

An Analysis of the Political Literacy Levels of Preservice Social Studies Teachers

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers. In doing so, the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers have been analyzed in terms of gender, grade and CGPA. Descriptive survey model is used in the study. The sample of the study consists of the preservice social studies teachers in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade studying at Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University. Political Literacy Scale developed by Köksalve Erol (2021) is used in the study. The data obtained through the study are analyzed with Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis test. The findings show that there are significant differences in the political literacy levels of the preservice social studies teachers in terms of gender and grade variables; however, no significant differences in the political literacy levels are determined in terms of CGPA. Accordingly, it can be said that gender and grade variables have an impact on the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers, but not the CGPA variable.

Keywords: Political Literacy, Preservice Teachers, Descriptive Survey.

Introduction

Political literacy can be defined as having knowledge on the decisions made socially, expressing their own ideas within the rules of discussion and criticism without being prejudiced against political ideas and differences of opinion, and having the ability to make political decisions (Political Literacy Within ITT Citizenship Education, 2002; cited in Dağ & Köçer, 2019). It can also be defined the ability of people to make sense of the political situation that occurs and to have political knowledge about the subject (Zaller, 1992). This concept has existed since the 1960s and has increased in importance today to train individuals who fulfill the justifications of political literacy. That is because the increase in the number of studies showing that the political literacy levels of young individuals in different parts of the world are low (Fyfe, 2007).

Democracy education should be given to students in order to provide an effective citizenship education. Democracy education is formed by adopting the concepts of political knowledge, political participation, political awareness and political literacy. Individuals who have internalized these concepts make democracy a way of life (Köksal & Erol, 2021).

Our education system includes institutions that enable students to make sense of democratic life, the reasons for democratic life, civic duties and political events (Kuş, 2013). These institutions, in which citizenship education is given, provide students with information about the place and society they live in and provide the opportunity to display necessary behaviors to ensure a democratic order (Crick, 2000). Social Studies courses are one of the courses in which concepts such as effective citizen, democracy, political knowledge, and political awareness are taught to students. Because the Social Studies course provides students with an idea about the current issues in the world and the society they live in by critically transferring the events that happened in the past and today (Arın & Deveci, 2008).

The “Active Citizenship” learning area added to the Social Studies Curriculum renewed in 2018 serves to provide students with political literacy skills. This field of learning mainly focuses on the concept of active citizenship within the framework of sociology, political science and law disciplines. Considering these explanations, it can be stated that one of the main objectives of the Social Studies course is to raise politically literate individuals who have grasped the term political literacy (Görmez, 2018).

Before stating the purpose of the study, it is necessary to express the research on political literacy in the literature.

Studies such as examining pre-service teachers’ political literacy status and political literacy levels (Akhan, 2011; Demir, 2019; Faiz & Dönmez, 2019; Kuş, 2014; Tarhan, 2015), the scale (Köksal & Erol, 2021) developed on legal literacy and political literacy of the Social Studies curriculum (Duman & Turhal, 2019; Faiz, 2016; Faiz and Dönmez, 2016; Kara & Tangülü, 2017; Kuş, 2013) to work, political literacy in Turkey (Dağ & Köçer, 2019), improving the political literacy level of the individual (Pallares, 2006; Yarnall, 2003), addressing various dimensions of political and political literacy (Connel, 1973; Refaie & Hörschelmann, 2010; Thorson & McKeever, 1983; Simon 2014; Maitles & Deuchar 2004; Lailiyah, Yuliyanto & Pradhana, 2018) have been found in the literature.

Considering the main purpose of the Social Studies Curriculum to raise politically literate individuals and examining the studies in the literature, the purpose of this study can be stated as determining the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers. In order to achieve this stated aim, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. What is the political literacy level of preservice Social Studies teachers?
2. Is there a significant difference in the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers in terms of gender?
3. Is there a significant difference in the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers in terms of grade level?
4. Is there a significant difference in the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers in terms of CGPA?

