Elective Course Selection Strategies in Social Studies Education

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Abstract

In the undergraduate programs implemented in Türkiye, there are two types of courses: compulsories electives. This reality may also affect the strategies that teacher candidates apply when choosing elective courses. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to determine the social studies teacher candidates' strategies in the elective course preferences and to discuss the emerging pattern with social cognitive, reasoned action and planned behavior theories. The study was carried out in accordance with the phenomenology design, and interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with the participants who preferred elective courses at least ten times before. The data was collected from students enrolled in a state university during the 2022-2023 academic year. In the analysis of the data, the inductive approach was preferred and content analysis was used. As a result of the analysis of the data, the categories were combined under the headings of selection strategy, the purpose of elective courses and the effect of KPSS on course preference strategies. In addition, based on the themes and participant expressions, the patterns that the participants followed during their choice of elective courses were also determined. Based on the research findings, it was understood that pre-service teachers developed strategies for the purpose of passing the course effortlessly and easily, not for the purpose of contributing to their personal development or gaining an interdisciplinary approach. Finally, suggestions such as determining elective courses through needs analysis have been made.

Keywords: Elective courses, social cognitive theory, reasoned action and planned behavior theories, social studies.

Introduction

Education has become a field that, beyond the conventional understanding, grants students as much choice as possible about their own learning. Contemporary education systems place great emphasis on student freedom. Lewis, Anderson, and Carroll (2020) note that education today is associated not only with the didactic dimension but also with the autonomy and the freedom to chart one's own path in education and teaching. In a Hanover Research report that evaluates the impact of personalized learning strategies and interventions on academic success (Hanover Research, 2014), it is stated that approaches that provide students with the right to choose their program and, consequently, their educational path facilitate students' participation, motivation, and achievements.

European countries initiated the Bologna Process in 1999 with the aim of establishing standards in higher education. The Republic of Türkiye is also one of the countries that participated in the Bologna Process. The main objective of the Bologna Process is to determine academic standards in higher education. In this context, Türkiye has implemented some new practices in higher education. One of these practices is setting the ratio of elective courses to all courses to at least 25%. This ratio demonstrates the importance given to elective courses within the Bologna Process. In Türkiye, undergraduate programs in higher education consist of a combination of two types of courses: compulsory courses and elective courses. Compulsory courses are directed towards the fields related to the programs of study, and every student is required to take these courses. Elective courses, on the other hand, are courses that students choose voluntarily. The primary reason for incorporating elective courses into the curriculum is to support interdisciplinary approaches and educate individuals who can solve problems (Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University [AİÇÜ], 2021). It is likely that elective courses contribute to students' cognitive, affective, and social development. Due to the rapid changes brought about by the times, individuals need to be competent and sufficient in their fields of study, but this is no longer sufficient. Societies now require versatile individuals with various skills who can adapt to rapid changes (Demir & Ok, 1996). Elective courses can provide students with the opportunity to develop themselves

in the direction they desire. Therefore, students' choices of elective courses are important in terms of their own development.

Students make many decisions related to their academic or daily life. These decisions are influenced by various factors such as family, friends, teachers, school, prior knowledge, and experiences (Jain & Jain, 2018). Choosing elective courses is one of the issues that students often find challenging and complex (Baruch, 2009). The increasing number of students and elective course options complicates the process of selecting the appropriate elective course (Parker et al., 2006). Furthermore, choosing the right course from among the alternatives involves a decision-making process that requires considering multiple factors (Ersöz, Kabak, & Yılmaz, 2011). Selecting the appropriate elective course is crucial because it has both financial and spiritual consequences in various areas in the future (Holtom & Inderriede, 2007). However, it is not possible to say that this applies to all teachers in Türkiye. This is because almost all teacher candidates in Türkiye aim to be assigned to state schools based on the results of a centralized exam (Özcan, Yöntem & Yücel, 2021). The majority of working teachers are employed in state schools, and teachers working in state schools have the same income and rights. The quality of the teacher or the elective courses taken during the educational process does not make a difference. This reality elevates the importance of elective courses in education faculties. This is because teachers working in state schools do not see any financial benefit from the elective courses they took during their undergraduate education. The topics within certain elective course groups have no impact on their acceptance into their professional careers. This situation may reveal the likelihood of teachers choosing the easier elective courses in their preferences. Consequently, the expected benefits from elective courses may not be realized.

In contrast to students in other undergraduate programs in Türkiye, education faculty students aspire to be employed in the public sector, and for this purpose, they prepare for central exams known as the Public Personnel Selection Exam (KPSS), which consists of multiple stages. Within the scope of this central exam, prospective teachers, unlike other candidates, sweat it out in two comprehensive separate exams that encompass educational sciences and subject knowledge related to teaching. These aforementioned exams require long-term and consistent effort due to their comprehensive nature. This, in turn, can significantly alter the way education faculty students view elective courses. First and foremost, the elective course preferences of undergraduate students can lead to significant developments in the long term (Jain & Jain, 2018) and have the potential to influence their professional skills, and thus, the breadth of their material and spiritual rights in the future (Holtom & Inderriede, 2007). However, education faculty students will have personal rights that are independent of their professional skills and competencies when they are employed in the public sector. Therefore, teacher candidates may tend to perceive their personal and professional development as less important than their preparation for the central exam.

In an academic context, the elective course preferences of undergraduate students can be influenced by various factors beyond central exams. Uçgun (2012) determined that the grading system used by the instructor, the peer group, and personal abilities are the most significant factors in course selection, while the academic career of the instructor, opinions of consulted faculty members, and previously taken elective courses have a very low impact. Tezcan and Gümüş (2008), on the other hand, identified that a student's opinions about the instructor, the similarity of the new course to a previously successful one, and the teaching method of the course are the most influential factors in elective course

selection. In the same study, the influence of family was found to be the least significant factor. Conducting a study within the same scope, Korukçu (2012) stated that course content, the attitude of the instructor, and students' career expectations are important factors in students' elective course preferences. Bursa and Ersoy (2020) examined the approach of social studies teacher candidates to elective courses included in the current program. According to the authors, social studies teacher candidates tend to choose courses related to special education and inclusive education due to a sense of inadequacy in this field, select critical thinking courses because they are essential goals of social studies education, and opt for adult education courses because they want to further develop themselves. In contrast to other publications in the literature, Bursa and Ersoy's study suggests that social studies teacher candidates explain their elective course preferences within the context of their needs and personal development.

Social studies teachers are individuals responsible for transforming the human resources of a country into competent citizens with effective and efficient citizenship skills. Therefore, social studies teachers should be individuals with well-developed social and communication skills, as well as problem-solving capabilities. Elective courses serve as important tools for achieving this goal. However, as mentioned above, elective course preferences are influenced by various factors. Furthermore, there is no literature on how these factors affect the attitudes of prospective social studies teachers toward elective courses. In this context, it is deemed meaningful to uncover the strategies and patterns followed by social studies teachers in the elective course preference process. Additionally, evaluating the behavioral patterns of prospective social studies teachers regarding elective courses within the scope of Social Cognitive Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action, and Theory of Planned Behavior, commonly used to explain individual behaviors, can provide valuable information for achieving the expected benefits from elective courses.

Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory, which encompasses cognitive factors alongside expectations, beliefs, and motivation, distinguishes itself from other learning theories. Bandura (1999) asserts that individuals, as they enhance their competencies, transform their experiences, social environments, and observations into sources of knowledge, process them, and employ these sources as guides in their actions. According to Bandura, individuals regularly utilize the acquired knowledge and concepts as standards for the development of self-efficacy and to identify discrepancies. Consequently, behavioral changes, based on comparative information, are made to ensure alignment between behavior, thoughts, and actions. The meanings attributed to environmental events and their emotional effects, as well as the motivating forces of behaviors and how they will be used in the future, are determined by cognitive factors.

According to Bandura (1999), an individual's behaviors and motivation are regulated by their anticipation of expected outcomes. Actions with likely positive consequences are adopted, while those with unpredictable or punitive outcomes are avoided. Anticipated positive or negative results influence motivation and behavior. According to the social cognitive theory, personal factors, social environment, and behaviors interact with each other. Hoy (2015) suggests, in line with the social cognitive theory that aims to explain the processes of learning, motivation, and adaptation, that the potential outcomes of behaviors are crucial for learning. These outcomes affect individuals' goals, efforts, perseverance, and resistance. According to the author, indirect experiences and observational learning are essential

elements of social cognitive theory, as individuals model behaviors they believe to be appropriate and likely to yield positive results. An important concept from the perspective of social cognitive theory is self-regulation. Self-regulation, as defined by Bandura (Hoy, 2015), can be seen as setting goals and making efforts in that direction. Self-regulation is influenced by information, motivation, and willpower. In the motivational dimension of self-regulation, individuals align their actions with an understanding of why they are making the effort. In this context, motivational goals are considered crucial for success (Hoy, 2015). It is believed that in this context, the social cognitive theory can provide meaningful and explanatory results regarding patterns of elective course preferences.

