

PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' VIEWS RELATED TO HISTORICAL LITERACY SKILLS

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the views of prospective Social Studies teachers' history literacy skills. The participants of the study determined with convenience sampling included 30 students of Social Studies Teacher Education department of a state university in Turkey in 2015-2016 academic year. Semi-structured interview form consisted of five questions was used as the data collection tool. Content analysis was employed as the research technique. Based on the results, it was determined that prospective teachers are knowledgeable about the concept of history literacy. The practices used to develop history literacy skills of prospective teachers in Social Studies Teacher Education department are literature review, benefitting from literature genres and trips to historical places. The subjects that prospective teachers think they are missing about their history literacy skills are conducting research, chronologic ordering, interpretation, lack of knowledge, historical empathy and objectivity. The practices that can be done for prospective teachers to develop their history literacy skills are benefitting from instructional methods and techniques and literature genres, organizing trips to historical places, conferences, watching historical movies, learning Turkish alphabets.

Key words; History literacy skills, Social studies prospective teachers.

Introduction

Social studies is a program aiming to educate active citizens who have decision making and problem solving skills in a changing world by employing knowledge and methods of social sciences (Öztürk, 2009: 4). Social studies aim to educate individuals as useful members of the community by integrating the scientific developments in social sciences into the process of education (Paykoç, 1991: 2). History is one of the disciplines of social sciences located in the social studies program. History is a branch of science explaining events based on sources with a reference to place, time and people occurred in the past (Köstüklü, 2001: 12). Actions and behaviors carried out by people in time form the subject of history science. For not being possible to record all the events of the past, history can be described as the recordings of the events and phenomenon (Dinç, 2009: 1431-1432). The fundamental aim of history is to enlighten the children about the society in which they live so that they can readily adapt to the social and national life. To fulfill this task, showing the only the past events is not adequate. The task of history is to uncover the periods which humans have gone through to reach the present time and to make them better grasp the present time (Sungu & Ata, 2002). History has been accepted as one of the basic disciplines where cultural transfer is made. In today's modern world, history education is important for its role in citizen skills and cultural transfer in addition to equipping students with critical and scientific thinking skills (Demircioğlu & Tokdemir, 2008: 82-83).

When Social Studies program is analyzed, it can be seen that the program consists of learning fields. History subjects were dominantly subsumed under the learning field of "Culture and Heritage". The attainments related to history are found in the units of the program at different levels: "I am learning my past" in 4th class program, "Step by step Turkey" in 5th class program, "Turks in Silk Road" in 6th class program, "Journey to Turkish History", "Science in Time", "Economy and Social life", "Living Democracy", and "Bridges between countries" in 7th class program (Özdemir, 2009: 24; MEB, 2005; Ulusoy, 2009: 308-310). In this context, to realize the education attainments, the skills in the concept of history literacy are of important tools (Ata & Keçe, 2014: 2). History literacy can be seen as a process requiring certain skills, attitudes and comprehension and contributing to the developments of history consciousness. In this way, collective memory equipped with knowledge can be developed and enriched (Taylor & Young, 2003: 5). When the concept of history literacy assessed, it can be realized that is closely linked with history consciousness, historical awareness and sensitiveness. The concept of history consciousness is like the highest step of a ladder; for an individual to have historical consciousness, they should know the meanings of historical awareness, historical sensitiveness and history literacy respectively and should have the knowledge, skills and values required by the concepts in question (Keçe, 2013: 84-85). History literacy has five main dimensions; knowledge, conceptual understanding, historical method, historical consciousness and historical language.

While knowledge dimension includes events and narratives, conceptual understanding includes “time, causation and consequence, motivation, significance, change and continuity, empathy and moral judgments” and historical method includes “sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, analysis, evaluation, explanation” (Maposa & Wasserman, 2009: 61). Taylor and Young (2003: 33) listed the dimensions and skills forming history literacy as “knowing and understanding historical events, narratives of the past, research skills, understanding historical language, historical concepts, using ICT, connecting the past with the world today, expressing historical events as narratives, distinguishing contradictory comments and explaining history”.

