11.8 % of them were secondary school graduates, that 29.6 % of them were high school graduates and that 41.6 % of them were university.

Development of the Measurement Tool

In an effort to collect the levels of conscious consumerism of primary school students, a data collection tool was developed by Sağlam (2010). The development of the tool consists of a few phases: The development of the data collection tool devised for receiving student opinions in an attempt to determine the level of conscious consumerism of 4th grade

students consists of several stages. Initially, a review of literature was conducted by the researcher and interviews were carried out with teachers and students. For validity purposes, the specialists who would be consulted about their learned opinion regarding content and face validity were determined. The scale was submitted to certain specialists in social studies instruction, research methods and the Turkish Language with a view to determine whether it had content and face validity. The underlying motive in this attempt was the idea proposed by Balcı (2004): "Content validity is concerned whether the scale measures what is intended to be measured and can be explained on the basis of learned opinion". A 27-item pool was composed in accordance with the opinions and proposals of the specialists. Again with the opinions and criticism from the specialists, the draft scale was revised. Some items were excluded, others were revised and new ones were added to the scale. Thus, a 24-item scale was made ready for the preliminary implementation. Studying at a primary school located in Sakarya, 113 4th grade students were exposed to the scale for validity and reliability purposes. The literature includes conflicting criteria and views as to the size of the sample required for conducting multi-variable analyses, such as factor analysis, for validity studies of the scale (Fer, 2005). Some views focus on the size of the sample. About the issue, Sapnas (2004) noted that good factor results could be achieved by studies with small sample groups and thus a sample group of 100 people would be adequate. On the other hand, Preacher and MacCallum (2002) stated that minimum sample size should include 100 to 250 people. Some scholars specify a ratio depending on the item number. Through a review of the literature, Preacher and MacCallum (2002) found that the size of the sample should be three to ten times as large as the number of variables to items. From this point of view, the size of the sample included in the present study was considered adequate. 4 point Likert scale was used for the views expressed by the subjects in the sample regarding the items included in the scale. The scale was graded as follows: never (1), occasionally (2), often (3), always (4). The grades given to the items (7 and 18) which had negative expressions concerning conscious consumerism were reversed. The student opinions regarding these items were graded as follows: never (4), occasionally (3), often (2), always (1).

The scale was carried out on the sample for construct validity and reliability purposes. In accordance with the data obtained from this proc-

ess, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted for construct validity. During the exploratory factor analysis, great care was taken to ensure that the load values of the items to be included in the scale would be at least .30, that items would be included in one single factor and that there would be a difference of at least .10 between factors in the event that they were included in two factors (Büyüköztürk, 2009). In addition, a varimax rotation – 25 degree- was carried out during construct validity. The reliability of the scale was studied through internal consistency coefficient. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, five items were excluded from the scale since they distorted the construct, and another factor analysis was conducted on the 19-item scale. At first, values from KMO and Bartlett Sphericity tests were taken into account in order to carry out a factor analysis. Since KMO test suggested a variance of .73 and Barlett Sphericity test a meaningful variation ($\chi^2=480.64, p=.000$), it was decided that it would be appropriate to conduct a factor analysis for the scale (Büyüköztürk, 2009). The factor analysis concluded that the scale had a three-dimensional structure comprised of 19 items. The first dimension in the scale is comprised of 8 items and their factor loadings range from .32 to .75. This dimension was named *consciousness of consumer responsibility*. Accounting for 16.4% of the total variance, the dimension has a reliability coefficient of .67. The second dimension, called *consciousness of quality*, is comprised of 5 items and their factor loadings vary between .54 and .65. Accounting for 12.7% of the total variance, the dimension has a reliability coefficient of .65. The third dimension, called *consciousness of budget-price*, is comprised of 6 items and their factor loadings vary between .38 and .65. Accounting for 11.3% of the total variance, the dimension has a reliability coefficient of .58. An overall view of the 19-item Scale indicates that it accounts for 40.5 percent of the total variance and its inner consistency coefficient is .77. Those scales with a reliability coefficient of .60 and over are regarded as quite reliable and those with a reliability coefficient of .80 and over as highly reliable (Özdamar, 1999). The results of CFA indicated that the model was well fit and Chi-Square value ($\chi^2=166.34, df = 147, p=.13124$) which was calculated for the adaptation of the model was found to be significant. The goodness of fit index values of the model were RMSEA=.034, NFI=.78, CFI=.95, GFI=.86, AGFI=.83 and SRMR=.075. All these results suggest that the whole scale, as well as each sub-dimension, is valid and reliable.

