

Research Article

Using Draw-Write-Tell Technique to Explore Middle School Students' Conceptions of the Social Studies Course¹

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Abstract

The current research aims to use the 'draw-write-tell' method to explore middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course. The study group of this qualitative research consists of 200 middle school students attending public middle schools in the city center of Gaziantep. The study was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, to determine the participants' overall conceptions of the social studies course, they were asked to draw the first five things that the course evoked in them. In the second stage, the participants were asked to pick one drawing among the five, which they most identified with the social studies course, and write down why they picked that drawing. In the third stage, in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with eight volunteering students. Results of the content analysis showed that students' overall conceptions of the social studies course could be gathered under 10 themes. Also, drawings related to human geography and history were identified most with the social studies course. Besides, the reasons behind students' conceptions of the social studies course were gathered under 12 themes. Our findings reveal that middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course are very diverse and complex, but consistent with the general objectives of the social studies curriculum.

Keywords: *Social studies, draw-write-tell technique, middle school students, phenomenology, drawings*

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Ortaokul Öğrencilerinin Sosyal Bilgiler Algılarının Çiz-Yaz-Anlat Tekniğiyle İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, ortaokul öğrencilerinin sosyal bilgiler algılarını çiz-yaz-anlat tekniğiyle incelemektir. Nitel araştırma yönteminin benimsendiği araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Gaziantep il merkezindeki kamu ortaokullarında okuyan 200 ortaokul öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma üç aşamada gerçekleştirilmiştir. Birinci aşamada ortaokul öğrencilerinin genel sosyal bilgiler algılarını tespit edebilmek için onlardan sosyal bilgiler deyince akıllarına gelen ilk beş şeyi çizmeleri istenmiştir. Araştırmanın ikinci aşamasında bu beş çizim arasından sosyal bilgiler ile en çok özdeşleştirdikleri bir tanesini seçerek bu çizimi seçme nedenlerini ayrıntılı bir şekilde yazmaları istenmiştir. Üçüncü aşamada çalışma grubu içerisinde seçilen gönüllü sekiz öğrenciyle derinlemesine yapılandırılmamış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. İçerik analizi sonuçları, öğrencilerin genel sosyal bilgiler algılarının 10 farklı tema altında toplandığını göstermiştir. Sosyal bilgiler ile en çok beşerî coğrafya ve tarih içerikli çizimlerin özdeşleştirilmiştir. Öğrencilerin sosyal bilgiler algılarının arkasında yatan nedenler 12 farklı tema altında toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, ortaokul öğrencilerinin sosyal bilgiler algılarının çok çeşitli ve karmaşık bir yapıda olduğunu ortaya koymakla birlikte sosyal bilgiler öğretiminin genel amaçlarıyla uyumludur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sosyal bilgiler, çiz-yaz-anlat tekniği, ortaokul öğrencileri, fenomenoloji, çizimler

Introduction

The social studies course help students better understand the society and the world they live in by teaching about humans, a social entity, and their cultural products (Acun, 2009). It also allows students to gain knowledge and experience regarding the relationship between humans and society, as well as providing a suitable learning environment for them to discover themselves, their values, and thoughts. To this end, while providing information about geography, history, and other social sciences, the social studies course also focuses on the behaviors that students can exhibit in the face of situations that may be encountered in real life (Kabapınar, 2009). Hence, in this globalizing world, the main objective of the social studies course is to assist students in developing the ability to make informed decisions for the well-being of the general public as members of a democratic society that contain many cultural differences (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2010).

Social studies were defined as a new field for the first time in 1916 by the NCSS. The introduction of the social studies course into the American education system was a result of the interaction of seeking solutions to important problems such as urbanization, industrialization, migration, racism, public order, and citizenship awareness caused by the great transformation in the social, economic, and cultural fields that the U.S. was undergoing and the efforts to build a united American nation (Kaymakcı & Ata, 2012). In addition, the Progressive Movement's "raising citizens for a democratic society" was effective in the emergence of social studies as a course (Ata, 2009; Erden, 1996; Safran, 2008). Highlighting the teaching of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that students need while adapting to social life and producing solutions to social problems, the social studies course aims mainly at raising effective citizens (Ata, 2009; Öztürk, Keskin & Otluoğlu, 2012). From this perspective, the social studies course has an important place in raising democratic citizens who think, inquire, research, and reason (Doğanay, 2009). The course helps students develop an awareness of their duties and responsibilities towards themselves and their community. Also, it teaches individuals how to be useful to society as well as provides necessary knowledge and skills related to environment and everyday life. Therefore, the social studies course aims not only to raise good and effective citizens but also to facilitate the individual's adaptation to the environment and society. With

this feature, the social studies course is a course that guides people throughout their lives (Ata, 2009; Çetin & Dinç, 2017).