When the concept of history literacy is analyzed, properties that history literate individuals should have come to the fore. History literate individual is knowledgeable about historical figures, knows the concepts in a historical text, can use ICT while exploring a history subject, make chronological order of historical events and takes into account the circumstances of time when analyzing a historical event (Keçe, 2013: 84-85). When the concept of history literacy is analyzed in detail with all its dimensions, it can be concluded that it is important for prospective Social Studies teachers’ having history literacy skills.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to determine the views of prospective teachers of Social Studies on their history literacy skills. To this end, views about the concept of history literacy and skills encompassed by it, practices carried out in the faculty to develop history literacy skills, missing subjects that they think related to history literacy skills and suggestions of prospective teachers for improving history literacy skills were investigated.

Method

Research Design

In the current study in which qualitative research design was used, case study was employed as the research technique. In case studies, all factors that are thought to affect the case are examined together and the effects of them to the case in question and how they are influenced by the case in question are investigated in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006: 77).

Participants

The participants of the study determined with convenience sampling included 30 volunteer students from the department of Social Studies Teacher Education of Education Faculty of a state university in Turkey in 2015-2016 academic year.

Data Collection Tool

Semi-structures interview form consisted of five questions was used as the data collection tool in the study. The questions were formed after conducting the literature review related to the concept of history literacy. After referring to a panel of experts (n=2) from the department of Social Studies Teacher Education at a state university in Turkey, the questions in the semi-structured interview form were finalized. Certain criteria were taken into consideration to provide the validity of the study. Mentioning about the details and explaining the conclusions reached clearly are important criteria to provide validity in qualitative research. Giving excerpts from the participants is also important for the validity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006: 257). In line with this reality, excerpt from the participants were given within quotation marks with italics in the study. Letters and numbers in coding the prospective teachers illustrate the prospective teachers and their order (T1=Teacher 1). Another criteria providing validity is the approval from the participants; there is a need for the verification of the data obtained and conclusions reached by the participants of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006: 268). To this end, data obtained in the study was summarized by the researcher and verified by the participants.

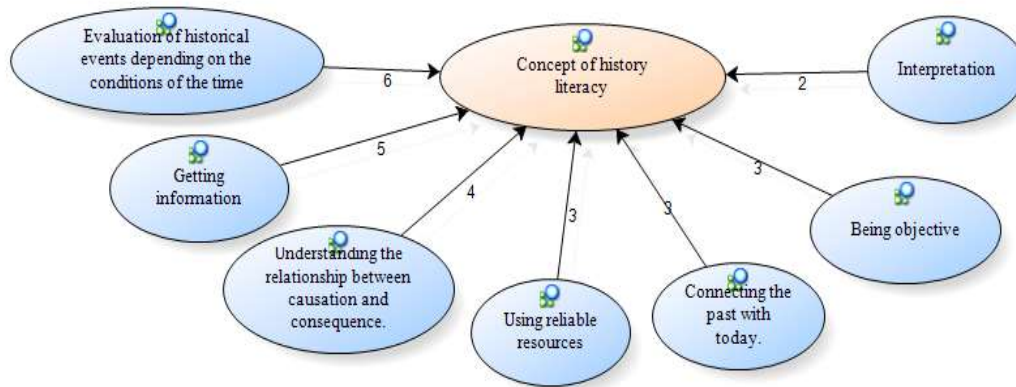
Data Analysis

QSR N-VIVO 8 was used in the data analysis and data was analyzed in line with the content analysis. In content analysis, similar data are brought together in the form of themes. The data was analyzed after going through the processes of “coding”, “finding themes”, “arranging themes” and “interpreting findings” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006: 227-228). In line with the listed processes, the views of prospective teachers about history literacy were coded, themes were determined and arranged. After one week, all themes were reviewed again and interpretations were made.

