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TOURISM AND TRAVEL FOR LEARNING ABOUT CULTURES: EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL STUDIES PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

Erdoğan Kaya

Anadolu University
Eskişehir, Turkey

Tuba Çengelci Köse

Anadolu University
Eskişehir, Turkey
tubacengelci@anadolu.edu.tr

Ömür Gürdoğan Bayır

Anadolu University
Eskişehir, Turkey

Nazlı Gökçe

Anadolu University
Eskişehir, Turkey
nazliu@anadolu.edu.tr

Abstract

'Culture and Heritage' is one of the learning domains from 4th to 7th grades in Social Studies Instructional Program in Turkey. In Social Studies course, the study of culture examines socially transmitted beliefs, values, behaviors, traditions and way of life of a group of people. It also includes literature, music, arts and artifacts, and cuisines. It can be claimed that culture is a significant part of Social Studies Program. In this regard, travel offers opportunities to learn about other times, places, and people in terms of learning outside the classroom. This study aims to understand pre-service social studies teachers' opinions on traveling to learn about cultures through experience. In line with qualitative research approach, phenomenology design was used to conduct this study. The participants are 8 pre-service social studies teachers enrolled in social studies teacher training program at a faculty of education in Eskişehir, Turkey. Individual and semi-structured interviews were held to obtain information about the research questions. Inductive analysis approach was used in the study to analyze obtained data. Findings have shown that pre-service teachers usually travel to learn about different cultures and would like to see historical and natural places. The participants state that tourism plays a significant role in introducing cultures to other societies. Moreover, they emphasize that issues such as sensitivity to cultural heritage should be taught to next generations.

Keywords: Culture, learning, travel, pre-service teacher

Introduction

Transforming children into good citizens is one of the most salient functions of educational institutions, which helps children socialize and get to know the culture, history, and parts of the society they are living in. This way may lead to raising content and productive individuals and sustaining the continuity of a society. Social Studies course is among the others that serve this end (Erden, n.d., p.4). Social Studies course matters considerably in terms of teaching children their responsibilities as citizens, introducing them with the social and cultural properties of their society, and meeting their educational needs with respect to social events (Yanpar-Sahin, 1994).

Culture is one of the significant domains within social studies program. Social Studies Standards established by NCSS in 1994 also underpins the importance of culture as a learning domain (Turner, 1999: 61). In Social Studies course, the study of culture examines socially transmitted beliefs, values, behaviors, traditions and way of life of a group of people. It also includes literature, music, arts and artifacts, and cuisines. “Culture and Heritage” is one of the learning domains from 4th to 7th grades in Social Studies Instructional Program in Turkey. Yet, social studies instruction should be revisited with respect to acculturation and cultural learning.

It is inevitable for social studies course to resort to outside activities while aiming to transform children into active and social citizens (Topçu, 2014, p.2). Directly embedded in life, social studies course can attain its goals more effectively if supported with settings and activities outside the school. John Dewey also emphasizes the vitality of space for socialization. It is the space that forms socialization and the social structure (Kaya and Oner, 2017). Thus, exploring places by traveling stands out as a definitive element with regards to making judgements about socialization forms. Accordingly, learning about culture through expeditions outside the school and class provides a great number of opportunities to collect information about times, places, and people.

Activities based on expedition and observation are essential components of social studies instruction. Within Social Studies course, not only geography but also all other topics should benefit from traveling. Considering the potential contributions that travel can bring into cultural learning, tourism should be carefully noted due to its influence over the relation among people.

Tourism builds interaction among societies with different social and cultural properties, and it drastically influences social structure and behavioral patterns. Therefore, tourism—defined as a social phenomenon—should not only be regarded as an economic activity, but also as a field totally wired with dense human relations and in need of many human or society-centered sources because of the product it markets. Thus, tourism’s effect over social and cultural structure should be examined, and a place’s natural, historical, architectural, social, and cultural identity should be handled as a whole (Duran, 2011). In other words, social studies course containing culture, cultural learning, and tourism entails integrating all fields. In this respect, it is crucial for pre-service social studies teachers to consider the relations that tourism activities within their both private and educational lives have with the field. In this research, the contributions that tourism and travel can bring into cultural learning are examined through pre-service social studies teachers’ perspectives. Answers have been sought for the following research questions:

- How do pre-service teachers define culture?
- What do pre-service teachers think about the ways to get to know other cultures?
- How do pre-service teachers define cultural learning?
- What do pre-service teachers think about the role of tourism in cultural learning?
- What do pre-service teachers think about the role of teacher in cultural learning?
- What do pre-service teachers suggest with respect to tourism’s contribution to cultural learning?