Theory of Reasoned Action, and Theory of Planned Behavior

In the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, 1980) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985), which can be considered as a redesigned version of the former, aim to explain human behavior. These theories are rooted in the assumption that human behavior is influenced by attitudes and social forces. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, behavior is a function of the intention to perform a specific behavior. In general, attitudes and subjective norms determine intention, and intention, in turn, determines behavior (Şahin & Solunoğlu, 2019). The intention that drives behavior is shaped by the strength of the belief in the behavior, the prediction of whether the desired outcome can be achieved, the positions of significant others regarding the behavior, and the individual's tendency to conform to the desires and wishes of other significant people. As seen, intention is a significant determinant of behavior and is influenced by various factors.

In the Theory of Planned Behavior, the component of perceived behavioral control is added, which represents an individual's perceived competence to be successful in the behavior or the perceived barriers to the occurrence of the behavior (Sideridis, Kaissidis, & Padeliadu, 1998). According to the authors, the addition of this component also includes perceived self-efficacy beliefs in the theory, related to Bandura's (1999) concept of self-efficacy. As a result, in the Theory of Planned Behavior, three fundamental determinants of human behavior are the strength of an individual's belief in the possible outcomes of the behavior and their importance, the expectations of significant others and the importance of these expectations, and beliefs about factors that facilitate or hinder the behavior and the strength of these beliefs (Şahin & Solunoğlu, 2019).

In both theories, theorists argue that individuals make rational and well-thought-out decisions by accessing information (Öztürk, Nart, & Altunışık, 2015). It is believed that these theories could be useful in explaining students' strategies in choosing elective courses.

Purpose and Importance of the Research

The purpose of this study is to determine the underlying factors of elective course preferences among prospective social studies teachers in the fourth grade of the education program and to identify possible patterns of these factors. Additionally, the study aims to examine these patterns in the light of social cognitive theory and planned behavior theory.

In this context, the following research questions were addressed:

1- What do prospective social studies teachers take into consideration when making elective course choices?

2- How do prospective social studies teachers evaluate the reasons for the inclusion of elective courses in the curriculum?

3- What strategies are generally employed by prospective social studies teachers when making elective course preferences?

4- How can the elective course preferences of prospective social studies teachers be explained in the context of social cognitive theory and planned behavior theory?

The inclusion of elective courses in curricula can be understood for various well-intentioned reasons. Nurturing individuals who think multidimensionally, solve problems, utilize their existing knowledge in diverse contexts, and generate new information is at the forefront, offering both material and spiritual benefits to society and individuals through an interdisciplinary approach to education (AİÇÜ, 2012; Holtom & Inderriede, 2007). However, the realization of the expected benefits of elective courses is closely related to the factors that motivate student choices. In this context, determining the elective course preference patterns of social studies teacher candidates can provide essential insights into the goal of training desired social studies teachers. Furthermore, the scarcity of extensive research on this topic is another crucial aspect that underscores the importance of this study.

Method

This research, conducted in accordance with qualitative methods and phenomenology, aims to examine the approaches of prospective teachers studying in the Social Studies Education undergraduate program who have chosen elective courses at various levels during the elective course selection process. In this study, the phenomenology design was chosen as it explores the meanings attributed by participants to the phenomenon of "elective courses." Phenomenological studies investigate the common meaning of individuals' lived experiences related to the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenon under examination is "elective course selection." In this context, the meanings attributed by the participants to elective courses, their experiences related to the elective course selection process, and the paths they follow have been examined.

Participants

The research participants were selected from prospective teachers enrolled in the social studies teacher education program at a state university. The purposeful sampling method of criterion sampling was employed in the participant selection process. The criteria for selection were defined as follows: being a prospective social studies teacher, not having any failing grades, having a cumulative grade point average of 3.00 or higher, and having selected a minimum of ten elective courses. The rationale for these criteria related to success was to eliminate students who did not take their education and teaching processes seriously. The criterion of selecting at least ten elective courses aimed to include experienced students in the study. A table presenting information about the participants who met these criteria and were included in the study is provided below.

Table 1. *Participants*

Code	Gender	Grade
K1	M	4
K2	M	4
K3	F	4
K4	F	4
K5	M	4
K6	F	4
K7	M	4
K8	M	4
K9	F	4
K10	F	4
K11	M	4
K12	M	4

Data Collection

In the study, data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. The researcher prepared draft questions by examining research on students' elective course preferences in Turkish and world literature. The prepared form was presented to two experts in the fields of social studies education, educational programs, and teaching. The form was then revised in accordance with expert feedback and, finally, reached its final version through the input of two Turkish language experts. The final form contains four main questions.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants using the semi-structured interview form. In all interviews, the questions included in the prepared semi-structured interview form were posed to the participants. In cases where the interviews remained superficial and required further exploration, follow-up questions were used based on the participants' responses. Individual interviews with participants lasted between 15-25 minutes, while focus group discussions took approximately 50 minutes each. Before starting the interviews, participants were asked whether they voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and consented to audio recording during the interviews. They were also asked to confirm their decisions after the audio recording started. Both individual and focus group interviews were recorded based on participants' consent.

During the data collection process, participants were initially divided into two groups of six. Focus group discussions were conducted with each of the designated groups initially. There are several reasons for prioritizing focus group discussions in data collection. Crueger and Casey (2000) note that focus group discussions are used to understand diversity and how the situation is perceived. Kitzinger (1995) suggests that focus group discussions can help participants explore and clarify their own views. In this context, it can be said that the focus group discussions to be held before individual semi-structured interviews will contribute to both participants' awareness and the researcher's knowledge and insights on the subject. Additionally, the raw data from focus group discussions were read by the researcher to identify where in-depth information could be obtained through follow-up questions. This allowed the superficial views presented by participants in focus group discussions to be deepened in individual semi-structured interviews. Therefore, another aim of resorting to focus group discussions was to obtain more in-depth information in the individual interviews with participants. Another purpose of conducting focus group discussions first was to determine the similarities and differences in participants' views by leveraging group dynamics. As Kitzinger (1995) points out, focus group discussions were conducted before individual interviews to provide a solid foundation for later data

collection methods such as interviews and surveys. Following the focus group discussions, individual interviews were conducted with the same participants using the semi-structured interview form.

Analysis of Data

In the scope of the study, the data collected was considered as a single data set and subjected to the same analysis processes. Both the audio recordings obtained in one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed by the researcher and entered into a word processing program. The transcripts of the interviews were presented to the participants to confirm their accuracy. After reading the raw data twice, the coding process was initiated. The coding process was conducted in accordance with content analysis. Content analysis can be defined as a systematic and replicable approach in which text is coded based on specific rules, and the resulting categories and themes are summarized (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008).

In the coding process, a reflective approach was adopted, and the compatibility of the codes with the research purpose was considered. Each word or sentence was considered as an analytical unit based on context in the coding process. In the content analysis process, codes were not grouped under specific categories or themes but were coded as independent units, and common categories were created from related codes in order to establish a coding structure. When deciding on categories, the causality and relevance of codes with other codes were taken into consideration. In this context, an inductive approach was adopted in the coding process. Direct quotations from participant expressions, coded under categories, were included in the findings section to enhance the narrative.

Reliability

In academic studies, it is recommended by theorists to employ various strategies to enhance reliability (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this context, the preparation of data collection tools in the study involved seeking expert opinions, and participant validation was employed in transcribing interviews. Furthermore, direct quotations from the interviews with participants were included in the findings section, and the narrative aimed to incorporate rich descriptions.

Ethical Permits of Research

In this study, all the rules specified to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were complied with. None of the actions specified under the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, have been taken.

Ethics Committee Permission Information:

Name of the committee that made the ethical evaluation = Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee

Date of ethical review decision= 20/09/2022

Ethics assessment document issue number= 2022.10.291

Findings

As a result of the analysis of the data, the selection strategy, the purpose of elective courses, and the effect of KPSS on course preference strategies were thematicized by combining categories. In

addition, based on the themes and participant expressions, the patterns that the participants followed during their choice of elective courses were also determined.

