

Qualities of Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers who will Educate the Citizens of Future in Turkey

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Abstract

With the incorporation of a constructivist approach into social studies curriculum to give direction to social life, people have started to wonder what kind of changes should be made in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. The current study aims to determine the qualifications of social studies pre-service teachers who will contribute to the social studies education of the future and their expectations from teacher education. The study used the semi-structured interview method based on a qualitative research approach. The participants of the present study are 20 fourth-year students from the social studies teacher education program of the education faculty of a state university. In the analysis of the data, an inductive analysis technique was employed. Within the context of the study, the qualifications a social studies teacher should possess are explained in terms of personal characteristics, subject area knowledge, general knowledge, and professional knowledge. The expectations from social studies teacher education are discussed in terms of content, the teaching–learning process, evaluation and qualifications of teacher educators, and teacher appointments. In light of the present study’s findings, it can be argued that social studies teacher education needs to be improved and new regulations for teacher education programs established in line with the constructivist theory put into effect in Turkey in 2005.

Keywords: Constructivist theory, social studies teacher, teacher education

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Introduction

Countries' most powerful institutions for coping with ignorance, evil, and conflicts as well as minimizing undesired situations are their schools, and the cornerstones of schools are their teachers. Teachers play important roles in creating healthy children and adolescents who are self-confident, successful, happy, and productive. For education to realize these functions, teachers should undergo a quality pre-service teacher education; in addition, once teachers start their professional careers, they need to continue their development through quality in-service training. In this respect, in recent years, many countries have started to question their education systems and teacher training policies, making greater efforts to educate teachers for more effectively in order to ensure high-quality education and developing many standards and qualifications related to the teaching profession.

The task of determining teachers' qualifications in Turkey was assigned to the Ministry of National Education in the 45th article of the Basic Law of National Education. As required by this law, many attempts have been made by the Ministry of National Education to enhance the qualifications of teachers; some of these attempts have already been put into practice whereas others have not (Hakan et al., 2011).

As a result of scientific and technological developments, as in the whole world, some educational reforms have been realized in Turkey, and the educational environments have adopted a more student-centered structure. These changes have resulted in some important changes in teachers' roles. In Turkey, some changes were made in elementary and secondary school programs in 2005, and all courses were reconstructed based on the constructivist approach. These changes forced teachers to give up their information distributor role and instead assume a constructivist teacher role. Today, teachers are expected to implement the constructivist approach in their practice and educate individuals to hone their critical and creative thinking skills, problem solving skills, empathy, cooperation skills, communication skills, and values such as respect, love, honesty, tolerance, and work ethic. Today, equipping students with these skills and values is one of the objectives of social studies courses in Turkey.

The current social studies course program in effect in elementary and secondary schools in Turkey is based on the constructivist approach and aims to create effective citizens while making significant contributions to the training of the future citizens (Sözer, 2008). Social studies courses have long been part of elementary and secondary school programs, contributing to the realization of social changes and development of citizenship education (Zevin, 2007; Wade, 2007). Social studies courses provide students with opportunities to share their opinions with each other by creating a safe environment in which to discuss opinions and ideas (Thornton, 2008).

In Turkey, social studies courses start in the fourth grade of elementary school and continue through fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. The courses account for three class hours per week and aim to train responsible and effective citizens. The content of the course includes topics that enable students to get to know themselves and their environments via an interdisciplinary approach. The learning-teaching process of the course incorporates activities requiring student participation based on the constructivist approach, and the extent of achieving the objectives is determined through process evaluation techniques (MEB, 2005). Nowadays, in line with the real life-based objectives of social studies courses, effective learning, student-centered activities, social participation skills, up-to-date issues, environmental education, multi-cultural activities, attitudes, and values are incorporated into the course content (Becker, 2007; Seefeldt, Castle and Falconer, 2010). To achieve this, some amendments have been made within the course program based on the constructivist approach in Turkey. Given the function of social studies courses—namely, to give direction to social life—in-school and out of-school activities led by social studies teachers can arguably be conducive to the enhancement of living standards. When applications related to social studies education, characteristics, objectives, and course content as well as cultural movements in society are considered, social studies teachers and their training are of great importance.

Social studies teachers play distinctive roles in creating individuals who can think, express what they think, and criticize while being at peace with themselves, happy, and peaceful. Therefore, social studies teachers are expected to have certain qualifications to train individuals to have healthy personalities, scientific thinking skills, a comprehensive worldview, a feeling of responsibility to society, and respect for human rights while also being a constructivist and creative. Given the crucial role that social studies teachers play in the development of society, great importance should be attached to the training of social studies teachers.