Method

Descriptive survey design, one of the quantitative research designs, is used in the study. In descriptive survey, the existing situation is described as it is (Karasar, 2001). The reason why descriptive survey has been used in this study is to determine the political literacy levels of the preservice social studies teachers.

Research Sample

The sample of the study consists of preservice social studies teachers studying at Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University in 2021-22 academic years. The sample is selected through convenience sampling among non-random sampling techniques. The convenience sampling method is the units where sampling is easily reached and the application is made due to some limitations (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2012).

Table 1 Descriptive Data of Preservice Social Studies Teachers

	Demographic Features	F	%
Gender	Female	72	44,6
	Male	58	55,4
Grade	1st grade	32	24,6
	2nd grade	29	22,3
	3rd grade	37	28,5
	4th grade	32	24,6
CGPA	2,00-2,50	16	12,3
	2,50-3,00	32	24,6
	3,00-3,50	69	53,1
	3.50-4.00	13	10,0
Total		130	100

When Table 1 is analyzed, it is seen that 72 (44.6%) of the preservice teachers participating in the study are female and 58 (55.4%) are male, 32 (24.6%) are in the 1st grade, 29 (22.3%) are in the 2nd grade, 37 (28.5%) are in the 3rd grade and 32 (24.6%) are in the 4th grade. It can also be seen that 16 (12.3%) of the participant preservice teachers have a CGPA of 2.00-2.50, 32 (24.6%) have a CGPA of 2,50-3,00, 69 (53.1%) have a CGPA of 3,00-3,50 and 13 (10.0%) have a CGPA of 3.50-4.00.

Data Collection Tools

The Political Literacy Scale used in the research has been developed by Köksal and Erol (2021) by applying it to a total of 440 undergraduate students studying at a university. This scale, which is a 5-point Likert scale, consists of 24 items and 5 sub-dimensions. The sub-dimensions are political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest and political participation. After confirmatory factor analysis, it has been stated that the fit indices of the 5 sub-dimension scales are sufficient ($\chi^2/sd= 1.53$, RMSEA= .70, SRMR= .07). Total item correlations of the scale ranged from .48 to .70. The value of the scale, in which the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is checked for internal consistency, is found to be .89. As a result of these findings, it is accepted that the scale is valid and reliable in measuring the political literacy skills of individuals.

Data Analysis

In the study, the data obtained from the Political Literacy Scale are analyzed with the statistical software. The mean scores, standard deviations, and minimum-maximum values are determined by calculating the total scores of the scale and the scores from the sub-dimensions, primarily with the data obtained.

Research Ethics

This research was prepared in accordance with the scientific discipline principles and was carried out with the permission of the Ethics Committee of Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University, with the decision dated 01.03.2022 and numbered E.35215.

Findings

In this section, findings and comments regarding the research questions are given. The descriptive statistics of preservice social studies teachers' political literacy levels are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2 Average Points of Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Political Literacy Levels

Subdimensions	N	Min.	Max.	Ort.	Ss	Skewness	Kurtosis
Political Expertise	130	1,00	5,00	3,27	1,21573	-,342	-,829
Political Knowledge	130	1,00	5,00	3,40	1,40618	-,514	-1,240
Political Awareness	130	1,00	5,00	3,47	1,51619	-,668	-1,135
Political Interest	130	1,50	5,00	3,19	1,21352	-,378	-,844
Political Participation	130	1,00	5,00	3,19	1,21352	-,378	-,844
Scale Total	130	1,00	5,00	3,34	1,20402	-,632	-,826

According to Table 2, it is seen that 130 preservice Social Studies teachers participate in the study, and the lowest score to obtain from the scale is 1.00 and the highest is 5.00. It can be seen that preservice Social Studies teachers get an average score of 3.27 from the sub-dimension of political expertise, 3.40 from political knowledge, 3.47 from

political awareness, 3.19 from political interest, 3.19 from political participation and 3.34 from the total of the scale. When the sub-dimensions of the scale and the minimum and maximum scores that can be obtained from the total of the scale are compared, it is revealed that the political literacy levels of the preservice Social Studies teachers are good.