The Selection Strategy

As a result of the analysis of the interviews with the participants, the visual expression of the categories and codes that make up the selection strategy is presented below.
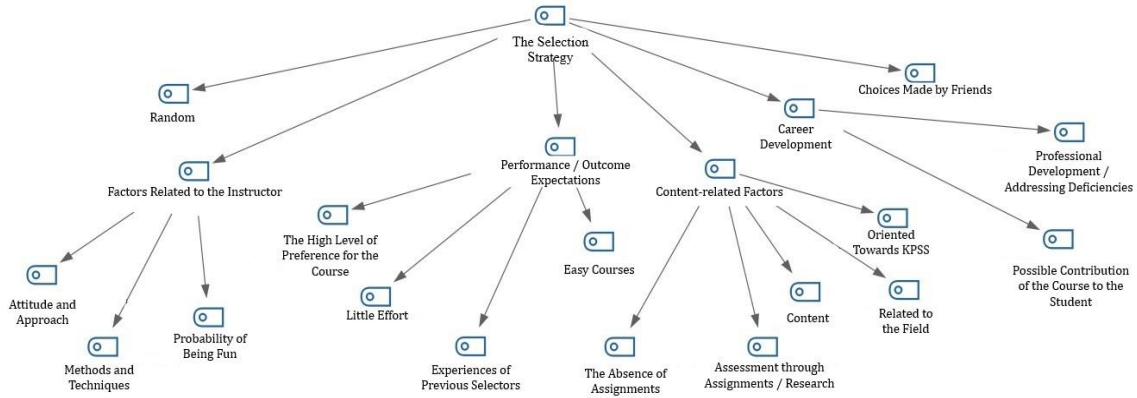

Figure 1. Theme of the selection strategy

The categories that emerged under the theme consist of career development, performance/outcome expectations, content-related factors, and factors related to the instructor. In addition to these, codes for random selection, choosing friends, and the suitability of class hours that do not fall under any category are also included under the theme.

One of the categories under the theme is factors related to the instructor. Participants have claimed that they take into consideration the instructor's ease in grading, their relationship with students, assignment practices, the classroom climate they create, and the teaching methods and techniques they employ when making elective course preferences. It is evident from the participant statements coded under this category that the instructor's approach that facilitates the course, both in terms of its teaching and grading, as well as their attitude and approach towards students, holds a significant place in student elective course preference strategies. Another important category under the selection strategy is performance/outcome expectations. Some of the codes under this category relate to the ability to easily pass the course. Some participants have stated that they prefer courses that require the least effort and are relatively light in terms of content. This code can be considered as another expression of the "ease of the course" code. Furthermore, when examining participant statements, the experiences of those who have previously taken the course and the codes indicating that the course is highly preferred actually indicate the ease of passing the course. Participants mention that they try to choose a course that they can pass more easily by benefiting from the experiences and preferences of others. When the category of content-related factors is examined, it is seen that courses related to the field or the KPSS are important. Participants state that they choose such courses because they want to prepare for the KPSS. Alternative assessment methods used during the course and the absence of assignments are also mentioned in the participants' statements. Finally, some participants have expressed that they consider the potential contribution of the course to their personal development, and they prefer courses that enable them to continue their professional development and address their deficiencies in their elective course preferences. Below is a table that includes direct quotations from the categories and codes under the theme.

Table 2. *Theme of the selection strategy – quotations from participant statements*

Category	Code	Participants	Quotations
Career Development	Possible Contribution of the Course to the Student	K7	(…)I have a distinct advantage (meaning unlike the strategies of others), you know, I look at the course, and if it adds something to me, I choose it.
	Professional Development / Addressing Deficiencies	K3	For instance, I'm mediocre in geography. I mean, I'm really mediocre. I love history a lot, but I kind of despise geography, for example. However, in spite of that, you know, just in case, to see if I might learn something or develop a liking for it, I've generally made an effort to take geography courses.
Performance / Outcome Expectations	Little Effort	K5	I choose the least demanding courses (Laughs).
	The High Level of Preference for the Course	K11	I pick the courses that many people choose, the ones with full enrollment. So many people wouldn't choose it for no reason. That means that's the course I should be taking.
	Experiences of Previous Selectors	K8	Then I check if someone has taken that course before. I ask a few people. They say it's either tough or not. From among those, I choose the easy one.
	Easy Courses	K1	Furthermore, in terms of exams, we are in our final year, preparing for the KPSS. We've been careful to choose the least challenging courses. We select easy courses for our KPSS preparations..
Content-Related Factors	Assessment through Assignments / Research	K3	(…)In assignments, actually, we are researching a specific topic, and I think we acquire information quite well about that subject. You research that assignment, then you extract the parts that will be useful for you. Like... the professor had us write articles. And I had learned the topics he gave us quite well during those articles. I think it makes more sense for the professor to assign assignments instead of exams.
	The Absence of Assignments	K11	I mean, I prefer the ones who don't make it too challenging, don't give assignments, those kinds of professors. Sometimes, though, I choose an easy professor. Sometimes they even give assignments or something.
	Oriented Towards KPSS	K10	There are elective courses related to professional knowledge. I choose the one I can benefit from in the KPSS because not every course is covered in the KPSS.
	Content	K4	I definitely look at the content. Depending on the situation, I also looked at the course content. For example, we had a history class. I chose that course, not in the sense of 'let me choose this course as a teacher and develop myself,' but I looked at it from the perspective of course content.
	Related to the Field	K2	I prefer to choose courses related to my field. If the quotas are full, I can take courses from other fields.
Factors Related to the Instructor	Probability of Being Fun	K6	I wouldn't take classes that would be boring. I would choose them if they were going to be fun
	Methods and Techniques	K9	Right now, for example, I know a few teachers. For instance, I used to take courses from "Mr. ….". We also have instructor, "Mr. ….", who really pushed us hard. I wouldn't take courses from him. You see, if I like the instructor, I would choose them even if it's challenging. I wouldn't take an easy course from a teacher I don't like. When I said the teacher pushed us, for example, if that teacher had taught the class well, I mean, if they had explained the material properly, I would still take their course. But they went through the material without teaching it, and they overwhelmed us. They gave us a very independent assignment. That's why I wouldn't take a course from them again.
	Attitude and Approach	K11	.If I choose that one, it's the same, so if I choose this one, it will be the same. In the end, I always chose the easiest teacher
Random		K2	In the first year, yes, we do choose randomly. We don't know what each person is like, their character, or anything.
Choices Made by Friends		K8	We try to choose the courses where we are together with our friends more often.
Schedule		K1	I chose the courses based on the schedule that suits me better.

When the categories and codes under the theme are considered together, it is understood that participants prioritize courses where they can generally achieve easy results in their elective course preferences, and their perceptions of the instructor and course content are significant. However, participants' perceptions of instructors are largely associated with the ease of passing the course. Participants sometimes link passing an easy course to the course itself and sometimes to the instructor. Additionally, it can be said that their desire for personal development and being in the same class with friends also influences their course selection decisions.

Theme of the Purpose of Elective Courses

The visual presentation of the categories under the theme is provided below.
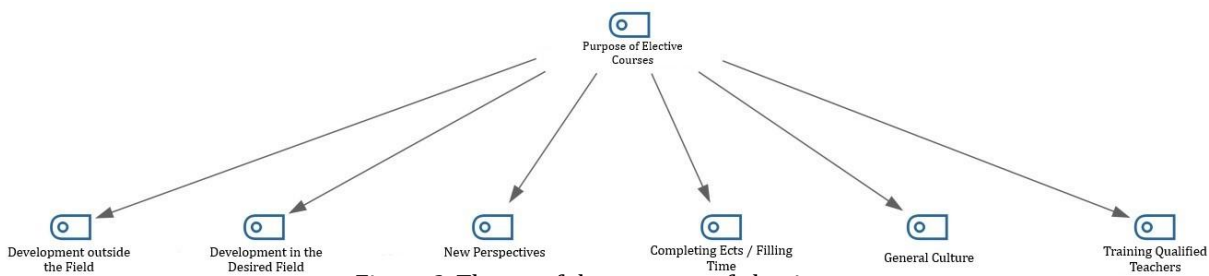
Figure 2. Theme of the purpose of elective courses

The categories under the theme are as follows: development outside the field, development in the desired field, new perspectives, completing ECTS / filling time, general culture, and training qualified teachers. A significant portion of the participants believe that elective courses are added to the program with the aim of providing new perspectives and promoting development in areas outside the field, especially in line with the interests and desires of the students. Participants' statements indicate that they associate this situation with their observation that elective courses are often in areas unrelated to their own fields. Considering the general structure of the codes, it is understood that some participants correctly interpret the purpose of adding elective courses to the program. However, some participants have evaluated the reason for the existence of elective courses in terms of ECTS or time-filling purposes. Direct quotations from participants' coded views are presented in the table below.