Due to the interdisciplinary approach it adopts, the social studies course covers many social sciences. The knowledge generated by social sciences is transferred to students through the social studies course. Thanks to the social studies classes, students have the opportunity to better know and make sense of their community, society, environment, and culture. Furthermore, the social studies course enables students to recognize the characteristics of their society as well as to realize their personal and social responsibilities. This realization is also effective in finding solutions to the social problems they face (Deveci & Bayır, 2011; Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Farris, 2004). Effective citizenship refers to citizens who properly fulfill their role as a citizen to improve the democratic process. In this regard, the social studies curriculum aims to provide students with democratic citizenship values and skills. The citizen profile highlighted by the social studies course is a knowledge-based citizen with reasoning skills, who has developed an understanding of local and national values as well as respects universal values (Kabapınar, 2009). Effective citizens are aware of their duties and responsibilities and are informed of what is happening in their social environment (Sözer, 1998).

Whether middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course are compatible with the objectives specified in the social studies curriculum has long been aroused curiosity. As it is known, a person's conceptions are affected by his/her personal traits, expectations, and motivation. In fact, a conception is the experience that occurs after the brain translates thousands of independent and meaningless senses into a meaningful pattern or image (Plotnik, 2009). Considering students' conceptions of the social studies course, which has a very important place in the socialization of the individual, there is a huge gap between the actual importance of the course and the importance attached to the course by students. It has been found that a great number of students perceive the course as a boring subject based on memorization, that has no relevance to the real life (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2004; Ata, 2009; Byford, 2002; Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Dinç & Üztemur, 2017; Özkal, Güngör & Çetingöz, 2004). Many variables are effective in the emergence of these conceptions of students; however, teachers' behavioral patterns also play a big role (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2004; Ata, 2009; Byford, 2002; Çetin & Dinç, 2017). On the other hand, in order for all the objectives of the social studies curriculum to be achieved, using effective teaching techniques is of utmost importance. And, in order to

achieve effective teaching of the course, it is necessary to reveal students' conceptions of the course. The determination of students' conceptions of the social studies course and the meanings they attach to it also has special importance in terms of demonstrating whether they have acquired and related to their everyday life the knowledge presented to them in the course. Taking these as a starting point, the current research aims to explore middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course using the 'draw-write-tell' technique. To this end, answers to the following questions were sought:

- What are middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course and what are the reasons behind these conceptions?
- How effective is the draw-write-tell technique in revealing middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course?

Methodology

Design

Seeking to explore middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course, the study was carried out in three stages. The qualitative research method was used in the first and second stages. In the third stage, the phenomenological model was used to analyze the participants' conceptions of the social studies course with a holistic approach. Phenomenology aims to obtain a rich understanding of the meaning or meanings that one or more people attribute to a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research seeks to describe the studied concept or phenomenon by focusing entirely on the individual's conceptions and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2009). In this study, the subject to be explored in depth is middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course.

Participants

The study group consists of 200 middle school students from each grade level attending public schools in Gaziantep, Turkey, in the first semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. Phenomenology studies enroll a small number of participants in order to analyze the studied

phenomenon in depth. Since the first stage of the present study sought to reveal the participants' overall conceptions of the social studies course, the number of participants was relatively high. However, in the third stage, at which interviews were held, the number of participants was reduced to eight (four males, four females) on the basis of voluntariness. The ethics committee approval was obtained from Usak University with a document number of "28620816/341" on 06.03.2020.

Data Collection Process

Aiming to reveal middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course, the study was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, each student was handed a blank A4 paper and asked to draw five things that the social studies course evoked in them. The students were also asked to have no aesthetic worries in their drawings since their drawing skills were not being measured.

In the second stage, the participants were asked to pick one drawing among five, which they most identified with the social studies course, and write down why they have picked up that drawing. They were asked to explain in detail the connections of their chosen drawings with the social studies course and how they identified this drawing with the course. Therefore, the second stage aimed to reveal the motives underlying the students' conceptions of the social studies course. The first and second stages of the data collection process were carried out simultaneously.