The Ministry of National Education (2008) determined the subject area competencies for social studies teachers to be planning and arranging the learning process; monitoring and evaluating; cooperating with the school, family, and society; and continuing professional development. However, as emphasized by a study conducted by the Turkish Education Association (2009), the definition of the required qualifications of social studies teachers is not sufficient on its own. What is more important is to make required modifications in pre-service education and in-service training of social studies teachers to ensure that they have these required qualifications. With the implementation of the constructivist approach in Turkey as of 2005, it has become very important to determine the qualifications to be possessed by social studies teachers and their expectations from their teaching training programs to enable them to implement the constructivist approach in their teaching. Although the literature includes a great amount of research conducted on teachers and teacher education in Turkey (Gökçe and Demirhan, 2005; Hakan et al., 2011; Oğuz, 2009; Yıldırım, 2011), little has been conducted on social studies teachers (Yılmaz, 2009; Çoban, 2010). Defining the expectations related to social studies teachers and social studies teacher education is of great importance to improve social studies teacher qualifications as established by the Ministry of National Education and to make the required modifications to train teachers to be capable enough to implement the constructivist approach in their professional careers. The present study is expected to contribute to the improvement of social studies teachers and quality of teacher training programs, thereby enhancing the development of society.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of the current study is to elicit the pre-service social studies teachers' opinions about the qualifications required for social studies teachers and teacher training programs. To this end, the following questions will be answered:

- What are the qualifications social studies teachers should possess according to pre-service social studies teachers?
- What are the expectations of the pre-service teachers from social studies teacher training programs?

Method

This section discusses the research model, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis

Research Model

In the present study seeking to elicit pre-service social studies teachers' opinions about the qualifications of social studies teachers and social studies teacher training, a semi-structured interview method based on a qualitative research approach was employed.

Participants

The participants of the present study are 20 fourth-year students from the social studies teacher education program of the education faculty of a state university. The main criteria adopted in the

selection of the participants are the successful completion of a school experience and practical teaching courses as well as theoretical courses related to social studies education and a social studies teacher training program. Therefore, the study used a purposeful sampling method with 20 voluntary fourth-year students.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview form was developed to elicit the social studies pre-service teachers' opinions about the qualifications to be possessed by social studies teachers and social studies teacher training programs. After the interview form was developed, interviews were piloted with three pre-service teachers, and the data were subsequently transcribed. The results indicated that no item was too difficult to comprehend or failed to serve the purpose of the study. In order to establish the content validity of the interview form, it was scrutinized by experts in the field, and the final form was devised based on their feedback. The transcriptions of the interviews conducted with three pre-service teachers were given to the experts, who were asked to analyze the comprehensibility of the items, the extent to which they cover the issue dealt with, and their capacity to yield the required data. Through these works, the reliability of the items was established, which was found to be adequate. Required permissions to conduct the study were acquired from the office of the dean of the Education Faculty, where the study was to be conducted.

In order to perform the interviews, appointments were made with the pre-service teachers chosen in advance. Before starting the interview, each pre-service teacher was given a written document that included all the details and information about the study. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, then had the participants read the information document and sign the permission document.

In the analysis of the data, an inductive analysis technique was employed. Inductive analysis can be described as unfolding the concepts serving as the basis for the data and examining the relationships among these concepts through coding. The steps within inductive analysis include coding data, identifying themes, organizing and defining the data in accordance with the codes and themes, and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2014).

The qualitative data are presented in the tables. In the presentation of the findings, direct quotations were taken from the statements of the pre-service teachers. In order to establish the validity of the study, the data were analyzed by the researcher and an expert. As a result of these analyses, codes and themes were compared and the points of conflict were detected; to reach an agreement on the points of conflict, some discussions were conducted and the final form of the themes devised.

Findings

This section presents the findings in tables and direct quotations from the participants.

Qualifications Required for Social Studies Teachers According to Pre-Service Teachers

The pre-service teachers' opinions about which qualifications social studies teachers should have are presented in Table 1. While explaining their opinions about the qualifications to be possessed by social studies teachers, the pre-service teachers discussed personal characteristics, subject area knowledge, general culture, and professional knowledge.

