

First-Year Student Views on Geography as a Department and as a Profession

Coğrafya Bölümü Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Coğrafya Bölümüne ve Mesleğine Yönelik Görüşleri

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Özet

Nitelikli bir coğrafya eğitimi gerçekleştirebilmek için öğrencilerin doğru tanınması gereklidir. Coğrafya bölümünde eğitim gören öğrenciler farklı illerden geldikleri gibi öğrenme kabiliyetleri de farklılık göstermektedir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin coğrafya eğitimi alma amaçları tamamen aynı sebebe bağlı olmadığı gibi coğrafya mesleğine yönelik görüşleri de aynı değildir. Bu araştırmada coğrafya bölümünde eğitim gören birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin görüşleri tespit edilmek istenmiştir. Araştırma dört üniversitede yapılmış olup likert tipi anket uygulaması ile veriler elde edilmiş, SPSS programı ile analizler yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: coğrafya eğitimi, öğrenci, yükseköğretim, meslek.

Abstract

Students should be understood properly to give them a qualified geography education. Students studying in the Department of Geography do come from different cities, and their learning capabilities thus differ as well. Moreover, the reasons that students desire a geography education are not the same for all. Similarly, their views on the geography profession are not the same either. This study examines the views of first-year students already studying geography at four universities where the study data were collected, utilizing a Likert-type questionnaire. All analyses were conducted via a SPSS program.

Keywords: geography education, student, higher education, vocation

1. Introduction

Geography is one of the few disciplines that can provide a great insight on the interaction between places and humans. That being the case, many concepts are included in the study area of geographers (Coe, Kenny and Yeung, 2013). While these concepts are associated with each other in a variety of ways, most are intersecting sites for the sub-branches of geography. On the one hand, geographers analyze the differences for physical and humane characteristics using a time-wise and spatial scale (Owen and Ryan, 2006), however, on the other hand, the questions about “what should be taught” in geography (Benejam, 1993) and “how it should be taught” frequently address a specific agenda and critical thinking capacity of the students is questioned. In this sense, providing an education without knowing the students who are receiving that education and their views on the Department of Geography is a deficiency (Ünlü, 2014). Empathizing makes it more possible to thoroughly know the students and learn their views on geography. In this sense, there is a clear need to know and understand student expectations to be able to deliver a reliable geography education and deliver it well (Howes and Hopkin, 2002).

The university sector is an intense change of scene, particularly in certain Western and Eastern territories the World (Biggs and Tang, 2007). In addition to a changing scene at universities, the number of universities offering geography and studies related to geography education are on the rise worldwide (Gerberd and Williams, 2000, p.209-219). The number of students and academicians in Turkey studying geography have increased as well (Özey, 1998). Hence, there is a clear need for renovation of all geography curricula in many countries to eliminate deficiencies and let geography education progress positively (Meredith, 1985).

Indeed, the growth in higher education not only brings students from different backgrounds, ambitions, and needs together (Brennan, 2002) but also allows students with different learning paces and problem-solving skills to work together and learn more. This circumstance creates an obligation to distinguish individual differences and also understand and appreciate the value of each and every student. From the point of view regarding education only, however, it is important to stress certain methods and techniques during all class instructions (Battersby, 2003), particularly since most geography instruction today is still delivered as in-class lectures. Thus, new strategies and practices are needed for a better education process (National Academy of Sciences, 2002) as well as a need to employ a variety of approaches during instruction to increase all student achievement. In this sense, there should be greater open interaction and cooperation between the instructor and the students (Limniou, Papadopoulos and Kozaris, 2009), and all the expectations and learning characteristics of students should be met using different instruction methods.

As is the same in every phase of education, it is a well-accepted reality that studies to increase the quality in higher education are widely accepted worldwide. Further, providing the society with individuals who are competent and can meet the expectations of the business world is now a prominent focus (Patır and Yıldız, p.294). Therefore, education has currently become one of the areas where the developed countries are making the biggest investment. In this regard, today universities are also widely considered as research centers (Gibbons, 2003).