Method

This section provides information about the research model, participants, data collection, and analysis.

Research Model

This study has been conducted in accordance with qualitative research approach employing a phenomenological design. Phenomenology focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but not have detailed understanding about (Yildirim and Simsek, 2013). Since this research is on pre-service social studies teachers' experiences in learning about cultures through travel, phenomenology was adopted as a suitable design.

Participants

The participants are pre-service social studies teachers selected via criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling method. The main goal of criterion sampling is to investigate situations that meet a set of criteria determined earlier (Yildirim and Simsek, 2013). Having visited cities located in different regions and traveling at least two times a year were the criteria for the current research. So, eight pre-service social studies teachers have partaken in this study. Table 1 depicts the participants' features.

Table 1: Participants' Features

Feature	f
Gender	
Female	6
Male	2
Travel Frequency	
2	3
3	4
3 and more	1
Travel purpose	
Get to know the history and geography	5
Seeing places un-visited earlier	3
Get to know the culture	2
Education	1
Recreation	1

As can be seen in Table 1, the number of female and male participants are 6 and 2 respectively. Four stated that they travel more than 3 times a year. The most frequent purpose for travel as noted by the participants is to get to know historical and geographical properties of a place. Other purposes include seeing places unvisited earlier and get to know the culture. So, it is obvious that these travels host an expectation to learn about history and geography, hence culture.

Data Collection and Analysis

Developed by the researchers, a semi-structured interview form was utilized to figure out the role of travel in learning about culture based on pre-service social studies teachers' experiences. Interview is one of the primary data collection techniques of phenomenology design. Field experts were consulted to finalize the

interview form. During the research, pre-service teachers were directed several questions about cultural learning, ways to get to know other cultures, the role of tourism in learning about cultures, and things that teachers can do to introduce students with other cultures, which is how qualitative data were collected.

Descriptive analysis was employed during analyzing the research data. In this analysis, data are organized in accordance with themes that are distilled from the interview questions (Yildirim and Simsek, 2013). Next, the themes were converted into codes, relations were examined. MAXQDA software was used for data analysis. Research data were analyzed by two researchers independently, and differences regarding analysis results were resolved through negotiation. Furthermore, findings were supported with direct quotes and pseudonyms were used for participants.

Findings

Research data were grouped under following themes: pre-service teachers' perceptions about culture, perceptions about cultural learning, and suggestions about the contributions that tourism can bring into cultural learning. Accordingly, Figure 1 displays pre-service social studies teacher's perceptions about culture.