Table 1. Qualifications Required by Social Studies Teachers

Personal characteristics
He/she must be democratic
He/she must adopt national and universal values
He/she must be creative
He/she must communicate effectively
He/she must be self-confident
He/she must have a critical viewpoint
He/she should make contributions to the future of the country
He/she must try to achieve his/her objectives
He/she must love teaching
He/she must care about students
He/she must try to create hopeful generations
He/she must be inquisitive
He/she must be empathetic
Professional Knowledge
He/she must use technology
He/she must bring the daily life to class
He/she must put the student at the center
He/she must implement the constructivist approach
He/she must be a good model for students
He/she must teach how to learn
General Knowledge
He/she must renew himself/herself
He/she must be sensitive to the world and the environment
He/she must have information about any issue
Subject Area Knowledge
He/she must be knowledgeable of his/her field

When talking about social studies teachers' necessary qualifications, the pre-service teachers mentioned mostly personal characteristics. They stated that social studies teachers must be democratic, adopt national and universal values, be creative, and communicate effectively. Moreover, they must be self-confident, be critical, contribute to the future of their country, work in line with their objectives, love their profession, care about their students, and create hopeful generations. One of the participants explained the personal characteristics of social studies teachers by emphasizing the characteristics of the social studies field:

A social studies course is a colorful course including different elements. The personal characteristics of the social studies teacher should comply with the characteristics of the course. Rather than being a teacher always sitting and looking at the events from one perspective, the teacher should be inquisitive. He/she must look at the events critically to be able to question the past and evaluate the future.

According to the pre-service teachers, in terms of professional knowledge, social studies teachers should be competent in using technology, establishing relationships between daily life and the social studies course, organizing student-centered learning activities, implementing the constructivist approach, and being a good model for students. One of the pre-service teachers explained:

Now, the programs are constructivist, but in practice there is no constructivism. In the future, I hope that social studies teachers can better internalize constructivism and implement it in their teaching to the fullest extent. In the lessons I have observed, social studies teachers just sit down and read the textbook, but they do not make use of various materials. The social studies teaching I imagine is in a sharp contrast to this, in which various materials are used, the

blackboard is actively used, students participate in lessons, and constructivism is applied properly.

This student's comments draw attention to the need to use constructivism more effectively in social studies instruction.

In relation to the general culture, the pre-service teachers emphasized that social studies teachers should renew themselves continuously; they need to be sensitive to the world and environment as well as be knowledgeable about any issue. One of the pre-service teachers explained this issue as follows:

A social studies teacher should be an engineer, know something about agriculture, follow political developments, be knowledgeable about mathematics, and have some information about any issue, and he or she should not restrict himself/herself to the social studies textbook. As social studies instruction is related to everything ranging from painting and art to science, the social studies teacher should have some information about everything.

Having good subject area knowledge is among the qualifications expected of social studies teachers, as the following pre-service teacher explained:

A social studies teacher should have comprehensive subject area knowledge to create connections between the past and present, to relate different fields of social studies to each other, and to give an answer to every question.

Thus, pre-service social studies teachers have various expectations of social studies teachers. In the future, for social studies courses to serve the function of contributing to social development, it is of great importance for teachers to assume the roles dictated by the constructivist approach.

Pre-Service Teachers' Expectations of Social Studies Teacher Education

While talking about their expectations of social studies teacher education, the pre-service teachers mentioned teacher training programs, assessment and evaluation, teacher educators, and appointments of social studies teachers. The pre-service teachers' expectations of social studies teacher education are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-Service Teachers' Expectations of Social Studies Teacher Education

Content
All social sciences should be presented in a balanced way
There should be a diversity of elected courses
There should be some courses to encourage reading
There should more general culture courses
The content should not be dealt with in a detailed manner in courses related to social sciences
Up-to-date issues should be discussed
Different skills, such as music and painting, should be promoted
Teaching–Learning Processes
Constructivism should be implemented
Student-centered activities should be organized
There should be a social studies class
Technology should be used
Social studies should be experienced within the faculty environment
Applied Works
The lessons should be application based
The amount of field work should be increased
The number of study trips should be increased

Courses such as community services and social projects should be continued for four years
Teaching practice lessons should be given for four years
Out-of-school activities should be organized
The amount of cooperation with the environment should be increased
Assessment and Evaluation
Criteria should be developed to select pre-service teachers
Changes should be followed
Appointments should be made based on school achievement
Process evaluation techniques should be used
Teacher Educators
The qualifications of teacher educators should be improved
Teacher educators should be good role models
Teacher Appointments
More teachers should be appointed
Some other criteria should be adopted in addition to the State Personnel Selection Exam (KPSS) for the appointment of teachers

The pre-service teachers explained their expectations of social studies teacher education, focusing on the content of teacher education programs and making suggestions for new courses in social studies teacher education. The pre-service teachers stated that all disciplines of social sciences should be included in the program in a balanced way, and the emphasis on history and geography in the current program should be diminished. Moreover, the weight of the courses included as disciplines of social sciences should be decreased in the program. One pre-service teacher explained this issue as follows:

We took various courses in history and geography. The same diversity of courses should also be seen in fields such as economics and anthropology. All social sciences should be evenly distributed across the program. Field trips should be incorporated into the program.