Findings

Code lists were formed based on the analysis of views of prospective teachers about history literacy skills. Five main themes were formed based on the codes: “concept of history literacy”, “history literacy skills”, “practices for developing history literacy skills”, “missing points” and “suggestions for developing history literacy skills. The views of prospective teachers about the concept of history literacy can be seen in below:

1. Views of prospective teachers about the concept of history literacy



When the views of prospective teachers are analyzed, it can be seen that they stressed “evaluation of historical events depending on the conditions of the time”, “getting information” and “understanding the relationship between causation and consequence”. Regarding the sub-theme of “evaluation of historical events depending on the conditions of the time” one of the participants expressed that **T8**, “*History literacy is to evaluate the past depending on the conditions of the time with an objective point of view and explaining and evaluating it with all its aspects. A condition which is wrong today may have been true that day, so it will be wrong to judge the past*”. Another participant expressed that **T5** “*History literacy is to evaluate the historical events with a reference to their time and conduct massive research to analyze the historical subject*”. One participant prospective teacher **T2** stressed the dimension of “Evaluation of historical events depending on the conditions of the time” with the statement of “...understanding the historical information with the conditions of that day not with the conditions of today...”

Another subject stressed by the participants about the concept of history literacy was “getting information”. A participant **T23** stressed the importance regarding the sub-theme of “getting information” expressed that “*history literacy is the effort of humans in getting information about the past experiences and periods they need to understand due to their curiosity by using the primary and secondary resources*”. One of the participants **T2** expressed that “*History literacy is to get information in history teaching about the subject that we want to learn*”. Another participant **T10** stated that “*History literacy is the effort in obtaining information about the events of the past*”.

One of the participants **T10** expressed about the sub-theme of “Understanding the relationship between causation and consequence” that “*Historical events take place like this: actually the reason of one event is the consequence of another event. Event are moving forward interconnected. History literacy is actually to realize this fact and understand this relationship between causation and consequence*”. One participant **T2** described history literacy as “*the ability to understand the effects and connection of a past event to the present*”. Another participant **T4** stressed the importance of uncovering and understanding the relationship between causation and consequence of the historical events in terms of history literacy by stating that “*history literacy encompasses the questioning of events and at the same time evaluating the them in line with the relationship of causation and consequence and present them to the students based on this evaluation under the conditions of today*”.

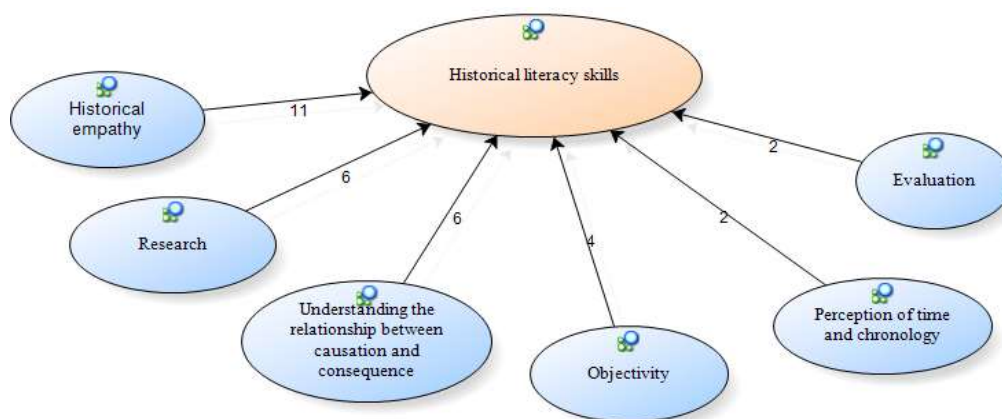
Another important dimension of history literacy is “using reliable resources” according to the views of the prospective teachers. One of the participants **T23** explained his views regarding this sub-them as “*history literacy is the effort of humans in getting information about the past experiences and periods they need to understand due to their wonders by using the primary and secondary resources.....*”. One participant **T4** stressed the important role of the use of resources in transferring historical events accurately by stating that “*use of resources in the process of teaching historical events is to put critical lenses on about the accurateness of these resources*”.

Another sub-theme regarding history literacy is “connecting past with today”. One of the participants **T12** regarding this sub-theme stated that “*History literacy helps to make the connection between the past and the future*” and another **T17** stated that, “*History literacy is to make connection between the past and the present and to follow research*”. When paid attention to the above statements, it can be seen that participants see history literacy the connection between the past and today.