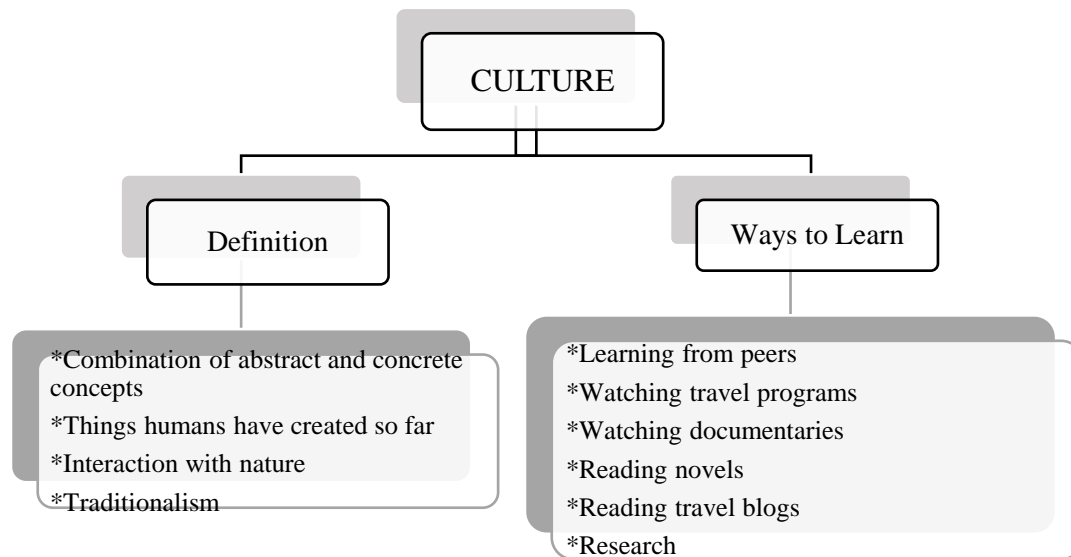


Figure 1: 'Culture' Theme

As shown by Figure 1, pre-service social studies teachers' opinions were gathered under two title within culture theme. Participants provided several definitions for culture and mentioned various ways to know about culture. As for the teacher candidates, culture refers to a combination of abstract and concrete concepts, what humans have created so far, interaction with nature, and traditionalism. Defining culture as a combination of abstract and concrete concepts, pre-service teacher Aycan supported her ideas by saying "Culture is a vast topic. It may vary from person to person. What we learn at school mostly is a combination of abstract and concrete concepts." She added "Both abstract and concrete elements are involved. For me, anything related with customs and traditions is a reflection of culture." Emphasizing traditionalism, Reyhan defines culture as follows "When it comes to culture, it covers everything material

and spiritual. For example, traditional games, folk dances, traditional cuisine, dresses, all are components of culture.” Ceyda underlined humans’ interaction with nature and human creations in her definition of culture by saying “It sound cliché but everything created by humans is culture. Or, everything humans have created as a result of their interaction with nature... For example, dressing styles, the way we speak, our dishes, I mean everything in life.”

As noted by the participants, the ways to learn about culture include learning from peers, watching travel programs and documentaries, reading novels and blogs, and researching. Mentioning peers as a channel to learn about cultures, Ali stated his opinion by saying “Because of my friends. I learned about their culture after I met them.” Ayse pointed to documentaries and family involvement by stating “I love documentaries. As a family, we enjoy watching documentaries a lot.” On the other hand, Ceyda underpinned the significance of research and technology support to learn about cultures by noting “I generally get help from social media and the Internet to learn about other cultures.” Again, Ceyda mentioned travel blogs and how important technology is by saying “The truth of what I learn online is still debatable, yet I follow blogs by people who travel a lot. That’s how I learn.” However, she annotated her concerns about the truth of online information sources. Figure 2 depicts pre-service teachers’ opinions about cultural learning.

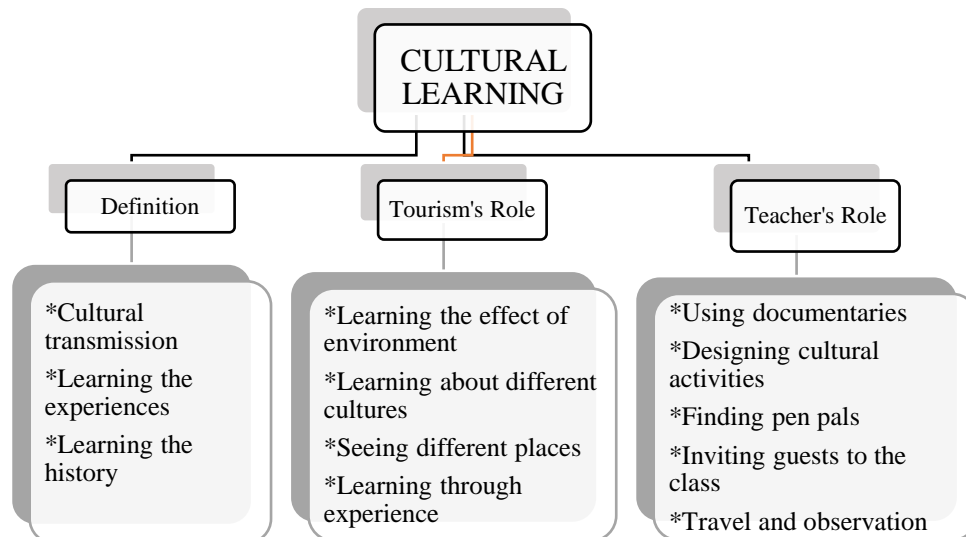


Figure 2. ‘Cultural Learning’ Theme

As shown in Figure 2, pre-service social studies teachers’ opinions about cultural learning are grouped under three titles: definition, tourism’s role, and teacher’s role. Teacher candidates defined cultural learning as cultural transmission, learning the experiences, and learning the history. Considering cultural learning as cultural transmission, Merve said “Cultural transmission comes to my mind about cultural learning. It starts in the family, and it is shaped by our immediate environment. It is blended with different interactions during learning.” Relating cultural learning with learning about the history, Oznur noted “It may mean to know about the things that have happened up until now in human history. Or it may mean to learn together with the culture. That’s what I can say.”