In the third stage, unstructured interviews were held with eight volunteering students. The starting point of the interviews was the compositions written by the students in the second stage. The interviews not only enabled the control of data obtained in the second stage but also allowed a detailed examination of the students' conceptions of the social studies course. The first and second stages of the research took 40 minutes. In the third stage, each interview took an average of 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

In order to get an overall picture of the participants' conceptions of the social studies course, the drawings obtained in the first stage were subjected to content analysis. A total of 1000 drawings were categorized into certain themes with an inductive approach. Then, the data obtained in the second and third stages were subjected to content analysis to obtain codes. While coding, the participants' expressions were used as much as possible. Following this, similar codes were gathered under the same theme (Giorgi, 2009; Punch, 2005). Each student was given a code according to their gender and grade level. For example, the student coded 6M2 represents the second (2) male (M) student in the sixth grade (6). To increase the credibility of the research, excerpts from the interviews with the students were included. Also, to increase the internal consistency, coding was performed by researchers at different times, who later on came together to discuss and make necessary revisions on the codes and themes.

Findings

The findings are interpreted under two headings. The first one 'Drawings' includes the findings from the drawings while the second 'Compositions and Interviews' heading includes the findings from the compositions and interviews.

Drawings

In the first stage of the research, drawings were used to reveal students' conceptions of the social studies course. In order to determine how students' conceptions of the social studies course were reflected in their drawings, the drawings were subjected to content analysis. As a result of the analyses, ten themes emerged (Table 1).

As can be inferred from Table 1, the drawings of about a third of students fall under the theme of "human geography." One drawing that was most frequently observed among the participants' drawings was of the world map (f: 118). Considering the drawings in this theme, students mostly identified the course with human and economic activities. “

Under the theme of “history”, students identified the social studies course with historical events, historical states, historical figures, historical places, historical objects, and historical concepts. The drawings gathered under this theme mostly depicted battle scenes (f: 105). The high number of students who identified the social studies course with battle scenes can be attributed to the weight of history in the multi-disciplinary structure of the course and its reflection in the students' conceptions.

Table 1.
Students' Overall Conceptions of the Social Studies Course

Categories	Drawings and Frequency Values	%
Human Geography (302)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map: Map of Turkey (114), Map of the World (118), Legend (5) Location (2), Compass (7) • Settlement Units: Village (1), District (1), Province (1) • Human Activities: Agriculture (8), Livestock (16), Economy (1), Tourism (1), Industry (3), Migration (3), Human Elements (2), Social Organizations (18), Observatory (1) • Historical Events: Conquest of Istanbul (2), National Struggle Congresses (1), French Revolution (2), Geographical Discoveries (1) • Historical States: Sumerians (2), Ottoman State (15), Asian Hun Empire (1), Kayı Tribe (2), Civilizations (6) • Historical Figures: Atatürk (50), Mehmet the Conqueror (2), İsmet İnönü (1), Metehan (2) 	30.2
History (271)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Places: Ataturk's Mausoleum (9), Silk road (4), Spice Road (3), Thessaloniki (1), “Göbeklitepe” (1), Ziggurat (2) • Historical Objects: Orkhon Inscriptions (2), Sculpture (2), Historical Artifact (21), Alms Stone (2) • Historical Concepts: War (105), History (14), Epic (1), “Nutuk = Mustafa Kemal's notable Speech at the Parliament” (1), Islam (1), Sultan (5), Age of Enlightenment (1), Commander (1), Text (8) 	27.1
National Identity (131)	Flag (102), Martyr (9), National Anthem (1), Soldier (13), Nation (4), Homeland (2)	13.1
Individual and Society (72)	Role (10), Right (29), Aid (14), Responsibility (7), Identity (2), Respect (2), Differences (1), People (1), Family (3), Friendship (3)	7.2
Communication and Interaction (59)	Social Networks (26), Telephone (12), News (1), Empathy (3), Prejudice (1), Computer (9), Television (2), Socialization (5)	5.9
Physical Geography (59)	Nature (23), Mountain (9), Natural Disaster (15), Sun (4), Cave (2), Seas (1), Planets (1), Poles (1), Landforms (1), Weather (1), Cappadocia (1)	5.9
Social Studies as a Lesson (31)	School (12), Book (12), Teacher (7)	3.1
Cultural Elements (27)	Folk Dances (10), Values (7), Carpet (4), Holiday (3), Local Food (3)	2.7
Law and Politics (26)	Justice (9), Parliament (8), Law (1), Treaty (5), Politics (3)	2.6
Science and Technology (22)	Technological Tools (14), Science (5), Scientist (3)	2.2

Under the theme of ‘historical figures,’ the drawings of “Ataturk” were most frequent. Under the theme of “national identity,” most of the students identified the course with the Turkish flag. Other drawings under this theme highlighted national values and patriotism.