Another important dimension of history literacy is the evaluation of the past events objectively. One of the participants **T22** expressed her views regarding the sub-theme of “being objective” as “*History literacy is evaluating of past events and phenomena and ideas and thoughts with an objective point of view an individual of today and making our today and the future bright and livable*”. Another participant **T8** with the statement of “*If we look history only from one side, it would be missing and misleading. If we look history from a variety of angles and points of views, an objective and scientific history literacy would come out*” stressed the need evaluating historical events by investigating them from a variety of resource.

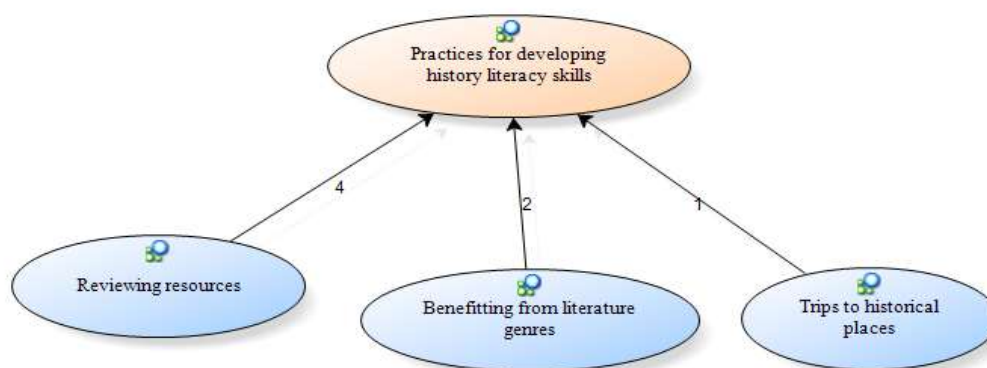
The last sub-theme that emerged from the views of prospective teachers regarding history literacy is “interpretation”. One of the participants **T27** expressed that “*...in brief, history literacy is not reading but filtering events from a mental filter full of meaning*”. Another participant **T6**, stressed the importance of interpreting historical events in addition to knowing them by stating that, “*history literacy includes analyzing the past events from different angles, and understanding and interpreting them with critical and creative points of view rather than memorizing the events*”.

2. Views of prospective teachers regarding the skills encompassed by history literacy



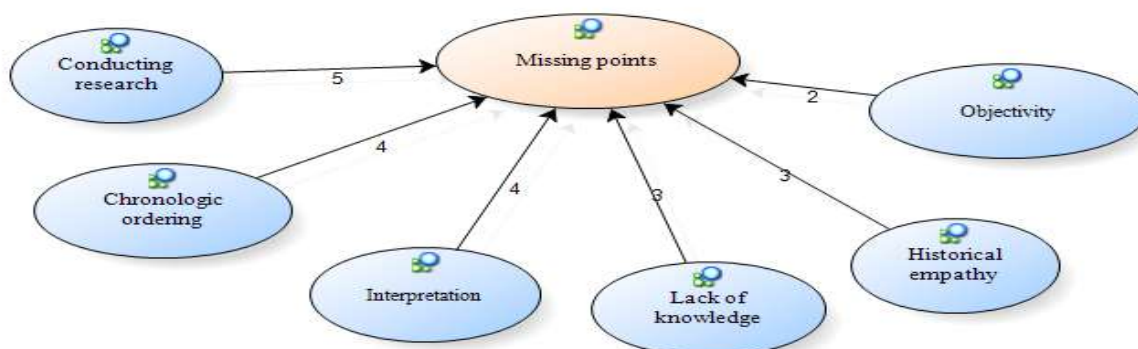
Regarding the history literacy skills, prospective teachers put the greatest emphasis on “historical empathy”. Other skills that were mentioned by the participants are “research”, “understanding the relationship between causation and consequence”, “objectivity”, “perception of time and chronology” and “evaluation”. The prospective teacher **T27** stated regarding “historical empathy” that “*historical empathy, a process analyzing events and phenomena by taking into account the conditions of the time, has an important place in history literacy*”. Another participant **T8** explained that “*one of the skills of history literacy is historical empathy. It is necessary to evaluate historical events in relation to the conditions of the time. You cannot evaluate the events of the past in relation to the conditions of present*”. The participant **T9** stressed that in order to be history literate one should have research skills by stating “*being knowledgeable about historical events is the first step of history literacy*”. The participant **T28** stressed regarding the sub-theme of “understanding the relationship between causation and consequence” that historical events take place in relationship between causation and consequence by expressing “*the causes of historical events, the effects of these events on the following generations and how they affect the events afterwards are important*”. In relation with the sub-theme of “objectivity, a prospective teacher **T15** stated that “*I think that it is important to investigate the historical event consciously and comment on them impartially*”. Another prospective teacher **T11** stated regarding the sub-theme of “perception of time and chronology” that “*...calendar knowledge, the accurate use of time expressions, ordering events chronologically are important in terms of history literacy*”. Another participant **T13** stressed the sub-theme of “evaluation” by stating “*It is not enough to order historical events and express causes and consequences them; the important thing is to uncover the hidden truths about these events*”.