Social studies teacher candidates who underlined the role of tourism in cultural learning pointed to learning the effect of environment, learning about different cultures, seeing different places, and learning

through experience. Stating that tourism helps to learn the effect of environment within cultural learning, Ceyda underlined that travel improves learning by saying “Here it comes to that culture-environment and human-environment relation because environment shapes the culture a lot. Or it naturally shapes people’s lives considerably. Thus, it’s more meaningful to go and see things in vivo. And it eases retention.” Oznur emphasized the significance of tourism in terms of enhancing learning about different cultures and places within cultural learning by noting “Foremost important thing is tourism since it is the only medium we learn about different places and cultures. Other non-touristic travels are not that influential because the aim is different and we do not pay much attention to things we see during such visits. Therefore, I think it is crucial.”

Pre-service social studies teachers who believe that teachers play a vital role in terms of cultural learning listed what teachers can do as using documentaries, designing cultural activities, finding pen pals, inviting guests to the class, and offering travel and observation opportunities. Noting pen pals as an effective way, Melis worded her opinions as “People say there is a pen pal system. Teachers contact trustworthy people living in other cultures, and build some kind of affiliation with the school. Then, students write letters to them, and they write back, which provides chances to practice daily language and to learn about daily routines of other people. This may ease identifying oneself with another culture.” Again, Melis underlined that teachers should invite people from different cultures to the class by saying “Someone who has experience about living in a different culture may be invited to the class. S/he can share her/his experience with students. Such activities may be helpful.” Another teacher candidate focused on travel and observation opportunities by saying “To me, the most influential way is travel.” Likewise, another participant also pinpointed the significance of travel and observation for permanent and fun learning by saying “A school should organize expeditions to the historical places nearby. Learning will be more permanent with activities outside the school. They will both learn and have fun.” Figure 3 displays pre-service social studies teachers’ suggestions concerning how tourism can contribute to cultural learning.

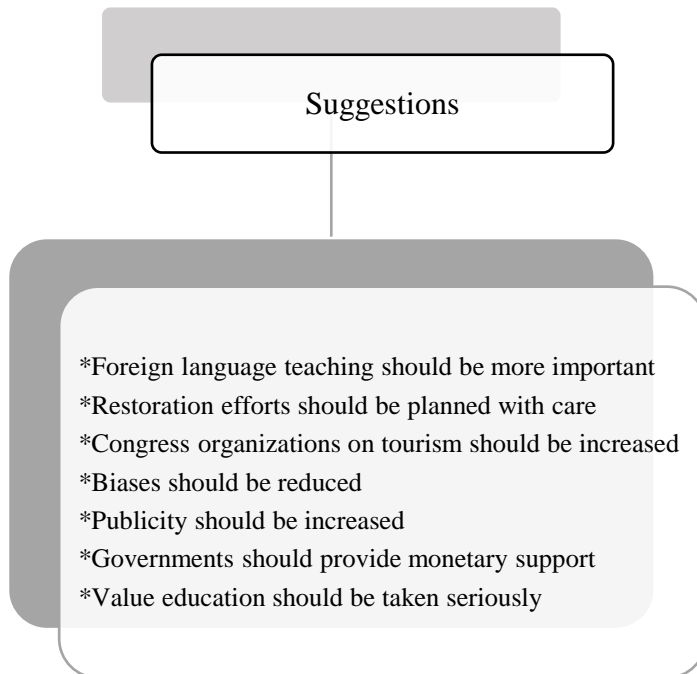


Figure 3. ‘Suggestions’ Theme

As listed in Figure 3, teacher candidates suggested that foreign language teaching be more important, restoration efforts be planned with due care, more tourism congresses be organized, biases be reduced, publicity be increased, governments provide monetary support, and value education be taken more seriously. Accordingly, Ayse who thinks foreign language teaching should be improved noted that language education should be more communicative by saying "Foreign language teaching should be improved. We should teach how to speak with tourists. This will enhance tourism." Saying "What directly rushes into my mind is the Russian tourists heading towards the coasts. This is among general biases. I think tourism is not perceived in the correct way in Turkey", Veli indicated the necessity to change biases. Veli also pointed the importance of restoration by saying "There are beautiful historical places. And, restoration plans and efforts should be more careful and precise.". On the other hand, Ali expressed the need for more congress organizations by saying "I think there are congress organizations on tourism. There should be more of them. More panels and symposiums should be held." Expressing her opinions by saying "Our country is home for lots of varieties, but unfortunately we can't use them for tourism because they are sometimes not publicized effectively and sometimes not in good shape. Serious publicity should be commenced", Reyhan underlined the vitality of publicity. Another teacher candidate who mentioned the relevance of publicity indicated the role of media by saying "Commercials can be broadcasted on local TV channels. Or, there are radio stations, too. Billboards can also be used for the downtown areas." Focusing on government's responsibility for tourism, Ceyda expressed her opinions by saying "The government should do what is necessary. They should advertise different cultures we host and they should provide monetary support." Prioritizing value education about tourism, Ayca said "Values of cultural heritage and sensitivity should be taught within our educational program." Similarly, Melis noted that current value education is incomplete by saying "There are some parts about different cultures in the coursebooks, but I think they do not pass onto students. I don't think students understand them. I believe more emphasis can be laid on value education. To me, it is rather artificial as it is now." So, one can conclude that pre-service teachers think education and government support are crucial for tourism to make any contributions to cultural learning.