The drawings gathered under the theme of “individual and society” underline the contribution of social studies course to the socialization of students. The participants’ drawings of interpersonal relations in everyday life and social structures that hold an important place in social life can lead us to the interpretation that students better learn about social life in the social studies course.

The drawings under the theme of “communication and interaction” emphasize technological innovations. The link established by students between social networks and the social studies course is particularly striking. Based on these findings, we can argue that students benefit significantly from the social studies course in their everyday life. Under the theme of “physical geography,” drawings of landforms attract the most attention. This finding not only is consistent with the scope of the course but also points to the importance that the course attaches to use of visuals.

Three drawings were collected under the theme of “social studies as a course.” Students whose drawings were collected under this theme identified the social studies course with the components of the school and the classroom environment. The drawings under the theme of “culture” mostly depicted elements that represent Turkish culture and traditions. Based on these findings, we can argue that the social studies course helps students learn about their own culture and traditions.

Under the theme of “law and politics,” students identified social studies with legal and political concepts. This finding is important in that it points to the interdisciplinary approach of the course that covers all social sciences. The theme of “science and technology” mostly contains drawings of technological devices. Based on these findings, we can argue that the course covers not only the past but also the present time.

In the second stage, the participants were asked to pick one drawing among five, which they most identified with “social studies,” and write down why they picked that drawing. The drawings that the participants most identified with social studies are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

The Drawings the Participants Most Identified with the Social Studies Course

Categories	Drawings and Frequency Values	%
History (81)	• Historical Events: Conquest of Istanbul (1)	40.5
	• Historical States: Ottoman State (4), Civilizations (1)	
	• Historical Figures: Atatürk (16), Metehan (1)	
	• Historical Places: Ataturk's Mausoleum (1), Ziggurat (2)	
	• Historical Objects: Historical Artifact (3)	
Human Geography (43)	• Historical Concepts: War (39), History (9), Islam (1), Sultan (1), Text (2)	21.5
	• Map: Map of Turkey (23), Map of the World (15), Compass (1)	
National Identity (26) Communication and Interaction (14)	• Human Activities: Agriculture (1), Livestock (1), Industry (1), Social Organizations (1)	13
	Flag (23), Soldier (2), Nation (1)	
Individual and Society (12)	Social Networks (7), Socialization (3), Computer (3), Telephone (1)	7
Physical Geography (10)	Role (10), Family (2)	6
Cultural Elements (9)	Nature (5), Natural Disaster (5)	5
Social Studies as a Lesson (3)	Folk Dances (4), Values (5)	4.5
Law and Politics (2)	School (1), Book (1), Teacher (1)	1.5
	Parliament (1), Politics (1)	1

As can be inferred from Table 2, the students mostly identified the social studies course with history and geography. Based on this finding, we can argue that students' selective conceptions of the social studies course are consistent with their overall conceptions. The drawings that fall under the theme of history mostly depict "battle scenes." This finding is important in terms of revealing students' conceptions of history. On the other hand, the drawings that fall under the theme of “geography” mostly depict Turkey and world maps. Students' identifying the course with maps is a valuable finding indicating the importance of using visuals like maps or graphs in social studies classes.

The drawings collected under the theme of “national identity” mostly depict the Turkish flag. This finding can be regarded as a reflection of the importance attached to citizenship awareness in the social studies curriculum. When the drawings that fall under the themes of “communication and interaction” and “individual and society” are examined, it is seen that the individual's activities in the process of socialization were identified with the social studies

course. The link students established between the Turkish culture and the social studies course is consistent with the general objectives and learning outcomes of the social studies curriculum.

Compositions and Interviews

This part of the study focuses on students' reasons behind their decisions to pick up one drawing out of the five that they did at the second phase and the links they established between their drawings and the social studies course. As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the compositions and interviews, the themes and sub themes shown in Figure 1 emerged.