Table 3. *Theme of the purpose of elective courses – quotations from participant statements*

Code	Participants	Quotations
Development outside the field	K10	Maybe it's to learn new things. You know, we usually have history classes, geography in our social studies. It could be to develop in different fields. To develop outside our field.
Development in the desired field	K4	In my opinion, it's because we can progress in the field we want because we'll be more interested in it, it's an area we desire. That's why they might have done it this way. We can choose according to our own interests and desires.
New perspectives	K5	We can gain a different perspective with elective courses. Like that judo thing, it has no connection with us, I mean with social studies and all, but by taking it, maybe we can acquire knowledge. I think it can be socially beneficial as well. I can look at things differently, you know.
Completing ects / filling time	K11	Actually, they want us to fill time. Isn't it obvious from those weird courses?
General culture	K10	Elective courses serve many purposes, but the most important one is to enrich our general knowledge.
Training qualified teachers	K12	In my opinion, elective courses are there to make us better teachers.

The Impact of KPSS on Course Selection Strategies

When examining the coded views of the participants, it is evident that the majority do not consider KPSS as a criterion in course preferences directly. However, through conversations with participants, it becomes clear that behind the scenes, the central exam is the primary determinant in their course preferences. All the codes under the performance/result expectations category under the theme of selection strategies, as well as some of the codes under the content and instructor-related factors categories, are primarily motivated by the central exam.

The underlying reason for students' tendencies to choose courses that require minimal effort and are easy to pass is to make time for themselves, and the fundamental reason underlying their desire to create time is the comprehensive preparation process required for KPSS. However, some of the expressions related to content and instructors also reflect the desire for easy passage of the course. Various direct quotation examples related to this situation are presented in the table below.

Table 4. *The impact of KPSS on course selection strategies – quotations*

Participant	Quotations	Relationship with KPSS
K11	I haven't seen elective courses offered seriously outside of our field. Especially, MB (Educational Knowledge) and GK (General Culture) are completely empty. We have students sports, physics, social sciences programs in our class. How can the teacher teach one of us? If it's not related to KPSS, if that course isn't oriented towards KPSS, it's empty..	The participant emphasizes that elective courses that do not focus on KPSS are meaningless.
K7	In the final year, they could increase the number of days for internships, for example, from one day to two or three days. This would help us get to know the school, teach students, and develop ourselves. In the second year, for example, we could take an elective course. That would be beneficial for us. In the third and fourth years, courses more focused on KPSS or completely removing elective courses and giving importance to internships could be an advantage for us.	The participant suggests adding KPSS-oriented courses to the program instead of elective courses.
K12	Mine might be a bit unconventional, but under the guise of elective courses, if that course is unrelated to KPSS or our field, let it be related to our profession or education. We can have a general review course unrelated to that course, but focused on KPSS.	The participant recommends adding elective courses that could serve as preparation for KPSS to the program.
K5	I think I can choose a general culture elective course in the first or second year. In the third and fourth years, we could choose elective courses that are relevant to our field. It would be better if we had such an option from a KPSS perspective.	The participant believes that there should be no elective courses in the fourth year to allocate more time for KPSS preparation.
K8	In my opinion, there shouldn't be elective courses in the fourth year. It would be good for our preparation for KPSS, and I think we already have enough in the second and third years. There's already the internship, which is necessary, of course.	The participant believes that in the fourth grade, there should be no elective courses in terms of the remaining time for preparing for the KPSS.
K10	If there were no KPSS, I would always choose the courses that I liked. Actually, I still do to some extent, but I also consider the teacher. Without KPSS, I wouldn't choose according to KPSS. I would consider what's useful for me in class.	The participant points out that they couldn't choose elective courses that match their interests and desires due to KPSS.
K11	(If there were no KPSS) I swear, I would choose the most challenging course for me that would be useful for me. But the government (referring to the state) tells me to get assigned. Is it easy to get assigned out of hundreds of thousands? Being good in class, knowing history and geography well, it doesn't mean anything.	The participant argues that KPSS hinders their professional development.
K8	(…)of course, elective courses could be very beneficial. Because after four years of studying, we will become teachers, there's a guarantee of that. Then, I would focus on improving myself, if there was no KPSS.	The participant claims that KPSS hinders their personal development.

When the statements of the participants in the table are considered together, it is possible to say that participants are generally influenced by central exams in their elective course preferences. In this context, it has been found that KPSS could potentially be a hindrance to participants in obtaining the expected benefits from elective courses.

Course Selection Patterns Obtained from the Analysis Results

In explaining the course selection strategies of the participants, it was deemed necessary to clarify the meanings obtained from the analysis results, as some of the terms used could have different interpretations.

The term "easy course" is used by all participants to refer to a course that can be passed with minimal effort. However, it was understood from the analysis results that participants use this term to indicate the approach, methods, and techniques of the instructor rather than the course content. Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to distinguish between a course that is easy due to the instructor's approach and a course that is easy in terms of content, as the boundary between these two phenomena is unclear. Participants use the term "easy course" to refer to a course they pass with minimal effort for whatever reason.

The term "selection of friends" implies that participants choose a course that they can take with their friends, and their friends also choose.

The term "instructor's approach" indicates that participants select the course of an instructor with whom they enjoy being in class and who has a positive attitude.

When the emerging themes and participants' statements are considered together, the following preference patterns have been identified.

Table 5. *Course selection patterns*

Participant	Course Selection Patterns
K1	Convenient work schedule -> Selection of Friends -> Easy Course
K2	Easy Course -> Instructor's Approach -> Assigments -> Field Course -> Relatively Difficult Field Course
K3	Eliminating Personal Deficiency -> Method Technique and Assesment - Evaluation Approach Used by the Instructor -> Classroom Climate Created by the Instructor
K4	Easy Course -> Aproach of Instructor -> Content
K5	Easy Course
K6	Content -> Fun Classroom Climate -> Easy Course / Selection of Friends
K7	Easy Course -> Contribution to Development -> Aproach of Instructor
K8	Easy Course -> Aproach of Instructor -> Others' Experience
K9	Easy Course -> Aproach of Instructor -> Assigments
K10	Fun Content -> Contribution to Development -> Course Related to KPSS -> Selection of Friends -> Easy Course -> Aproach of Instructor
K11	Aproach of Instructor -> Assigments -> Easy Course -> Selection of Friends -> Most Chosen Course
K12	Easy Course -> Field Course -> Assigments

When examining the participants' preference patterns, the first noticeable aspect is that a large portion of them generally opt for courses they consider easy. Many participants prioritize the ease of the course in their elective course preferences, rather than the benefits they can obtain from elective courses and their own interests and desires. More than half of the participants place the ease of the course and related criteria at the forefront of their elective course preference strategies. Many of the participants who begin the course selection process with this criterion explain it as a way to allocate time for KPSS preparation. Others mention that they do not believe in the benefits of elective courses.

A striking finding obtained from the analysis is that some development-focused students and those who do not prioritize their development and show indifference in their courses have adopted the

same course preference strategies. These students consider criteria such as an easy course, a course that can be passed with minimal effort, an instructor who does not push them, and does not assign homework at the forefront of their course preferences. This phenomenon is thought to stem from a motivation source that feeds on low effort and time to pass the course. The motivation behind this is to allocate time to prepare for the central exam. Other students aim to avoid putting in effort and allocating time. Other development-focused students, on the other hand, take care to select elective courses that are likely to be related to the central exam and cover their field and professional knowledge in their elective course preferences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's results reveal that a significant portion of the participants, when choosing elective courses, primarily seek courses that are easy to pass in a way that would undermine the expected benefits from elective courses. Participants evaluate criteria such as the course's content, the instructor's qualities, and teaching methods in terms of the course's ease, aiming to focus on courses where they can achieve the best results with the least effort. Tunç, Yılmaz, and Abacı (2021) found that the intention to pass courses effortlessly significantly influences university students' course selection attitudes. In their study with engineering students, Vural and Kaplan (2020) found that factors influencing elective course preferences generally included the course's ease, recommendations from friends, and personal development. An instructor giving easy grades or the course's content being perceived as easy increases the attractiveness of the course. These findings align with the study's results, suggesting that students tend to consider how easy a course is rather than the contribution it offers in these studies as well.

Tezcan and Gümüş (2008) in their studies with biology students identified the instructor as the most important factor in elective course preferences. The authors found that students take the grading system into account and that the opinions of students who have taken the course before also have an influence on course selection. Additionally, the instructor's preferred method and the student's potential expectations of contribution are important from the students' perspective. Similarly, Uçgun (2012) found that the instructor's grading practices and peer influence were effective in elective course preferences. According to the author, the instructor's attitude has a high impact on elective course preferences. All these findings are in line with the results of the study. Students primarily consider the instructor's grading system. This finding, which aligns with our study results, shows that students evaluate whether the course can be easily passed even when assessing the instructor. Similarly, in Korukçu's (2012) research on theology students' elective course preferences, it was found that the main three factors students consider in course selection are course content, professional expectations, and instructor attitude. However, in addition to these factors, the ease of the course and peer recommendations significantly affect course preferences. According to the author, students do not want to experience the fear of "failing" in elective courses. In the same study, more than half of the students considered elective courses as either entirely or partially a formality. These findings, which are similar to the results of our study, may indicate that students in both studies do not see elective courses as an important and indispensable part of the program and do not take them seriously.