3. Practices for developing history literacy skills in the department of Social Studies teacher education



When the practices regarding the development of history literacy skills of the prospective teachers in the department of Social Studies Teacher Education, participants stressed most the sub-theme of “reviewing resources”. Another practice for the development of history literacy skills of prospective teachers is “benefitting from literature genres”. The participant **T27** who thinks reviewing resources is effective for developing history literacy expressed that “*for developing history literacy skills, doing practices allowing to look to a historical event from different perspectives by investigating the same event from different resources is important...*”. One prospective teacher **T30** indicated that the practice they are doing is reviewing different resources for a historical event from different resources by stating “*When taken different historical resources into consideration, we see different comments on the same events which are contradictory, indicating that not all resources are reliable*”. One of the prospective teachers **T27** regarding the sub-theme of “Benefitting from literature genres” stated that “*attracting interest to mainly hidden anecdote is a practice for developing history literacy*”. Another participant **T30** stressed the importance of “benefitting from literature genres” by stating that “*narration of historical events increases the effectiveness of instruction; we obtain general information related to the events*”. On the subject of “trips to historical places”, the participant **T27** explained that trips to historical places is a practice in the department for developing their history literacy skills by summarizing it with “*internalization of events with the trips to historical places*”.

4. Missing parts considering history literacy skills



When the missing parts in history literacy skills of prospective teachers are analyzed, they put the greatest emphasis on the sub-theme of “conducting research”, “chronologic ordering”, and “interpretation”. One of the participants **T18**, expressed the problems in conducting research expressed that “*In order to be history literate, we should have a research culture. I feel that I am not adequate on this subject*”. Another participant **T30** also underlined his inadequateness in conducting research by stating that “*I think that I am not knowledgeable in historical events and I am in adequate in terms of conducting research*”.

Another missing subject that prospective teachers stressed was the chronologic ordering. One of the participant **T10** explained his inadequateness on this subject by stating “*I am incompetent in thinking chronologically but I am trying to overcome these deficiencies*”. One of the participants **T17** stated the deficiency with the words of “*on the subject of chronologic classification...*”.

Interpretation is another missing part in prospective teachers. One participant **T19** expressed the incompetence with “*We have only pure knowledge about historical events. We study history only for exams and take no lessons from the events. The underlying reason for this is that we haven’t been developing our interpretation power since our childhood*”, indicating that interpretation is not a skill that teacher trainers in the Social Studies teacher department focus on.

The participant **T18**, thinking he has lacking knowledge on historical events expressed that, “*In order to be history literate, first I should have fund of knowledge on history. I know I have less knowledge on history*”. Another participant **T21** stressed his inadequateness on historical subjects by stating “*I think I have shortcomings. I haven’t read enough books on history. This prevents me having adequate knowledge on history*”.

One of the skills required to be history literate is “historical empathy”. One prospective teacher **T11**, expressed the inadequacy by stating that “*I have shortcomings about historical empathy. I experience problems while interpreting on the historical events by taking the conditions of those times into consideration*”. Another prospective teacher **T20**, expressed the inadequacy in objectivity by stating that “*I think that I am not evaluating historical events objectively*”.