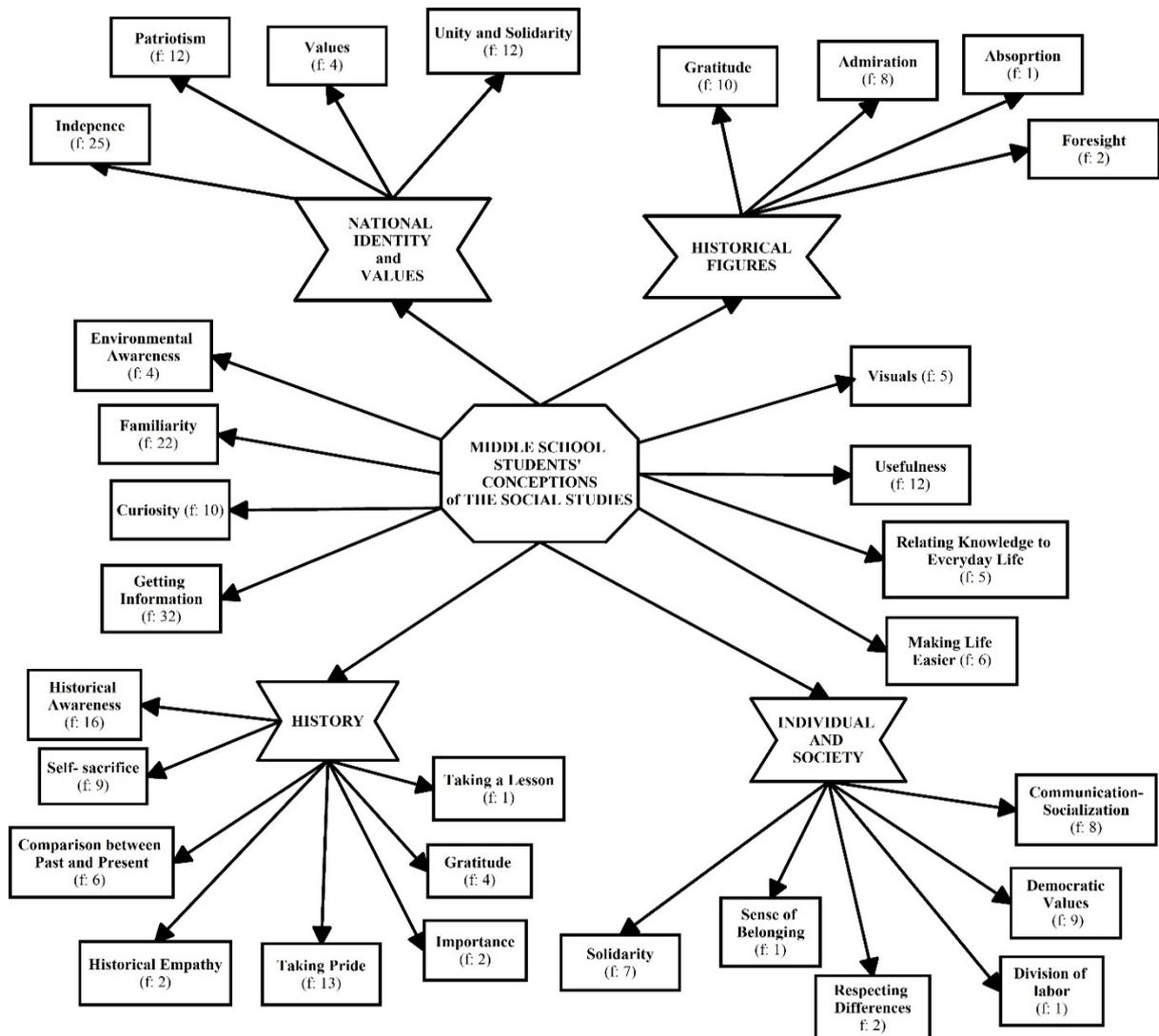


Figure 1. The Themes That Emerged as A Result of The Analysis of Compositions and Interviews

As can be inferred from Figure 1, the reasons behind the participants' decisions to pick up one drawing were categorized into 12 themes. The drawings that fell under the theme of “national identity and values” were categorized into four sub-themes: “independence, patriotism, values, and unity and solidarity.” The students whose drawings fell under the sub-theme of “independence” stated that they were influenced by the Turkish nation led by Ataturk winning the War of Independence. They also said that they should be grateful to the soldiers who self-sacrificed for Turkey’s independence. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 7F6 is presented below:

“We are grateful to our martyrs who fought for the Turkish flag. They saved us and our future. We are grateful to our soldiers who sacrificed their lives for us. We may not be able to satisfactorily express our gratitude. Anyone traveling to Canakkale should visit them (martyr’s cemetery). As Mehmet Akif said, “May God never let this nation write the national anthem again.” So, we (today’s children and youth) must work in this direction.” (7F6).