Starting in the late 19th century and moving onwards, higher education institutions began to undertake both research and instruction functions instead of offering just education. Later, higher education institutions started to develop stronger relations with the industrial sector and become the initiators of new developments in the industrial sector. In this sense, universities undertook a new and important role during the interaction period in the innovative sense with information-based production companies (Rutten, Bökema and Kuijpers, 2003). Key factors of this change were technology and production as well as the feasibility of transferring these developments instantly around the world (Lambert and Morgan, 2010). Therefore, current economic activities and conditions are now playing an important role in education (Lambert and John Morgan, 2010) and indeed become the main transporters of scientific developments to the younger generation. Universities educate scientists for the society while also holding the primary position for letting students acquire many different professions.

One of the priorities of students who are studying geography in higher education is to become an expert in the field and make geography an important part of their professional lives. Indeed, it is important for individuals to select appropriate professions for themselves, so that a professional can be beneficial both to himself/herself and his or her society (Pekkaya and Çolak, 2013). Loving a profession means working devotedly and successfully at it. Carrying out one's profession successfully means loving what you do before anything else (Koroğlu, 2014). In this sense, it is especially important to conduct geographical studies that educational perspectives on students who are studying in Departments of Geography at different universities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the views of first-year students who are studying geography. In this sense, student satisfaction levels on becoming a geography student, their eagerness to study geography, and their views on whether or not they will be effective geographers after graduation were also collected. Further, this study gathers student views on job opportunities after graduating from Departments of Geography, the future of the geography profession, whether the profession will make them happy, whether they will pursue another profession or more education after graduation, and whether the geography profession is a high-earning profession. In addition, questions on whether the geography subjects covered during geography education involve examples from daily life and the effect of geography education on personality were asked to the students. Therefore, a clear determination of the views of students studying in Departments of Geography in relation to geography constituted the main purpose of this study.

2. Method

Research Method

In order to increase the reliability of the research, all of the findings were together without making any comments. Quantitative data analysis method used in the study. A Likert-type questionnaire was used in the study to collect the data, and 12 questions were given to the students. The data obtained were evaluated for frequency, reliability, and arithmetic mean analysis. Analyses were carried out using the SPSS 22.0 statistical program. The mean of reliability analysis (Cronbach Alpha) was calculated as .742.

On the Likert- type questionnaire, the 5-point Likert type questions were rated as follows: “1- I totally disagree, 2- I agree a bit, 3- I agree to some extent, 4- I strongly agree, 5- I totally agree”.

Study Group

A total of 129 students participated in the study. All were first-year students from 4 universities and divided as follows: 37 students from Namık Kemal University; 17 students from Marmara University; 50 students from Karabük University; and 25 students from Kastamonu University.

Of the 129 students who participated in the study, 76 were males (41.1%) and 53 were females (58.9%). The distribution of the participants by the area of study in high school was as follows: There were 54 Turkish-Mathematics graduates (41.9%); there were 49 Social Sciences graduates (38%); there were 25 vocational high school graduates (19.4%); and there was 1 foreign language graduate (0.8%). There was no student who studied Physical Sciences in high school, but currently studied geography at university. Final graduation grades of students for secondary education were as the following: There were 2 students with scores between 45 and 55 (1.6%); 50 students had scores between 56 and 69 (38.8%); 38 students had scores between 70 and 84 (29.5%); and 36 students had scores between 85 and 100 (30.2%).

3. Findings

When the questions were grouped, the views of the students on geography and geography education, the geography profession, and the influence of geography on human development were the main topics. The frequency and percentages for the answers to these questions on the student questionnaire are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of the questionnaire items from geography students

No	QUESTION	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT									
		I totally disagree		I agree a bit		I agree to some extent		I strongly agree		I totally agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Are you satisfied that you are enrolled in the Department of Geography?	5	3.9	7	5.4	28	21.7	61	47.3	28	21.7
2	Do you think geography education delivers a qualified personality to an individual?	2	1.6	4	3.1	25	19.4	57	44.2	41	31.8
3	What was your interest level in geography when you started studying geography?	2	1.6	4	3.1	29	22.5	67	51.9	27	20.9
4	Do you think the education you are receiving will make you a qualified geographer after graduation?	5	3.9	1	0.8	33	25.6	59	45.7	31	24
5	Do you think the future of the geography profession in Turkey will get better?	10	7.8	20	15.5	56	43.4	32	24.8	11	8.5