Table 3 Mann–Whitney U Test Results on Political Literacy Attitudes of Preservice Social Studies Teachers in Terms of Gender Variable

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	p	Significant Difference
Political Expertise	Male	58	64,60	3747,00	2036,000	,807	
	Female	72	66,22	4768,00			
Political Knowledge	Male	58	60,72	3522,00	1811,000	,193	-
	Female	72	69,35	4993,00			
Political Awaransess	Male	58	62,01	3596,50	1885,500	,338	

Political Awareness	Female	72	68,31	4918,50	1885,500	,338	
Political Interest	Male	58	57,19	3317,00	1606,000	,023	Female>Male
	Female	72	72,19	5198,00			
Political Participation	Male	58	57,19	3317,00	1606,000	,023	Female>Male
	Female	72	72,19	5198,00			
Scale Total	Male	58	62,86	3646,00	1935,000	,474	
	Female	72	67,63	4869,00			

Table 3 indicates the results of the Mann–Whitney U test, which is conducted to determine whether the mean scores obtained from the sub-dimensions of political expertise, political knowledge, political awareness, political interest and political participation of the preservice teachers participating in the research show a significant difference in terms of the gender variable. The analysis shows that there is a significant difference in the political literacy levels of females compared to males in the

sub-dimensions of political interest and political participation.

The Kruskal Wallis test is used to understand whether the political literacy levels of the preservice social studies teachers differ in terms of grade variable, and the Games Howell test, one of the Post Hoc tests, is used to understand the relationship between the groups. The findings obtained from the analysis are given in Table 5.

Table 5 Kruskal Wallis Test Results Showing Political Literacy Levels of Preservice Social Studies Teachers in terms of Grade Variable

Variable	Groups	N	Mean Rank	X ²	p	Significant Difference
Political Expertise	1st grade	32	54,09	14,772	,001	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	50,84			
	3rd grade	37	72,66			
	4th grade	32	81,91			
Political Knowledge	1st grade	32	48,86	18,160	,000	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	53,72			
	3rd grade	37	73,61			
	4th grade	32	83,44			
Political Awareness	1st grade	32	52,19	18,208	,000	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	51,14			
	3rd grade	37	71,20			
	4th grade	32	85,23			
Political Interest	1st grade	32	51,30	15,985	,001	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	55,12			
	3rd grade	37	68,84			
	4th grade	32	85,25			
Political Participation	1st grade	32	51,30	15,985	,001	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	55,12			
	3rd grade	37	68,84			
	4th grade	32	85,25			
Scale Total	1st grade	32	49,03	20,097	,000	4-1 4-2
	2nd grade	29	51,62			
	3rd grade	37	74,32			
	4th grade	32	84,34			

Table 5 shows the analysis results of the Kruskal–Wallis test, which is conducted to test whether there is a significant difference between the political literacy levels of the preservice teachers participating in the research and the gender variable, and the Games Howell test, one of the Post Hoc tests, to understand the relationship between the groups are seen. It can be seen in the Table 5 that there is a significant difference among the 4th, 1st and 2nd grades in political expertise ($X^2=14,772$;

$p<,002$), political knowledge ($X^2=18,160$; $p<,000$), political awareness ($X^2=18,208$; $p<,000$), political interest ($X^2=15,985$; $p<,001$), political participation ($X^2=15,985$; $p<,001$) dimensions and scale total ($X^2=20,097$; $p<,000$).

The Kruskal Wallis test is used to determine whether there is a significant difference in the political literacy levels of the preservice Social Studies teachers in terms of CGPA. The findings obtained from the analysis are given in Table 6.