This excerpt shows that students are instilled with a sense of independence and patriotism in social studies classes. The students whose drawings fell under the sub-theme of “patriotism” mentioned the soldiers who left their families to fight for their country. Also, they reminded Ataturk’s patriotism and his deeds for the Turkish nation, emphasizing that they should be proud of Turkish history. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6M12 is presented below:

“Many soldiers were martyred. They left their families to fight for their country; although they felt thirst and hunger, they didn't leave their posts and they defended this country. Our soldiers, who loved this country and nation, fought to save our country without asking ‘What will happen to me?’; I'm proud of them.” (6M12).

Looking at the above excerpt, we can argue that historical awareness and national values are properly learnt by students. The fact that the students mentioned some major events (like the War of Independence) in Turkish history and that they said that they are proud of the history of the Turkish nation is important in terms of showing the contribution of social studies classes in developing historical awareness in students. The students whose drawings fell under the sub-theme of “values” identified the social studies course with everyday values, culture, and the Turkish lifestyle. Emphasis on cultural elements and the Turkish lifestyle is important in terms

of demonstrating that the social studies course helps students learn about certain cultural elements inherent in the Turkish nation. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6M16 is presented below:

“Social studies classes ensure social unity by teaching us to respect the elderly, love those younger than us, and to be respectful to each other.” (6M16).

The above excerpt highlights the structure of social information, covering the rules of social life and values in everyday life. The students whose drawings fell under the sub-theme of “unity and solidarity” frequently mentioned social cohesion, coexistence, and social consciousness. Also, they referred to the contribution of historical events to develop national consciousness as well as underlined the concept of 'division of labor' in everyday life.

The theme of “historical figures” consists of four sub-themes: “gratitude, admiration, foresightedness, and absorption.” Under the theme of ‘historical figures,’ the drawings of “Ataturk” were most frequent. Under the sub-theme of “gratitude,” the students mentioned the sacrifices made by important names in Turkish history. They also stated that today’s independent and modern Turkish society is a result of the determination and efforts of historical figures (e.g., Ataturk). To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6F4 is presented below:

“Had it not been for Fatih Sultan Mehmet (Mehmed the Conqueror), Istanbul would not be (a part of Turkey) now. Had it not been for Ataturk, we would not be (living) now; thanks to him, we can live freely.” (6F4).

Looking at the above excerpt, we can argue that historical events (or figures) shape today’s political and social structure, which is reflected in students’ conceptions. Looking at the views of the students in the “admiration” sub-theme, students expressed their admiration for Ataturk’s leadership in the wars, his speeches, his signature, his courage, and his efforts to save the country. In addition, students expressed their admiration for “Seyid Onbasi” (Corporal Seyid), who made great efforts and showed determination in the Battle of Canakkale. The views of the student coded 8M7 are as follows:

“The first historical figure that comes to my mind is Ataturk. Because he engraved his name on the history of Turkish Revolution and he won many wars. Besides the

battles he won, he always uttered good ideas. He did good work; for example, "Ataturk Forest Farm and Zoo" is a very good idea. He is a leader whose example we should follow." (8M7).

The above excerpt shows that the students identified the social studies course with Ataturk. Also, based on this finding, we can argue that the social studies course has an important place in students' following the example set by historical figures. In the sub-theme of "foresightedness", the students mentioned Ataturk's foresightedness. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 8F13 is presented below:

"In (social studies) classes, we learn about Ataturk's personal traits. Thanks to his revolutionary ideas and foresightedness, we saved our country. After the war, he implemented many reforms with his foresightedness and revolutionary ideas." (8F13).

The above excerpt not only underlines Ataturk's foresightedness and revolutionary ideas but also emphasizes the contribution of his personal traits to the Turkish nation. In the sub-theme of "absorption," the students stated that they appreciate Ataturk's reforms and that they follow the example set by Ataturk. They also noted that Ataturk is present in every aspect of their lives. The views of the student coded 5F10 are as follows:

"Ataturk is present in every aspect of my life." (5F10).

The above excerpt indicates that the student has Ataturk at the center of her life. The theme of "individual and society" consists of sub-themes of "communication-socialization, solidarity, respecting differences, labor of division, sense of belonging, and democratic values." The students in the sub-theme of "communication-socialization" identified the social sciences course with communication tools that connect people and enable socialization. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6F2 is presented below:

"If people cannot communicate with each other, there is no such thing as social life. People use different ways to communicate throughout their lives." (6F2).