No	QUESTION	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT									
		I totally disagree		I agree a bit		I agree to some extent		I strongly agree		I totally agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
6	Do you think the geography profession will make you happy?	2	1.6	2	1.6	34	26.4	58	45	33	25.6
7	Do you think job opportunities after graduation for geography are redundant?	13	10.1	38	29.5	63	48.8	13	10.1	2	1.6
8	Do you think it is important for geography to be intertwined with other current issues?	1	0.8	3	2.3	10	7.8	52	40.3	63	48.8
9	Does learning geography increase the problem-solving skills of people?	5	3.9	9	7	40	31	53	41.1	22	17.1
10	Do you think geographers have a high status in the society?	16	12.4	31	24	55	42.6	20	15.5	7	5.4
11	Are you considering pursuing another profession after graduating from the Department of Geography?	45	34.9	36	27.9	30	23.3	11	8.5	7	5.4
12	Is geography a high-earning field?	10	7.8	47	36.4	57	44.2	11	8.5	4	3.1

Based on the data in the Table 1, the study presented the following findings. In response to the question “Are you satisfied that you enrolled in the Department of Geography?”, 69% of the students agreed either “strongly” or “totally”, indicating their satisfaction with being a student in a Department of Geography. When this rate was combined with the rate for “I agree to some extent”, their response totaled 90.7%. In this sense, it is clear that students who are studying in the Department of Geography feel satisfied with the decision they made and the education they will receive. Similarly, in response to “What was your interest level in geography when you started studying geography?”, the students agreed either “strongly” or “totally”. When the rate for “I agree to some extent” was added to this rate, the total response became 95.3% which can be considered positive in terms of “readiness” regarding student interest in geography. Moreover, this rate indicates that students do really care about the geography education given them.

In response to “Do you think the education you receive will make you a qualified geographer after graduation?”, the rate of the students who agreed “strongly” or “totally” was 69.7%. When the rate for “I agree to some extent” is added to this rate, the total is 95.3% which is quite high. This rate indicates that students believe the geography education they will receive at a university will lead them to become qualified and expert in their areas. It is thus possible to infer from this result that the geography education delivered in higher education is approved by students.

In response to “Do you think it is important for geography to be intertwined with current issues?”, 89.1% of the students agreed either “strongly” or “totally”. When the rate for “I agree to some extent” was added to the above-mentioned rate, the total was 96.9%. This total indicates that students do agree that subjects should be highly up to date and related to current issues during instruction.

In response to “Do you think the geography profession will make you happy?”, which is one of the questions that was aimed at revealing student views and perceptions on the geography profession, 70.6% agreed either “strongly” or “totally”, and 97% agreed when the rate for “I agree to some extent” was added to the first rate. This rate indicates that a large majority of students are content to pursue the geography profession, interested in geography, and happy to choose it as their profession. Another item in the table is positively associated with this question: “Would you consider pursuing another profession after graduating from the Department of Geography?” Here, 62.8% of the students “totally” did not consider or considered only “a bit” pursuing another profession than geography. When the rate for “I agree to some extent” was added, the total was 86.1%, which is an important indicator that these geography students did not consider pursuing another profession. In the answers to another question, “Do you think job opportunities after graduation regarding geography are redundant?”, only 1.6% of the students “totally” agreed. When the rate for “I strongly agree” was added, the total was a low rate at 11.9%.

Thus, it is quite clear that job opportunities in geography are limited according to these students. However, the rate for “I agree to some extent” was 48.8%, indicating that the students basically believed that they will find a job that related to the field of geography. The rate of the students’ responses saying that there were no job opportunities in the area of geography was 10.1%. Hence, in response to “Is geography a high-earning field?”, the rate of “totally” agreeing students was 3.1% while the rate of “strongly” agreeing was 8.5% producing a total of 11.6%, an extremely low rate. Thus, it is possible to say that students do not think that geography is a good choice just for earning money. However, the rate for considering geography as a high-earning area “to some extent” was 44.2%. In addition, the rate of the students who believe that geography is not a high-earning area of study at all was only 7.8%.