Elective courses are included in programs with various objectives, such as supporting interdisciplinary approaches, developing problem-solving skills in students (AİÇÜ, 2012), and ensuring students' multifaceted development. Furthermore, course selection, both at the undergraduate and

graduate levels, is considered an important step towards specialization in the relevant profession (Ersöz, Kabak, & Yılmaz, 2011). An important factor in actually achieving these goals is that students who will choose elective courses select courses according to their own interests and preferences and take these courses as seriously as mandatory courses. Only in this way can students choose courses based on their perceived deficiencies, interests, or desires. In their research, Tezcan and Gümüş (2008) investigated the factors that influence university students studying in science departments in their elective course choices. They found that the three most effective factors were the perception of the instructor who would teach the course, similarity to previously taken courses, and the course content. The first finding of this study aligns with the results of this study. However, another significant finding by the authors is inconsistent with this study. Yılmaz (2019), in his study with university students, found that the most important factor in elective course selection, contrary to this study, was academic and professional advancement goals. This inconsistency is thought to be due to the central exams that teacher candidates must take to work in state schools. To work as a permanent teacher in state schools, teacher candidates only need to score well in the KPSS. Therefore, being well-rounded, having developed problem-solving skills, or having an interdisciplinary approach is not important for teacher candidates regarding their ability to work in state schools. The only requirement is to achieve a high score in the KPSS to be ranked. For this reason, education faculty students may choose easy courses to allocate time for central exam preparation when they cannot find courses that will be beneficial to them in the central exam in their elective course preferences instead of continuing their development.

Theories like social cognitive theory argue that individuals observe the behaviors of others, make inferences based on their observations, and shape their actions accordingly (Bayrakcı, 2007). Students studying in education faculties aim to be assigned to public schools. In public schools, there is no significant material factor that determines the qualifications of a teacher who has already started the profession. Teachers' employment rights are independent of their qualifications. Therefore, for prospective teachers, getting employed in state schools by passing stages like the KPSS is ahead of their professional development. This situation can be considered as an obstacle to the elective course choices that prospective teachers make for their development. Because prospective teachers may prefer easy-to-pass courses that they will put less effort into and allocate more time to, rather than elective courses that will require them to exert effort, spend more time, and make them more qualified in the future. Choosing elective courses that will contribute to development has no benefit to prospective teachers beyond personal satisfaction. Prospective teachers are likely to observe this situation, and it is a behavior that can be explained by social cognitive theory.

According to Bandura (1999), actions believed to result in positive outcomes are displayed more frequently. Actions that are not believed to have any benefits or are anticipated to cause harm are not displayed. In this context, it seems reasonable for prospective teachers to expect a benefit from this action in terms of focusing on their development and allocating time in their elective course selection strategy. The participants in this study stated that they predominantly focused on KPSS in their elective course choices. Therefore, prospective teachers may choose courses that require less effort and time to prepare for the central exams, believing that such courses have a benefit. According to Bandura (1999), people can predict the possible outcomes of their actions, consider these implications when setting their goals, and design action plans. Thus, future predictions can be the determinant of short-term and long-term behaviors. When considering elective courses, it becomes clear that a prospective teacher may not choose elective courses that have the potential to contribute significantly to their personal development

but require a lot of effort, as these courses are not significant for entering the teaching profession. Instead, preparing for central exams by creating as much time as possible is a more reasonable approach from a practical perspective. Therefore, prospective teachers' choices of elective courses based on the amount of free time they will have rather than their personal and professional development can be evaluated as a reasonable approach from the perspective of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1999) also suggests that actions without rewards or with no benefits are likely to remain outside an individual's behavioral repertoire. In this regard, it is clear that choosing elective courses that offer no benefit beyond personal satisfaction and that are more difficult is not easily adopted.

People predict the possible outcomes of possible actions, set goals for themselves, and plan action plans that avoid actions that are likely to produce desired results and harm. Future events, of course, cannot be the motivation and reasons for current behavior, as they do not have real existence. However, the anticipated future can be brought to the present through anticipation. Represented cognitively in the present time, designed future situations are transformed into current motivating and behavior-regulating factors. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, beliefs about the possible outcomes of behavior are fundamentally motivating human behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Şahin & Solunoğlu, 2019). In this study, it was concluded that the most common elective course selection strategy of the participants was to choose easy courses in the first step. In light of the Theory of Planned Behavior, participants may believe that elective courses that focus on development but may be difficult to pass will not be useful in the future, or the benefit they will gain is insignificant compared to the effort and time they will spend. Therefore, it is possible that participants are inclined to choose courses that they can pass with minimal effort. Since such courses that require less effort can save time for studying for central exams, prospective teachers may be orienting their strategies with the belief that there is a benefit to choosing such elective courses. According to Bandura (1999), people can predict the possible outcomes of their actions, consider these implications when setting their goals, and design action plans. Thus, future predictions can be the determinant of short-term and long-term behaviors. This information, in the context of elective courses, makes it clear that prospective teachers may not choose elective courses that have the potential to contribute significantly to their personal and professional development but require a lot of effort because these courses are not significant for entering the teaching profession. Instead, preparing for central exams by creating as much time as possible is a more reasonable approach from a practical perspective. Therefore, prospective teachers' choices of elective courses based on the amount of free time they will have rather than their personal and professional development can be evaluated as a reasonable approach from the perspective of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1999) also suggests that actions without rewards or with no benefits are likely to remain outside an individual's behavioral repertoire. In this regard, it is clear that choosing elective courses that offer no benefit beyond personal satisfaction and that are more difficult is not easily adopted.

The presence of elective courses is primarily because students can have a say in their own learning experiences. However, it is also clear that universities do not involve students in the process of determining elective courses. In some universities, elective courses are observed in various faculties' websites' exam and course schedules, and it is observed that elective courses are offered at certain levels and each student is required to choose one of two elective courses at each class level and type, as seen in the research. In this context, it is evident that the institution of elective courses has been equated to a kind of mandatory course status by removing it from its reasons for existence. Therefore, students' right to choose elective courses based on their development, interests, and needs is effectively taken

away, and their course selection strategies are directed towards choosing the easiest courses. Bursa and Ersoy (2020) also mention findings in their studies that social studies teacher candidates perceive elective courses as mandatory courses due to the limitation of their choice rights. This phenomenon may also affect the elective course choices of prospective teachers. In this context, Bursa and Ersoy (2020) recommend considering student preferences in determining elective courses. In many universities, elective courses are determined by faculty members or faculty administrations. Usually, a standard plan is prepared, courses are assigned to faculty members, and students are offered a choice based on their preferences. Although there are 52 elective courses in the Social Studies Teacher Training Program (SBÖP, 2018), in many faculties, most of these courses are not offered, and students are forced to choose from the standard and limited number of courses opened according to the qualifications and wishes of faculty members.

In conclusion, it can be said that the course selection strategies of the participants in this study are mostly based on the perception that elective courses are unnecessary, time-consuming, and motivated by choosing the easiest option. However, at the same time, the same participants interpret the addition of elective courses to the program as a well-intentioned effort. According to these participants, elective courses have been added to the program for good and important purposes. Nevertheless, despite these thoughts, the participants choose the easier option rather than focusing on personal or professional development in their elective course choices. This can be interpreted as a contradiction, but the behavior of the participants is based on understandable reasons. The main reason for this avoidance behavior of participants who choose not to benefit from elective courses that they believe have positive purposes is the KPSS. It can be said that participants set aside their personal development because they will confront the reality of KPSS. Therefore, it is considered reasonable that the behavior preferences of the participants are reasonable in the context of Social Cognitive Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Prospective teachers are choosing behaviors that will be in their favor.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the study data and the results obtained, the following recommendations are considered to be beneficial:

1- Needs Analysis for Determining Elective Courses: Universities can conduct needs analysis studies in the process of determining elective courses. In this context, student needs can be identified, and elective courses that meet these needs can be added to the programs. By aligning elective courses with student needs, universities can offer a more relevant and beneficial curriculum.

2- Research on Factors Considered by Faculty Members: Qualitative and quantitative studies can be conducted to uncover the factors that faculty members take into consideration when offering elective courses. This research can help compare the considerations of faculty members with the strategies adopted by students when choosing their courses. As a result, it can raise awareness among faculty members about the importance of considering students' selection strategies when offering elective courses.