5. Suggestions for developing history literacy skills



Under the theme of suggestions for developing history literacy skills, the most frequently emphasized sub-themes are “benefitting from instructional methods and techniques”, “benefitting from literature genres” and “organizing trips to historical places”. A prospective teacher **T10** thinking that history literacy can be developed by “benefitting from instructional methods and techniques” stated that “*A historical event can be revived with drama. Teacher candidates can get closer to developing their history literacy while paying the historical character, helping also the development of historical empathy*”. Another participant **T27** explained that using different instructional methods and techniques in the teaching environment can be useful in developing history literacy by stating “*History subject open to discussion can be investigated in the class with presentation and question-answer technique allowing to see the subject from different perspectives. Presentations can be made by using panel or forum like techniques*”. One participant **T30** thinking literature genres can be beneficial for developing history literacy and increase the retention of information presented stated that “*Historical event can be narrated like the stories because narration is an effective technique for the retention of information. Besides poems or novels can be read on the history subject*”. Another participant **T5** stressed the importance of benefitting from literature genres on the history subject by stating, “*The historical events should not be presented with numerical data to the prospective teachers but in the form of stories and anecdotes*”. Organizing trips to historical places is another suggestion made by the prospective teachers. On this sub-theme, one participant **T22** expressed that, “*History consciousness can be developed with trips to places in our country where historical events took place*”. Another participant **T12** stated that “*Teacher candidates should experience the history. Trips should be free of charge or with appropriate fees*”. On the same subject, another prospective teacher **T17** explained that history literacy can be developed with historical trips by stating “*As Japans organize trips to their historical places, our children in early ages should be taken to Çanakkale where Turks fought for their homeland in a heroic manner so that our children can understand in what conditions we fight for our homeland*”.

One participant **T10**, who thinks that watching history movies can develop history literacy expressed his ideas with “*...for example; nice films describing historical events can be watched*”. Another participant **T26** who thinks that organizing conferences is beneficial for history literacy expressed that “*Conferences on history subjects should be organized and enjoyment from history lessons should be provided*”.

The prospective teacher T11, who thinks that teaching Turkish alphabets is a necessity for developing history literacy expressed that, “*Ottoman Turkish lessons can be given to prospective teachers. Uighur and Gokturk alphabet can be taught*”.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study aims to determine the views of prospective teachers of Social Studies on their history literacy skills. Based on the results, it was determined that prospective teachers were knowledgeable about the concept of history literacy. prospective Social Studies teachers described history literacy as “evaluation of historical events depending on the conditions of the time”, “getting information”, “understanding the relationship between causation and consequence”, “Using reliable resources”, “connecting the past with today”, “being objective”, and “interpretation. According to prospective teachers, history literacy encompasses the skills of “historical empathy” “research”, “causation and consequence”, “objectivity”, “perception of time and chronology” and, “evaluation”. The participants listed practices they do in the department of Social Studies teacher education, to develop history literacy skills; “literature review”, “benefitting from literature genres” and “trips to historical places”.

Prospective teachers think that although they are knowledgeable about history literacy, they are lacking on the subject of history literacy skills like “conducting research”, “chronological ordering”, “interpretation”, “lack of knowledge”, “historical empathy” and “objectivity”. Prospective teachers suggested practices for the acquisition of history literacy skills such as “benefitting from instructional methods and techniques”, “benefitting from literature genres”, “organizing trips to historical places”, “watching historical movies”, “organizing conferences”, and “learning Turkish alphabets”. Sliwka (2008), stated that the lessons in which historical novels were used, the interest of students to the lesson increased and they interpreted deep meanings by reading and writing. In his study conducted on the history prospective teachers, Öztürk (2011) concluded that examining the history novels increases the interest of the participants to the history lesson and the participants develop different points of views towards historical events. Keskin (2008) also determined that history novels contribute to the empathy skills of the students. In addition, Keçe (2013) concluded that using history novels in teaching Social Studies is effective in understanding the language used in history, connecting the past with the world of today and developing historical empathy skills. In their study conducted on Social studies teachers, Ata and Keçe (2014) recommended the use of techniques such as creative drama and role playing which make students active participants and movies in order to develop the history literacy skills of the students.

The following suggestions can be made based on the conclusions:

- Instructional methods and techniques should be benefited while narrating historical events.
- Literature genres (e.g. novels, stories) should benefited while narrating historical events.
- Trips to places where historical events took place should be organized.

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