The responses given to “Do you think the future of the geography profession in Turkey will get better?” were heavily focused on a “medium” level. In this sense, the rate of the students who agreed “strongly” or “to some extent” was 75.4%. However, the rate of the students considering the future of geography as “totally” good was only 8.5%. The lowest rate among the responses to this item was the option “totally disagree”, which had a rate of 7.8%. Therefore, students do think that the geography profession promises a good future and does so at a considerable rate, so geography will be in a better position for students to find careers in the future.

In response to “Do you think geographers have a high status within the society?”, the response for the highest level of agreement was “I agree to some extent” at 42.6%. The rate for “strongly” agreeing students was 5.4% whereas the rate for “totally” agreeing students was 15.5%, which produced a total of 20.9%. Therefore, the rate for students who “strongly” think that geographers have high statuses, plus the rate for students who agreed with this item “to some extent”, totaled 63.5%. The total rate for the remaining responses in this category, at 36.5%, refers to the “strongly” or “totally” disagreement level. Therefore, there is a need for increased demand for geography in scientific terms and also a need to upgrade its status as a profession.

The other group of questions dealt with student views regarding student personalities and mental problem-solving skills. Two questions were given to the students. One asked “Do you think geography education delivers a qualified personality to an indivi-

dual?" The rate of the students "strongly" agreeing with this item was 44.2% while the rate for "totally" agreeing was "31.8% producing a total of 76%. When the rate of "I agree to some extent" was added, a really high rate appeared at 95.4%. The rate of the students who "totally" disagreed with the item was only 1.6%. This result indicates that students do believe that a geography education is highly beneficial for people to develop their personality. In response to "Does learning geography increase the problem-solving skills of people?", the rate for the "totally" agreeing students was 17.1%, whereas the rate for strongly agreeing students was "41.1% which then totaled 58.2%. When the rate for "I agree to some extent" was added to the above-noted rate, the total was 89.2%. It is clear that the majority of students believe that learning geography increases the problem-solving skills of most people. The rate for "totally" disagreeing with that item was only 3.9%. It is obvious then that most of students believe that geography education will contribute to their problem-solving skills in positive ways.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Students in the Department of Geography are clearly satisfied with their preference for the department and the education they will receive from it. They also attach importance to the academic education they will get in geography. They also stated that they will have an authoritative level of knowledge of geography and master the area as a result of their education. They mostly wish to pursue a professional career in geography area following their graduation rather than continuing their career in another area. On the other hand, students do not consider geography as a field that will let them earn a lot of money or have a high status. However, they do believe that pursuing the profession of geographer will make them happy.

Students in the Department of Geography do want to be instructed using current issues. Moreover, they think that geography education is beneficial and will develop the personality of people, and the study of geography will contribute to their problem-solving skills overall.

Based on all these results, it is possible to say that instructors should not only communicate academic information during their lectures, but also make connections to current issues and reflect up-to-date developments about geography in their courses. Therefore, geography education should be designed in such a way that it not only provides theoretical competency but also meets practical needs. Similarly, critical thinking capacity should be developed for success in the field of geography. This case is confirmed by the study conducted by Demirkaya(2008). In this respect, it is found that teaching geography by critical thinking, making analysis and questioning increases the students' problem solving capacity.

However, the results also imply that job opportunities in geography should be increased; necessary measures should be taken to enable students to pursue a career in their own areas in both the public and the private sectors; and required infrastructure should be developed. In this regard, the number of graduates should be appropriate for employment, and the number of unemployed graduates should be kept minimum. With its qualitative and quantitative aspects, geography education should be taken as a whole.

To conclude, the understanding of quality prevalent in today's world should be adopted in the geography education field at the highest level. Moreover, it is necessary

to provide the society with individuals who renew themselves, follow the developments in geography, and are productive and innovative.

5. References

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