3- Evaluation of Implementation of Program Guidelines: The deanships of education faculties can conduct research and evaluations to assess the implementation of the guidelines specified in teacher education undergraduate programs. This can help ensure that the rules and

regulations established by the programs are effectively put into practice and that any deviations from the intended goals are prevented.

By implementing these recommendations, universities and education faculties can create more student-centered and effective elective course offerings, ultimately benefiting both students and the education system.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Contribution Rate of Researchers

Author 1: 100%

Conflict Statement

There is no material or individual organic connection with the people or institutions involved in the research and there is no conflict of interest in the research.

Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet

Sosyal Bilgiler Eğitiminde Seçmeli Ders Seçme Stratejileri

Giriş

Eğitim, standart anlayışın dışında, mümkün olduğunca öğrenciye kendi öğrenmesi hakkında seçim hakkı tanıyan bir alan haline gelmiştir. Çağdaş eğitim sistemlerinde öğrenci özgürlüğüne fazlasıyla önem verilmektedir. Lewis, Anderson ve Carroll (2020), günümüzde eğitimin didaktik boyutuyla olduğu kadar öğrencilere kazandırmak isteği otonomi ve kendi eğitim – öğretim yolunu çizme özgürlüğüyle de anıldığını belirtmektedir. Kişiselleştirilmiş öğrenme stratejileri ve müdahaleleri ile bunların akademik başarı üzerindeki etkisinin değerlendirildiği Hanover Research raporunda ise (Hanover Research, 2014) öğrenciye program ve dolayısıyla kendi eğitim yolu hakkında seçme hakkı tanıyan, öğrencilerin seçim yapmasını kolaylaştıran yaklaşımların, öğrencilerin katılımlarını, motivasyonlarını ve başarılarını arttırdığı belirtilmektedir.

Avrupa devletleri, yükseköğretimde standartlar oluşturmak amacıyla 1999 yılında Bologna Sürecini başlatmıştır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti de Bologna Sürecine katılan ülkelerden biri olmuştur. Bologna Sürecinin temel amacı, yükseköğretimde akademik standartlar belirlemektir. Bu bağlamda Türkiye, yükseköğretim alanında bazı yeni uygulamaları yürürlüğe koymuştur. Bu uygulamalardan biri de seçmeli derslerin tüm derslere oranının en az %25 olarak belirlenmesidir. Bu oran, Bologna Süreci'nin seçmeli derslere verdiği önemi göstermektedir. Türkiye'de yükseköğretimde uygulanan lisans programları iki ders türünün birleşiminden oluşur: zorunlu dersler ve seçmeli dersler. Zorunlu dersler, eğitim verilen programların ilişkili olduğu alanlara yöneliktir. Her öğrenci bu dersleri almak zorundadır. Seçmeli dersler ise öğrencilerin gönüllü olarak seçtikleri derslerdir. Seçmeli derslerin öğretim programlarına alınmasının temel nedeni disiplinler arası yaklaşımı desteklemek ve problem çözebilen bireyler yetiştirmektir (AİÇÜ, 2021). Seçmeli derslerin öğrencilerin bilişsel, duyuşsal ve sosyal gelişimlerine katkı sağlaması muhtemeldir. Çağın getirdiği hızlı değişim sonucunda bireylerin kendi alanlarında yetkin ve yeterli olmaları yeterli olmamaktadır. Toplumlar artık hızlı değişime ayak

uydurabilen, çeşitli becerilere sahip çok yönlü bireylere ihtiyaç duymaktadır (Demir & Ok, 1996). Seçmeli dersler, öğrencilere kendilerini istedikleri yönde geliştirme olanağı sunabilir. Dolayısıyla öğrencilerin seçmeli ders tercihleri, kendi gelişimleri bakımından önem arz eder.

Öğrenciler, akademik ya da günlük hayatla ilgili birçok karar alırlar. Bu kararlar aile, arkadaş, öğretmen, okul, önbilgiler ve deneyimler gibi birçok faktörden etkilenir (Jain & Jain, 2018). Seçmeli ders seçimi de öğrencilerin karar vermek zorunda oldukları konulardan birisidir. Seçmeli ders seçmek çoğunlukla öğrenciler için zor ve karmaşık bir süreçtir (Baruch, 2009). Öğrenci ve seçmeli ders sayılarının artması uygun olan seçmeli dersi seçme sürecini daha zor bir hale getirmektedir (Parker vd., 2006). Ayrıca alternatifler arasından uygun dersi seçme, birden fazla unsurun göz önünde bulundurulmasını gerektiren bir karar verme sürecini ifade eder (Ersöz, Kabak ve Yılmaz, 2011). Uygun seçmeli dersin seçilmesi önemlidir çünkü ilerleyen süreçte birçok alanda bu seçimin maddi ve manevi sonuçları ortaya çıkar (Holtom & Inderriede, 2007). Ancak bu durumun Türkiye'deki tüm öğretmenleri kapsadığını söylemek mümkün değildir. Çünkü Türkiye'de öğretmen adaylarının neredeyse tamamı, merkezi bir sınav sonucunda devlet okullarına atanmayı amaçlar (Özcan, Yöntem & Yücel, 2021). Görev yapan öğretmenlerin büyük bir bölümü devlet okullarında istihdam edilir. Devlet okullarında görev yapan öğretmenler ise birbirleriyle aynı gelire ve haklara sahiptir. Öğretmenin niteliği ya da eğitim sürecinde almış olduğu seçmeli dersler bir fark yaratmaz. Bu gerçek, seçmeli dersleri eğitim fakültelerinde daha önemli bir konuma taşımaktadır. Çünkü devlette görev yapan öğretmenler, lisans eğitimlerinde aldıkları seçmeli derslerin maddi bir faydasını görmezler. Meslek hayatına kabullerinde de bazı seçmeli ders gruplarının kapsamındaki konuların hiçbir etkisi bulunmamaktadır. Bu durum ise öğretmenlerin seçmeli ders tercihlerinde kolay olanı tercih etme olasılıklarını açığa çıkarabilir. Böylece seçmeli derslerden beklenen fayda elde edilemeyebilir.

Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenleri, ülkenin insan kaynağını, etkin ve etkili vatandaşlık becerilerine sahip, nitelikli vatandaşlara çevirmekle yükümlü kişilerdir. Dolayısıyla sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin, sosyal becerileri ve iletişim becerileri gelişmiş, problem çözen çok yönlü kişiler olması gerekmektedir. Seçmeli dersler de bu amaca yönelik önemli araçlardır. Ancak yukarıda da bahsedildiği üzere seçmeli ders tercihleri birçok faktörden etkilenmektedir. Bununla birlikte söz konusu faktörlerin sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adaylarının seçmeli derslere yönelik tutumlarını nasıl etkilediğine dönük bir çalışmaya literatürde rastlanılmamıştır. Bu bağlamda sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin seçmeli ders tercih süreçlerinde izledikleri strateji ve örüntüleri açığa çıkarmak anlamlı bulunmuştur. Ayrıca sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adaylarının seçmeli ders konusundaki davranış örüntülerini bireylerin davranışlarını açıklamakta sıklıkla kullanılan Sosyal Bilişsel Teori, Gerekçelendirilmiş Eylem Teorisi ve Planlı Davranış Teorisi kapsamında değerlendirmek, seçmeli derslerden beklenen faydanın sağlanması amacıyla yapılabileceklere yönelik önemli bilgiler sunabilir.

Yöntem

Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmenliği lisans programında öğrenim gören ve her düzeyde seçmeli ders tercih etmiş öğretmen adaylarının seçmeli ders tercih sürecindeki yaklaşımlarını incelemeyi amaçlayan bu araştırma nitel yöntemlerden fenomenolojiye uygun yürütülmüştür. Çalışma kapsamında katılımcıların "seçmeli ders" fenomenine yükledikleri anlamlar araştırıldığından fenomenoloji deseni tercih edilmiştir. Fenomenolojik çalışmalarda bireylerin söz konusu fenomenle ilgili yaşanmış deneyimlerinin ortak anlamı araştırılır (Creswell, 2013). Bu çalışmada incelenen fenomen "seçmeli ders

tercihi" olmuştur. Bu bağlamda katılımcıların gerek seçmeli derslere yükledikleri anlamlar, gerekse seçmeli ders tercih sürecine yönelik deneyimleri ile takip ettikleri yol incelenmiştir.