The pre-service teachers emphasized the need for a social studies teacher to be educated as a versatile person; hence, general culture courses should be emphasized more, and up-to-date issues should be discussed in social studies teacher education programs. The pre-service teachers pointed out that the learning-teaching process in social studies instruction should place the student at the center, incorporate activities based on constructivism into the process, and promote the use of technology. According to the pre-service teachers, social studies classes providing opportunities for students to use technology through technological tools and equipment should be offered in education faculties. Similarly, social studies environments should be created within education faculties. One participant explained the reasoning for this recommendation:

Just as there is a laboratory used to teach science, there must be one in the social studies program. There must be a special social studies class in the education faculties. The students should be taught in this class. Wherever students look in this class, they must find something from social studies. There must be maps on the walls, etc., in the class. Students should be able to use technology. For us to implement the constructivist approach at schools, classes in the education faculty should be taught through the constructivist approach.

In this way, the participant pointed out the need to use the constructivist approach instead of the traditional approach in classes of education faculties.

Pre-service teachers also mentioned the importance of applied works. They suggested that field trips and research trips should be made and the amount of community work should be increased. As one pre-service teacher explained:

Community works, social projects, and teaching practice courses should be given across four years rather than one year. Pre-service teachers should follow everything under the guidance of their teachers until the end of the fourth year. I think four years are not enough to educate social studies teachers. At the end of this four-year period, graduates must do their internship in community organizations as well as in schools, and then they should be given a teaching post.

The pre-service teachers also focused on the student selection procedure and evaluation of the courses given in the program. They stated that process evaluation techniques should be employed in the evaluation of students to assess how they have changed. One pre-service teacher discussed the use of evaluation processes in teacher education programs in line with the constructivist approach:

If constructivism-based assessment and evaluation techniques are used at the university, we will be able to employ the same techniques when we become teachers.

The pre-service teachers highlighted the need to appoint more social studies teachers to teaching posts and use other criteria, in addition to the university entrance exam, to admit students into social studies teacher training programs. The pre-service teachers stated that teachers' appointments to teaching posts should be made based on school achievement. As one pre-service teacher explained:

After four years of intense education, the determination of whether we will be a teacher or not based on the result of an exam does not comply with the modern understanding of evaluations adopting process evaluation techniques. Process evaluation should be employed in the appointment of teachers.

The pre-service teachers pointed out that the courses in their program were developed to train the social studies teachers of the future; therefore, the teaching-learning processes and evaluation processes of these courses should be improved. For a social studies course to contribute to the formation of the future, the current pre-service social studies teachers should be better equipped by making use of the flexibility of social studies teacher education programs.

Results and Discussion

While explaining their opinions about the qualifications of the social studies teacher, the pre-service teachers focused on personal characteristics, subject area knowledge, general culture, and professional knowledge. The findings of the current study relating to the qualifications social studies teachers should possess comply with special subject area qualifications stipulated by the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2008) for social studies teachers. According to Öztürk (2009), the most prominent areas in which social studies teachers consider themselves to be inadequate are program and content areas. The reason these teachers view themselves as the least competent in these proficiency areas might stem from the fact that their opinions were not sought when changes were being made to the program. They also do not know the contents of the modified programs or the basic philosophy of the new program well enough.

The teachers do find themselves adequate in some special area competencies stipulated by the Ministry of National Education (2008), but they find inadequate in others. In order to improve the competencies of the teachers who implement the program, quality pre-service and in-service education should be offered. The pre-service teachers listed the personal characteristics social studies teachers should possess: being creative, caring about students, training hopeful generations, loving teaching, and contributing to the future of their country. They listed the qualifications required in terms of professional knowledge as bringing the daily life into class, making use of technology, being a good model, making use of teaching principles, and conducting student-centered teaching. Levstik and Tyson (2008) noted that, depending on the extent to which a teacher uses technology, his/her quality of teaching might improve. The qualifications expected from social studies teachers in terms of general culture include continuously renewing themselves, being sensitive toward the world and the

environment, and having information about almost all issues. Pre-service teachers' most important expectation of social studies teachers is the need to have mastered their subject area.