Table 6 Kruskal Wallis Test Results Showing Political Literacy Levels of Preservice Social Studies Teachers in terms of CGPA

Variable	Groups	N	Mean Rank	X ²	p	Significant Difference
Political Expertise	2,00-2,50	16	63,56	2,869	,412	-
	2,50-3,00	32	65,67			
	3,00-3,50	69	62,78			
	3,50-4,00	13	81,88			
Political Knowledge	2,00-2,50	16	55,69	3,030	,387	-
	2,50-3,00	32	68,20			
	3,00-3,50	69	63,99			
	3,50-4,00	13	78,92			
Political Awareness	2,00-2,50	16	60,31	1,008	,799	-
	2,50-3,00	32	62,75			
	3,00-3,50	69	66,66			
	3,50-4,00	13	72,50			
Political Interest	2,00-2,50	16	61,59	1,494	,684	-
	2,50-3,00	32	70,34			
	3,00-3,50	69	62,86			
	3,50-4,00	13	72,42			
Political Participation	2,00-2,50	16	61,59	1,494	,684	-
	2,50-3,00	32	70,34			
	3,00-3,50	69	62,86			
	3,50-4,00	13	72,42			
Scale Total	2,00-2,50	16	60,94	1,965	,580	-
	2,50-3,00	32	66,06			
	3,00-3,50	69	63,82			
	3,50-4,00	13	78,65			

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that there is no significant difference between the scores of the preservice Social Studies teachers from the sub-dimensions and the total of the scale and the CGPA variable. Depending on this result, it can be stated that the CGPA variable has no impact on political literacy.

Conclusion, Discussion and Implications

As a result of this research, which aimed to examine the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers in terms of various variables, it has been concluded that the political literacy levels of the prospective teachers are high.

According to the results of the research, it has been determined that there are significant differences in the political literacy levels of the preservice Social Studies teachers in terms of gender and grade variables. However, it has been concluded that there is no significant difference in the political literacy levels of the preservice Social Studies teachers in terms of the CGPA variable. Accordingly, it can be said that gender and grade variables have an impact on the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers, while the CGPA variable does not. In the related literature, Yarnall (2002) in his research on political literacy concludes that there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of political issues and interest in politics. Akhan (2011) states in his study with preservice teachers that the gender variable affects the political literacy levels and the political literacy levels of male students are higher compared to female students. Faiz and Dönmez (2016), on the other hand, state in their research that the political knowledge levels of female and male students do not differ in terms of the gender variable. Considering the general result of the scale in this study, it can be stated that it is similar to the study of Faiz and Dönmez (2016). Tarhan (2015), in her study on preservice teachers' views on political literacy, concludes that preservice teachers have knowledge about political literacy, but there are various factors that prevent them from being politically literate. Pallares (2006) states in her study that family, media, experience, church and political participation are effective in people's political interest and being politically literate. The results of the current study are partially similar to the studies of Tarhan (2015) and Pallares (2006). Kuş (2014) states in his research that preservice teachers generally have difficulties in making sense of the concepts of politics and political literacy. Grace (2002) concludes that students' political literacy levels and perceptions are low. Refaie and Hörschelmann (2010), in their study on young people's analysis of a political cartoon, show students political cartoons and talk to them about these cartoons. As a result of the research, they determine that the students are not interested in politics. Heron and McManus (2003) state in their study on political awareness with Social Studies teachers that students have less political

interest and low awareness of politics. The findings of the current study do not overlap the findings of these studies.

Apart from these studies in the literature, the results of the studies on the concept of political literacy in the Social Studies Curriculum are also included. Göremez (2017) states that the Social Studies Curriculum, which has 7 learning areas, includes units, themes and acquisitions related to political literacy skills in 4 learning areas. Therefore, he concludes that the Social Studies Curriculum includes sufficient political literacy skills, concepts and acquisitions.

Based on the results of the current research, which aims to examine the political literacy levels of preservice social studies teachers, some implications have been made.

- The number of scientific studies on political literacy can be increased.
- By adding an elective course on political literacy to the undergraduate program, preservice teachers can be provided with the opportunity to recognize and reinforce the knowledge and concepts in this field.
- It can be ensured by the academics that preservice teachers express their views on the political issues that are on the world agenda and create a discussion environment in the lessons.

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