Process

Development of the measurement tool by Sağlam (2010) devised for the study was taken, by the researcher, to a total of 6 primary schools- 2 state-owned and 4 private ones- located in Sakarya. Interviews were conducted with headmasters; 4th grade teachers were provided with necessary explanations for the scale; and the teachers implemented the scale after the unit “From Production to Consumption”, which is included in the curriculum of social studies lesson for 4th grades, was completed. Following the implementation, the scale forms were submitted to the school principals by the teachers. Afterwards, the researcher received the data collection tools from the school management. Out of the data collection tools delivered 490, 480 returned. Seven of them were excluded from the evaluation process either because they were empty or because they were not filled in properly in accordance with the objective of the scale. As a result, 473 data collection tools were included in the evaluation process.

Prior to data analysis, data collection tools were controlled and listed one by one and the data obtained were processed through SPSS. The data were analyzed in accordance with the sub-problems of the study. Firstly, the Shapiro Wilk-W test was conducted in order to determine the compatibility of the data with the normal distribution. The test concluded that the distributions were not normal ones seeing that the income level of parents, educational status of mothers and educational status of fathers varied significantly at the level of $p < .05$. Therefore, the Kruskal Wallis H test, a non-parametric one, was carried out on the variables in question. The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted in order to determine between which groups the meaningful difference emerging from the Kruskal-Wallis test was. Since the variables gender and school type did not vary significantly at the level of $p > .05$, as concluded by the Shapiro Wilk-W test, the distributions were found to be normal ones. Thus, as the statistical technique, t test, a parametric one, was employed for the analysis of the data on the variables gender and school type. The score range for determining the arithmetic mean was as follows: 1,00-1,74 (Never), 1,75-2,49 (occasionally), 2,50-3,24 (usually) and 3,25-4,00. The level of meaningfulness was accepted as .05. The data were analyzed through SPSS 15.0 and LISREL 8.54 a package program.

Findings

The conscious consumerism levels of the students are considered to be at the degree of “always” because the arithmetic mean of the opinions concerning the whole scale and its three sub-dimensions ranged from 3.25 to 4.00. The level of conscious consumerism of students does not vary significantly depending on their gender in terms of *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality* and *consciousness of budget-price*. Student opinions regarding the level of conscious consumerism do not display a meaningful difference depending on their gender. It was discovered that both male and female students stated “always” for their own level of conscious consumerism concerning not only the three sub-dimensions but also the whole scale.

The level of conscious consumerism of students does not vary significantly depending on the school type in terms of *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality* and *consciousness of budget-price*. Student opinions regarding the level of conscious consumerism do not display a meaningful difference depending on the school type. It was discovered that students who attend both public and private schools stated “always” for their own level of conscious consumerism concerning not only the three sub-dimensions but also the whole scale.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and *consciousness of budget-price* and the whole scale, no meaningful difference was observed between the students who participated in the study depending on their parents’ income level. It was discovered that it did not make a difference in students’ turning out to be conscious consumers whether their parents had a low, intermediate or high income.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and the whole scale, a meaningful difference was observed between the students depending on the educational status of their mothers. As for the sub-dimension *consciousness of budget-price*, on the other hand, no meaningful difference was found depending on the educational status of their mothers. In terms of the sub-dimension *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose moth-

ers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates.

In terms of the sub-dimension *consciousness of quality*, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates. In terms of the scores obtained from the whole test, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and *consciousness of budget-price* and the whole scale, no meaningful difference was observed between the students depending on the educational status of their fathers. This suggests that educational status of their fathers did not lead to a difference in the level conscious consumerism of students. From this point of view, it can be argued that educational status of their fathers does not result in a difference in the level conscious consumerism of students.

Discussion

The unit “From Production to Consumption” for 4th grades, associated with the learning field “Production, Distribution and Consumption” included in the Curriculum of Social Studies for Primary Schools, includes the following educational attainments: “They make a distinction between their desires and requirements”, “They associate their requirements with available resources”, “They assess what they are going to buy in accordance with the criteria specified” and “They use their rights as a conscious consumer” (MEB, 2005). These attainments are a clear indication of the fact that primary education aims to school conscious consumers through social studies lesson. The purpose of this study is to analyze the level of conscious consumerism of primary school students.