The above excerpt emphasizes the importance of communication, identified with the social studies course, for people. The students in the sub-theme of “solidarity” stated that solidarity among people is attached great importance in social studies classes and that the course evokes examples of solidarity in society. The views of the student coded 7F2 are as follows:

“We must help poor people materially and spiritually. This will make people very happy. In this way, people understand each other’s worth.” (7F2).

The above excerpt shows that helping those in need has an important place in ensuring unity and solidarity among people. The student coded 5M1 in the “Sense of Belonging” sub-theme emphasized that our cultural characteristics connect us and that the social studies course makes individuals develop a sense of belonging to the society they live in. The students in the sub-theme of “respecting differences” stated that there are many differences among people and that the most important requisite for living together is to accept everyone as they are and see the differences as a wealth. The views of the student coded 6F1 are as follows:

“People should be respectful to each other. People should respect the characteristics and behaviors of others.” (6F1).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the first condition for living together in harmony in society is to show respect to others and fulfill social responsibilities and duties. The fact that the students identified the value of “respecting differences” with the social studies course shows that the course helps students learn to be respectful of others. The students in the “division of labor” sub-theme stated that people work in different jobs and that everyone has different duties in these jobs, highlighting the importance of division of labor in social life. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 7M3 is presented below:

“In everyday life, we, humans, need each other.” (7M3).

As can be seen in the above excerpt, there should be a division of labor in social life as a necessity to live in harmony. Emphasis on the division of labor in social studies classes is important for students to adapt to society and develop citizenship awareness.

In the sub-theme of “democratic values” under the theme of “Individual and Society”, it was observed that the students emphasized fundamental rights and freedoms. The students also gave examples of the violations of rights and antidemocratic practices they faced. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, excerpts from the interviews with the students coded 7F7 and 6M5 are given below:

“In ancient times, women were not given human rights; girls were killed or buried alive. Now, men and women are equal.” (7F10).

“Democracy brings equality, justice, rights, and law to my mind. In our classes, we always see the concepts of equality and justice. When we say justice, we expect people to be fair in everything they do; but some people are not fair at all.” (6M5).

It can be inferred from the above excerpts that students gain a democratic perspective in social studies classes. In this respect, the emergence of the sub-theme of “democratic values” in students' conceptions of the social studies course, which plays a major role in helping students become aware of democratic values, is important.

It is seen that the students in the sub-theme of “historical awareness” under the theme of “history” have an awareness of important events in history. According to students, the first thing needed to build a solid future is to know and take lessons from the past. Indeed, students frequently emphasized the concept of historical awareness. The views of the student coded 8M3 are as follows:

“Turkish states in history inspire me. The valor and epics of our ancestors inspire me. Those who were martyred for our country left this flag to us; we must protect our country like them. We must do our best to protect this country; we are willing to give our lives for our country if necessary.” (8M3).

Looking at the above excerpt, we can argue that historical events (or figures) directly affect students' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and shape their lifestyles. It can be said that history is seen not only as a course but as a dynamic process affecting students' lives. Considering the views of the students in the sub-theme of “taking a lesson,” they stated that they should take lessons from historical events taught in social studies classes. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 7M2 is presented below:

“We must learn from the wars in which Ataturk took part and the things that major Turkish statesmen in history did and learn how they saved us. We must think about the self-sacrifices of our ancestors and learn from their examples. We must understand well what we did and what we experienced to come to these days. We must learn about our history and when other people ask (about our history), we must be able to answer.” (7M2).

As can be seen in the above excerpt, the students emphasized how the past shapes the present and the future. When we examined the compositions in the sub-theme of “gratitude”, the students stated that they were impressed by the sacrifices their ancestors made in the past and therefore they were grateful to them. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 8F1 is presented below:

“We are grateful to our soldiers who fought for the Turkish flag on the east, south, and west fronts in the War of Independence. They saved us and our future; we can’t express our gratitude enough. We are grateful to everyone who sacrificed themselves in the War of Independence for our country and for our freedom.” (8F1).

From the above excerpt, it can be inferred that students have an awareness of historical events. The students in the sub-theme of “importance” stated that they picked drawings of historical events because these events were turning points in the history of the Turkish nation. The drawings that fall under this sub-theme generally depict some major historical events in the history of Turkey (Turkish War of Independence, the establishment of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and etc.).