Araştırma katılımcıları bir devlet üniversitesinde sosyal bilgiler öğretmenliği programında kayıtlı öğretmen adaylarından seçilmiştir. Katılımcıların seçiminde amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden ölçüt örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Örnekleme seçiminde seçime esas ölçütler; sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adayı olmak, başarısız dersi olmamak, 3.00 ve üzerinde genel not ortalamasına sahip olmak ve en az on adet seçmeli ders seçmiş olmak olarak belirlenmiştir. Başarıya ilişkin ölçütlerin aranma sebebi eğitim ve öğretim süreçlerini ciddiye almayan öğrencileri elemektir. En az on adet seçmeli ders seçme ölçütü ile de araştırmaya konu olgu hakkında deneyimli öğrencileri örnekleme dahil etme amacı güdülmüştür.

Çalışmada veriler araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmacı, Türk ve dünya literatüründe öğrencilerin seçmeli ders tercihlerini konu edinen araştırmaları inceleyerek taslak sorular hazırlamıştır. Hazırlanan form, sosyal bilgiler eğitimi ve eğitim programları ve öğretim alanlarında uzman ikişer kişinin görüşlerine sunulmuştur. Uzman dönütlerine uygun olarak düzenlenen form son olarak iki Türkçe uzmanın görüşleri neticesinde son halini almıştır. Formun son halinde dört ana soru yer almaktadır.

Katılımcılarla, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak yüzyüze görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmelerin tamamında hazırlanan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formunda yer alan sorular katılımcılara yöneltilmiştir. Katılımcılarla yapılan görüşmelerde yüzeysel kalan ve derinleştirmeye ihtiyaç duyulan anlarda, katılımcı cevaplarına bağlı sonda sorular kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılarla birebir yapılan görüşmeler 15-25 dakika, odak grup görüşmeleri ise yaklaşık 50'şer dakika sürmüştür. Görüşmelere başlamadan önce katılımcıların çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmayı ve görüşmeler esnasında sesli kayıt alınmasını kabul edip etmedikleri sorulmuş, kararlarını ses kaydı başladıktan sonra da teyit etmeleri istenmiştir. Gerek birebir gerekse odak grup görüşmelerinde katılımcıların teyidi doğrultusunda sesli kayıt alınmıştır.

Çalışma kapsamında toplanan veriler tek bir veri seti olarak kabul edilmiş ve aynı analiz süreçlerine tabi tutulmuştur. Gerek birebir görüşmelerde gerekse odak grup görüşmelerinde alınan ses kayıtları araştırmacı tarafından transkript edilmiş ve kelime işlemci programına girilmiştir. Dökümü hazırlanan görüşmeler katılımcılara sunularak gerçeğe uygunluğu teyit edilmiştir. Ham verilerin iki kere okunmasının ardından kodlama sürecine geçilmiştir. Kodlama işlemi içerik analizini uygun olarak yürütülmüştür. İçerik analizi; belirli kurallara dayalı olarak metnin kodlanması, kodlama sonucunda oluşan kategori ve temaların özetlendiği sistematik ve tekrarlanabilir bir yaklaşım olarak tanımlanabilir (Büyüköztürk vd, 2008).

Kodlama işleminde yansıtıcı bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş ve kodların araştırma amacıyla uyumu gözetilmiştir. Kodlama işleminde bağlama göre her kelime ya da cümle birer analiz birimi olarak kabul edilmiştir. İçerik analizi sürecinde kodlar herhangi bir kategori ya da tema altında değil, bağımsız birimler olarak kodlanmış ve bir kodlama yapısına ulaşmak amacıyla ilişkili kodlardan ortak kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Kategorilere karar verilmesinde kodların diğer kodlarla nedenselliği ve ilişkiliği göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. Bu bağlamda kodlama sürecinde tümevarımsal bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Anlatımı güçlendirmek amacıyla kategoriler altında kodlanan katılımcı ifadelerinden doğrudan alıntılara bulgular bölümünde yer verilmiştir.

Bulgular

Verilerin analizi sonucunda oluşan kategoriler; seçme stratejisi, seçmeli derslerin amacı ve ders tercih stratejilerinde KPSS'nin etkisi başlıkları altında temalaştırılmıştır. Ayrıca temalardan ve katılımcı ifadelerinden hareketle katılımcıların seçmeli ders tercihi sırasında takip ettikleri örüntüler de belirlenmiştir.

Seçme stratejisi teması altında oluşan kategoriler; gelişim kaygısı, performans/sonuç beklentisi, içerikli ilgili faktörler ve öğretim üyesiyle ilgili faktörlerden ibarettir. Bunlarla birlikte herhangi bir kategori altında yer almayan rastgele seçim, arkadaş seçimi ve ders saatlerinin uygunluğu kodları da tema altında yer almıştır.

Seçme stratejisi teması altındaki kategorilerden biri öğretim üyesiyle ilgili faktörlerdir. Katılımcılar, öğretim üyesinin puanlama noktasında gösterdiği kolaylığı, öğrencilerle ilişkisini, ödev verme durumunu, oluşturduğu sınıf iklimini ve derste kullandığı yöntem ve teknikleri seçmeli ders tercihinde dikkate aldıklarını ileri sürmüşlerdir. Katılımcıların, öğretim üyesinin dersi gerek işleniş gerekse not verme konusunda kolaylaştıran yaklaşımı ile öğrencilere karşı tutum ve yaklaşımının öğrenci seçmeli ders tercih stratejilerinde önemli bir yer tuttuğu kategori altında kodlanan katılımcı ifadelerinden anlaşılmaktadır.

Seçme stratejisi altında yer alan bir başka önemli kategori ise performans/sonuç beklentisidir. Bu kategori altındaki kodların bazıları da dersi kolayca geçebilmekle ilgilidir. Katılımcıların bazıları en az çabayı gerektiren, içerik bakımından nispeten hacimsiz dersleri tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu kod "dersin kolay olması" kodunun başka bir türlü ifadesi olarak değerlendirilebilir. Ayrıca katılımcı ifadeleri incelendiğinde önceden dersi alanların deneyimleri ve dersin yüksek seviyede tercih ediliyor olması kodları da esasında dersin kolay geçilmesini işaret etmektedir. Katılımcılar, diğerlerinin tecrübe ve tercihlerinden yararlanarak daha rahat geçebilecekleri dersi tercih etmeye çalıştıklarını belirtmektedir. İçerikle ilgili faktörler kategorisi incelendiğinde alana ya da KPSS'ye yönelik derslerin önem arz ettiği görülmektedir. Katılımcılar bu tür dersleri seçerek, KPSS'ye hazırlanmak istediklerini beyan etmektedir. Ders sürecinde kullanılan alternatif ölçme yöntemleri ve ödev verilmemesi de katılımcıların ifadelerinde yer almıştır.

Katılımcıların kodlanan görüşleri incelendiğinde doğrudan çoğunlukla KPSS'yi ders tercihinde bir kriter olarak görmedikleri anlaşılmaktadır. Ancak bununla birlikte ders tercihlerinde perde arkasında temel belirleyicinin söz konusu merkezi sınav olduğu katılımcılarla yapılan görüşmelerden anlaşılmaktadır. Seçme stratejileri teması altında yer alan performans/sonuç beklentisi kategorisindeki kodların tamamının, içerikle ve öğretim üyesiyle ilgili faktörler kategorilerinin altındaki kodların ise bir kısmının temel gerekçesi merkezi sınavdır. Öğrencilerin az emekle ve sorunsuz geçebilecekleri tercih etme eğilimlerinin altında yatan temel neden kendilerine vakit oluşturma, vakit oluşturma isteklerinin altında yatan temel neden ise KPSS hazırlığının kapsamlı bir çalışma süreci gerektirmesidir. Bununla birlikte içerikle ve öğretim üyeleriyle ilgili ifadelerin de bir kısmı dersin kolay geçilebilmesi arzusunu yansıtmaktadır.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Çalışma sonucunda katılımcıların büyük bir bölümünün seçmeli ders tercih ederken seçmeli derslerden beklenen faydayı boşa çıkaracak şekilde sadece kolay geçilecek dersleri aradığı anlaşılmıştır. Katılımcılar dersin içeriği, öğretim üyesinin özellikleri ve öğretim pratikleri gibi kriterleri de dersin

kolay olması bakımından değerlendirmekte ve en az emekle en iyi sonucu alabileceği derslere yönelmektedir. Tunç, Yılmaz ve Abacı (2021), zahmetsiz ders geçme niyetinin üniversite öğrencilerinin ders seçim tutumlarını önemli bir ölçüde etkilediğini tespit etmiştir. Vural ve Kaplan mühendislik fakültesi öğrencileri ile gerçekleştirdikleri çalışmalarında (2020) seçmeli ders tercihinde etkili olan faktörlerin genel olarak dersin kolaylığı, arkadaş tavsiyesi ve kişisel gelişim olduğunu tespit etmiştir.