The level of conscious consumerism of students does not vary significantly depending on their gender in terms of *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality* and *consciousness of budget-price*. Student opinions regarding the level of conscious consumerism do not display a meaningful difference depending on their gender. It was discovered that both male and female students stated “always” for their own level of conscious consumerism concerning not only the three sub-dimensions but also the whole scale. This level was found to be notable. This is in conformity with Ata’s (2009) finding. Ata regarded the fact that a 4th grade student in Kayseri won IX. Traditional Consumer Rights Award as significant and stated that other students would exhibit similar behaviors and they would grow up to be conscious consumers. According to Fortana (1996), constructivist approach is a promising one in that it can be efficient in enabling students to learn through experience and to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills. It will make social studies lesson more efficient to design it in a way that will provide students with the opportunity to develop the mental skills through which they can transfer the acquired knowledge to problem-solving and decision-making process. It can be argued that this is an effective tool for making students gain economical consciousness. Aykaç and Başar (2005) noted that the subjects included in social studies lesson are closely intertwined with life, that they save students the trouble of memorizing and provide opportunity for learning by practice and experience. Being a conscious consumer entails transferring what is acquired to life and making proper decisions. A curriculum of social studies based on constructivist approach attaches importance to conscious consumerism. Student opinions seem to indicate that the attainments specified in the curriculum will be realized.

The level of conscious consumerism of students does not vary significantly depending on the school type in terms of *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality* and *consciousness of budget-price*. Student opinions regarding the level of conscious consumerism does not display a meaningful difference depending on the school type. It was discovered that students who attended both public and private schools stated “always” for their own level of conscious consumerism concerning not only the three sub-dimensions but also the whole scale. This was interpreted as the fact that public and private schools are not different in enabling students to gain the educational attainments specified in

the curriculum, an important finding in terms of equal opportunity in education. This was considered as an indication of the fact that public schools were becoming more and more efficient and the opportunities provided by public and private schools did not display important differences. This view seems to be supported by Cheng's (1994) study, which concluded that there was a meaningful correlation between the perception of educational environment and physical surroundings and student performance, Maiden and Foreman's (1998) study, which found a similar correlation between school buildings and student achievement as well as their educational behaviors. The fact that students who attended public or private schools expressed their level of conscious consumerism as "always" was considered to be closely intertwined with their decent school environments. This made it easier for attainments regarding conscious consumerism to be gained in an easier manner.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and *consciousness of budget-price* and the whole scale, no meaningful difference was observed between the students who participated in the study depending on their parents' income level. It was discovered that it did not make a difference in students' turning out to be conscious consumers whether their parents had a low, intermediate or high income. This can be interpreted as the fact that differences in parents' income levels do not lead to differences in students' becoming conscious consumers. The causes for this could be determined by other studies in the future. In this way, the correlation between parents' income levels and students' level of conscious consumerism can be identified.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and the whole scale, a meaningful difference was observed between the students depending on the educational status of their mothers. As for the sub-dimension *consciousness of budget-price*, on the other hand, no meaningful difference was found depending on the educational status of their mothers. In terms of the sub-dimension *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates.

In terms of the sub-dimension *consciousness of quality*, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates. In terms of the scores obtained from the whole test, it was observed that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates were more conscious than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; those whose mothers were high school graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates; and those whose mothers were university graduates than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates. The scores obtained from the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility* and *consciousness of quality*, and from the whole scale were found to be significant, but with a notable exception. The exception is that the students whose mothers were primary school graduates had a higher level of quality consciousness than those whose mothers were secondary school graduates. Apart from this, it was significant that the level of conscious consumerism of students were in direct proportion to the educational level. This finding is important in that it suggests how important the educational status of mothers is.

In terms of the sub-dimensions *consciousness of consumer responsibility*, *consciousness of quality*, and *consciousness of budget-price* and the whole scale, no meaningful difference was observed between the students depending on the educational status of their fathers. This suggests that educational status of their fathers did not lead to a difference in the level of conscious consumerism of students. From this point of view, it can be argued that educational status of their fathers does not result in a difference in the level of conscious consumerism of students. This finding was considered as a worrisome one. This might be attributed to the fact that fathers maintain conventional behaviors during the decision-making process while shopping. Furthermore, the fact that workload of fathers increase in accordance with their educational status might have caused them not to allocate enough time to their children. This, in turn, could lead fathers not to be a role model for their children in an attempt to increase their level of conscious consumerism.

The primary school 4th grade students expressed their level of conscious consumerism as “always”. It is a striking finding that no meaningful

difference was observed between students depending on the variables specified for the study, except for the educational status of mothers. This might be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted soon after the lesson covering the unit “From Production to Consumption” was taught. This unit includes educational attainments regarding conscious consumption and teachers carry out activities to enable students to gain these attainments during the teaching-learning process. In addition to these activities, students go shopping with their mothers and fathers in their real life. Both factors can be said to have contributed to high levels of conscious consumerism on the part of students. As well as quantitative ones, qualitative studies could help the issue to be comprehended in a better way. Besides this different class grades can be compared.

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