The pre-service teachers also focused on the elements of teaching programs, such as content, teaching-learning processes, assessment and evaluation, teacher educators, and teacher appointments. They stated that the content of social studies teacher education needs to be revised, and the weight of history and geography courses in the program should be reduced while all social sciences should be incorporated into the program in a balanced way. Courses such as history and geography should not be dealt with in such detail in the program. They emphasized the need to include up-to-date issues in the courses as part of social studies teacher education and to impart the skills necessary to ensure the versatile development of social studies teachers in the courses. Including up-to-date issues in social studies education can be considered a necessity. Yates (2002) found that 48% of social studies teachers think that their pre-service education is inadequate in terms of media education. It is of great importance to provide pre-service teachers with education that equips them with media literacy so that they can make use of up-to-date issues in their professional careers. As Kellner and Share (2005) explained, although media literacy is rarely discussed in terms of its place in teacher education, it is an important qualification for social studies teachers.

The pre-service teachers also noted that teaching-learning processes in teacher education should be designed based on the constructivist approach and emphasizing student-centered activities; they should make use of technology, social studies classes in education faculties should serve as models for pre-service teachers, and the ratio of applied activities should be increased. Yılmaz (2009) identified several problems such as learning environment, physical features of classes, teaching materials, and access to resources and noted that the inadequacies of teaching materials and equipment deteriorate the quality of teaching. The pre-service teachers also stated that the courses should be more application based, field work should be organized, the number of study trips and community work as well as social projects should be increased, and teaching practice courses should be conducted across four years rather than just one year. Özgür (2010) concluded that today's teachers do not make much use of out-of-class activities such as field trips, observations, journals, diaries, and interviews. In teacher education programs, application-based settings should be established to provide appropriate models for pre-service teachers. Prospective social studies teachers are expected to organize field trips and conduct out-of-class activities. Anderson, Groulx, and Maninger (2011) concluded that there is a significant relationship between pre-service teachers' perception of technology and likelihood of using technology in their own classes. In light of this finding, it can be argued that today's pre-service teachers should be encouraged to develop a positive perspective of technology to increase their likelihood of using technology in social studies classes.

The pre-service teachers also mentioned the development of extra student selection criteria, the appointment of teachers to teaching posts based on their school achievement, and the use of process-based assessment and evaluation techniques. Shakman et al. (2012) noted the importance of the teaching profession, concluding the need to perform various evaluations of teachers to prove that they have the required teaching knowledge and skills. The pre-service teachers pointed out that teacher educators' qualifications should be increased, and teacher educators should serve as good models for pre-service teachers. Yılmaz (2009) emphasized the role played by teacher educators in training effective social studies teachers, and the pre-service teachers recognized some inadequacies in their educators, which they believe affect their education negatively. The most important inadequacy among instructors as reported by the pre-service teachers was their not being able to use the constructivist approach in their teaching and evaluation. The pre-service teachers also noted that, in addition to improving social studies teachers' qualifications, more teaching posts should be spared for them in the future. Yılmaz (2009) reported that social studies pre-service teachers feel anxious about the likelihood of being appointed as a teacher and are concerned about passing the State Personnel Selection Exam. Such anxiety negatively affects them. As social studies teachers are responsible for many courses, such as social studies, citizenship and democracy education, reforms of Atatürk and revolution History, media literacy, and folk culture, the number of social studies teachers should be increased. Admitting more students into social studies teacher education programs of education

faculties, offering more quality training for pre-service social studies teachers, and appointing more teachers to teaching posts are among the expectations from teacher education programs. A large number of young, qualified, and highly motivated social studies teachers providing educating to others are expected to make great contributions to the future of the country.

In conclusion, the revision and development of efforts focused on the purpose, content, and teaching–learning and evaluation processes might meet some of students’ expectations and can make important contributions to the future of the country. In light of the findings of the present study, the following suggestions relating to practical applications and research are made to give direction to future social studies education:

- Teachers should be educated about constructivism and encouraged to implement constructivism in their classes.
- In-service training should be provided for teachers to enable them to conduct up-to-date and effective social studies education.
- Education programs should be organized to improve subject area knowledge of social studies teachers.
- Teachers should be supported in developing their potential to use technology.
- In compliance with the elementary school program, constructivism should be adopted in teacher education programs.
- The number of teachers appointed should be increased and, in addition to centrally administered exams, some other criteria should be developed to organize teacher appointments.
- Social studies teacher education programs should be revised in terms of purpose, content, teaching–learning processes, evaluation and assessment processes, and applied works at the school and in the community.
- Further research should be conducted to determine the problems experienced in social studies’ teacher education programs.
- Further research should be conducted to determine students’ expectations of social studies teachers.
- Future research should consider the opinions of social studies education specialists in relation to teachers’ qualifications and appropriate teaching of social studies.

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