Conclusions

The present research concludes that pre-service teachers define culture as a combination of abstract and concrete concepts, things humans have created so far, interaction with nature, and traditionalism. Kagıtcıbası (2010, p.35) states that there are 164 different definitions for culture in the literature (Kocoglu, 2014). The commonalities among these definitions indicate that culture is a product of a society, that its components are knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, arts, and tradition, and that it reflects people's thoughts. Research findings show that pre-service teachers' definition for culture is compatible with the one in the literature, but it is defined more comprehensively in the literature. Furthermore, as for teacher candidates, the ways to learn about different cultures include learning from peers, watching travel programs and documentaries, reading novels and travel blogs, and researching.

Pre-service social studies teachers define cultural learning as cultural transmission, learning the experiences, and learning the history. Cultural learning is also named as cultural transmission (Ballantine, 2017 cited from Chang et.al., 2010.). This time, teacher candidates' definition overlaps with the one in the literature. Yet, literature handles cultural learning as cross-cultural learning as well (Ikeguchi, 2008). It seems that pre-service teachers did not mention this aspect of cultural learning in their definitions.

Underlining the role of tourism in cultural learning, pre-service social studies teachers listed the contributions that tourism can make as learning the effect of environment, learning about different cultures, seeing different places, and learning through experience. Cetin (2009) concludes that tourism establishes cultural interaction between local people and tourists, which is in line with teacher candidates' idea that tourism has a positive influence over cultural learning via learning about the environment and other cultures. According to Atayeter and Tozkoparan (2014, p.11), social studies teachers should have a good command of knowledge about the culture and places where they take students as part of school expeditions. Thus, teachers should make necessary preparations before they set out for such travels. However, it is known that many teachers do not prepare for such trips, and as a result, students do not benefit from them as efficiently as they should. In this respect, it will be wise for pre-service social studies teachers to fall back on their own tourism experiences when they organize any school expeditions or travels in their professional life.

Acknowledging that teachers bear a major role within cultural learning, pre-service social studies teachers listed what teachers can do as using documentaries, designing cultural activities, finding pen pals, inviting guests to the class, and providing travel and observation opportunities. As can be deduced from the opinions, teacher candidates suggest adding variety to instructional activities and blending them. Hatoss (2006) underpins that both conceptual and experiential learning are significant in cultural learning. In this sense, teacher candidates' suggestions that teachers should design activities where students can learn through experience are compatible with the literature. As for Atayeter and Tozkoparan (2014, p.19), social studies teachers should diversify instructional activities and employ the methods appropriate for the content and objectives in order to maximize students' academic success. They should choose student-centered methods that entail active participation on part of students. Travel and observation opportunities, which can achieve this goal, should be provided whenever necessary.

As for pre-service teachers, foreign language education should be improved, restoration efforts should be planned with precision and care, congress organizations should be increased, biases should be eliminated, publicity should be enhanced, governments should provide monetary support, and value education should be taken more seriously if tourism and travel are expected to contribute to cultural learning. In their study examining university students' enthusiasm to learn a foreign language for their tourism education, Akgoz and Gursoy (2014) pointed to the key role that foreign language bears for tourism and laid several suggestions as to how the quality of foreign language education can be improved within tertiary education. In this current research, teacher candidates regard foreign language as the most essential component of interaction in tourism.

Following suggestions can be listed based on the research findings:

- The relation between culture, cultural learning, and tourism should be included within Social Studies Instructional Program through both theoretical and applied senses.
- Activities should be planned to improve pre-service social studies teachers' foreign language skills.
- Activities should be developed to increase pre-service social studies teachers' awareness about cultural learning and tourism.
- Further research should be conducted on tourism's effect over cultural learning.

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