Tezcan ve Gümüş (2008) biyoloji öğrencileriyle yaptıkları çalışmalarında seçmeli ders tercihinde en önemli faktörün öğretim üyesi olduğunu belirlemişlerdir. Yazarlar, öğrencilerin not sistemini gözettiklerini ve dersi daha önce alan öğrencilerin görüşlerinin de ders seçiminde etkili olduğunu tespit etmiştir. Bununla birlikte öğretim üyesinin tercih ettiği yöntem ve öğrencinin olası katkı beklentisi de öğrenciler açısından önem arz etmektedir. Uçgun (2012) da benzer şekilde öğretim üyesinin not verme pratikleri ve arkadaş etkisi seçmeli ders tercihinde etkili olduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır. Bilhassa yazara göre öğretim üyesinin tutumu seçmeli ders tercihine üst seviyede yansımaktadır. Tüm bu bulgular çalışma sonuçlarıyla paraleldir. Öğrenciler öncelikle öğretim üyesinin not sistemini dikkate almaktadır. Çalışmamız sonuçlarıyla örtüşen bu bulgu, öğrencilerin öğretim üyesi değerlendirirken dahi öncelikli olarak dersin kolay geçilip geçilemeyeceğini değerlendirdiklerini göstermektedir. Benzer olarak Korukçu (2012), ilahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin seçmeli ders tercihlerini incelediği araştırmasında öğrencilerin ders seçiminde gözettikleri temel üç etkenin ders içeriği, mesleki beklenti ve öğretim elemanı tutumu olduğunu tespit etmiştir. Çalışma sonuçları, bu çalışmanın bulguları ile örtüşmektedir.

Sosyal bilişsel teori gibi kuramlar, bireylerin diğerlerinin davranışlarını gözlemlediklerini, gözlemlerinden hareketle çıkarımda bulunduklarını ve eylemlerini şekillendirdiklerini savunur (Bayrakcı, 2007). Eğitim fakültelerinde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin temel amacı kamu okullarına atanmaktır. Kamu okullarında ise mesleğe başlamış bir öğretmen için niteliği önemli kılan maddi bir unsur bulunmamaktadır. Öğretmenlerin özlük hakları niteliklerinden bağımsızdır. Dolayısıyla öğretmen adayları açısından KPSS gibi aşamaları geçerek devlet okullarında istihdam edilmek, profesyonel gelişimlerinin önündedir. Bahse konu bu durum öğretmen adaylarının gelişimlerine dönük seçmeli ders tercih etmelerinin önünde bir engel olarak düşünülebilir. Çünkü öğretmen adaylarının, çaba gösterecekleri ve daha fazla vakit ayıracakları, kendilerini daha nitelikli kılacak seçmeli dersler yerine kolay geçilebilecek dersler seçmeleri gelecekleri açısından lehlerine olan bir yaklaşımdır. Gelişime katkı sağlayacak seçmeli ders tercihinin bireysel tatmin dışında öğretmen adaylarına bir getirisi yoktur. Öğretmen adaylarının ise bu durumu gözlemliyor olması kuvvetle muhtemeldir ve sosyal bilişsel teori ile açıklanabilecek bir davranıştır.

Bandura'ya (1999) göre olumlu sonuçlanacağı düşünülen eylemler daha fazla sergilenir. Süreç sonunda herhangi bir getirisi olacağına ikna olunmayan ya da zarar getireceği öngörülen eylemler ise sergilenmez. Bu bağlamda öğretmen adaylarının seçmeli ders seçim stratejilerinde gelişimlerini gözetmeleri ve vakit ayırmaları için bu eylemin bir getirisi olmasını beklemeleri olağan görünmektedir. Çalışmadaki katılımcılar seçmeli ders tercihlerinde yüksek oranda KPSS odaklı karar verdiklerini beyan etmektedir. Dolayısıyla öğretmen adayları herhangi bir getirisi öngörülemeyen ve vakit alan seçmeli dersleri tercih etmek yerine az emek ve çabayla geçebilecekleri dersleri tercih ediyor olabilirler. Çünkü az zahmet ve emek isteyen dersler merkezi sınava çalışmak için vakit kazandırabilir. Böylece öğretmen adayları bu tür seçmeli derslerin bir getirisi olduğu inancıyla stratejilerini uyarlıyor olabilirler. Bandura'ya (1999) göre insanlar eylemlerinin olası sonuçlarını öngörebilirler, hedeflerini belirlerken

bu konudaki çıkarımlarını göz önünde bulundururlar ve eylem planlarını tasarlarlar. Böylece geleceğe yönelik öngörüler, kısa ve uzun vadeli davranışların belirleyicisi olabilir. Bu bilgiler seçmeli dersler bakımından düşünüldüğünde, bir öğretmen adayının kişisel gelişime yüksek düzeyde katkı sağlama potansiyeli olan ancak fazlasıyla emek gerektirdiği halde mesleğe girişinde işlevsiz olan seçmeli dersleri tercih etmemesi anlaşılır hale gelmektedir. Çünkü öğretmenlik mesleğine atanabilmek için seçmeli derslerin büyük bir önemi yoktur, aksine kendine mümkün olduğunca zaman yaratarak merkezi sınavlara hazırlanmak fiili durum açısından daha makul bir yaklaşımdır. Bu nedenle öğretmen adaylarının kişisel ve mesleki gelişimleri yerine sahip olacakları boş vakit miktarını düşünerek seçmeli ders tercihinde bulunmaları sosyal bilişsel teori bakımından anlaşılır bir yaklaşım olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bandura (1999), ödülsüz kalan ya da getirisi olmayan eylemlerin bireyin davranış repertuarının dışında kalma olasılığının yüksek olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bu bakımdan da kişisel tatmin dışında bir getirisi olmayan daha zor seçmeli dersler seçme eyleminin kolay benimsenmeyeceği açıktır.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışmada katılımcılarının ders tercih stratejilerinin çoğunlukla seçmeli derslerin gereksiz olduğu, vakit aldığı motivasyonundan hareketle en kolay olana yönelme şeklinde gerçekleştiği söylenebilir. Ancak bununla birlikte aynı katılımcıların büyük bir bölümü seçmeli derslerin programa eklenmesini iyi niyetli bir çaba olarak yorumlamaktadır. Söz konusu katılımcılara göre seçmeli dersler iyi ve önemli amaçlarla programa eklenmiştir. Ancak bu düşüncelerine rağmen katılımcılar seçmeli derslerde kişisel ya da profesyonel gelişimi gözetmek yerine, kolay olanı tercih etmektedir. Bu bir çelişki olarak yorumlanabilir ancak katılımcıların davranışları anlaşılabilir bir gerekçeye dayanmaktadır. Katılımcıların olumlu amaçları olduğunu düşündükleri seçmeli derslerden faydalanmak yerine kaçınma davranışı göstermelerinin temel sebebi KPSS'dir. Katılımcılar KPSS gerçeği ile yüzleşeceklerinden kişisel gelişimlerini bir kenara bıraktıkları söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla katılımcıların davranış tercihlerinin Sosyal Bilişsel Teori ve Planlı Davranış Teorisi bağlamında makul olduğu düşünülmektedir. Öğretmen adayları kendi lehlerine olacak davranışları tercih etmektedir.

Öneriler

Çalışma verilerinin analizi ve elde edilen sonuçlar ışığında aşağıdaki önerilerin faydalı olabileceği düşünülmüştür:

Üniversitelerde seçmeli derslerin belirlenmesi süreçlerinde ihtiyaç analizi çalışmaları yapılabilir. Bu bağlamda öğrenci ihtiyaçları belirlenerek ihtiyaçlara karşılık gelecek seçmeli dersler programlara eklenebilir.

Öğretim üyelerinin seçmeli ders açarken dikkate aldığı hususları ortaya koyacak nitel ve nicel çalışmalar yürütülebilir. Bu sayede öğretim üyelerinin seçmeli ders açarken dikkate aldıkları hususlar ile öğrencilerin ders seçerken uyguladıkları stratejiler karşılaştırılabilir. Sonuç olarak öğretim üyelerinin seçmeli ders açarken öğrencilerin seçim stratejilerini de dikkate almaları gerektiği yönünde farkındalık sahibi olmaları sağlanabilir.

Eğitim fakültelerinin dekanlıkları öğretmen yetiştirme lisans programlarında belirtilen hususların uygulanma durumlarını ortaya koyacak araştırma ve incelemeler gerçekleştirebilir. Böylece programların bir amaca dönük olarak uygulamaya koydukları kuralların fiilen ortadan kaldırılmasının önüne geçilebilir.