Looking at the sub-theme of “taking pride,” it was observed that the students were proud of the past and history of the Turkish nation. These findings can be considered as a reflection of the role that the social studies course plays in developing historical awareness in students. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 7M8 is presented below:

“I feel proud of the Ottoman era about which we learn in social studies classes. As I learn how the Turkish nation lived in the past, our past wars and achievements, I feel proud of our ancestors. I am proud of our soldiers who sacrificed themselves for this country.” (7M8).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the social studies course and history education play a key role in creating a national identity. The students in the sub-theme of “historical empathy” expressed their empathy with the harsh conditions of the past by considering some major historical events. The views of the student coded 5F6 are as follows:

“The suffering caused by wars and the situation of orphans is a very bad thing. In social studies classes, we understand how our ancestors lived and the difficulties they experienced and learn how we have come to these days.” (5F6).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, by developing historical empathy, students better understand the decisions, actions, and experiences of historical figures. This indicates the importance attached to affective domain in social studies education. The students in the sub-theme of “comparison between past and present” stated that they have the opportunity to compare past practices with current practices in social studies classes. To give an example to the views of the students in this sub-theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6F6 is presented below:

“Thanks to geography, we compare the population of the 2000s with today’s population. We find out when and where people migrated. In the past, people used to live shorter lives. Because there was no cure for many diseases in the past. Scientists made our lives easier by making new inventions.” (6F6).

It can be inferred from the above excerpt that the social studies course helps students develop a conception of change and continuity and a conception of time and chronology. Thanks to social studies classes, students gain a versatile perspective on social phenomena by comparing past, present, and future. Looking at the views of the students in the “self-sacrifice,” they expressed their gratitude to those who self-sacrificed in difficult times the Turkish nation underwent. The views of the student coded 5M4 are as follows:

“Our flag was created with the blood of our soldiers. Thanks to the help of our mothers to our soldiers in harsh conditions, this country was saved. Our soldiers fearlessly and bravely threw themselves in front of the bullets.” (5M4).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the students are aware of the self-sacrifices of the people in the past and they identify this with the social studies course. Looking at the views of the students in the theme of “making life easier,” they emphasized the aspect of the social

studies course that facilitates the lives of individuals in everyday life. The students in this theme stated that compasses, maps, and other writing and communication tools make life easier. In the theme of “relating knowledge to everyday life,” it was emphasized that the knowledge acquired in social studies classes can be used in everyday life. To give an example to the views of the students in this theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 6M3 is presented below:

“Thanks to what we learn in social studies classes, we know what to do in case of a natural disaster such as earthquakes, floods, landslides. We learn about economic activities such as agriculture, trade, and industry. Similarly, we learn about our citizenship rights and exercise them in our lives. Social studies classes help (us) in many areas.” (6M3).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the social studies course has content that facilitates the lives of students in many areas. In the theme of “visuals,” the students stated that the information they learn through visuals in social studies classes sticks better in their minds. The students in this theme placed more emphasis on the visuals and maps in textbooks. In the theme of “getting information,” the students stated that with the information they learn in social studies classes, they can make sense of the world around them. They also said that they can learn about the wars in world history. Besides, they underlined the importance of the course in the socialization process. In the theme of “usefulness,” the participants highlighted the contributions of social studies classes to everyday life and cultural development. The views of the student coded 6F9 on this subject are as follows:

“Thanks to the education we receive in social studies classes, we learn things we can use to help our family. Apart from some of the products we use in everyday life, we learn about different products. By applying what I learn in this course, I will grow these products in the future.” (6F9).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the social studies course broadens students’ horizons with new and useful information. In the theme of “curiosity,” the students expressed their curiosity about certain historical and natural phenomena. In addition to the students who are curious about past events, those who are curious about the formation of landforms are also included in this theme. To give an example to the views of the students in this theme, an excerpt from the interview with the student coded 7F11 is presented below:

“I am very curious about historical artifacts. I am very curious about how ancient people’s belongings have survived to the present day. I am very curious about the makers of historical artifacts. I want to go to museums because there are many historical artifacts in our country and I am curious about them.” (7F11).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the social studies course stimulates students’ curiosity. In the theme of “familiarity,” the students mentioned the topics that they always encounter in social studies classes. The students in this theme stated that the social studies course evokes in them concepts such as maps, teachers, books, and wars. With regard to why they think so, they stated that the same concepts are addressed in almost every social studies class.

In the theme of “environmental awareness,” the students stated that humans should not harm trees, plants, animals, in short, the whole nature. They also said that the social studies course helps them develop environmental awareness. The views of students coded 7M7 are as follows:

“We constantly pollute our nature. People throw their trash on the streets, not in trash cans. They are not aware that we harm ourselves when we harm nature. Not only people but also animals are badly affected by environmental pollution. Industrial waste flows into the sea and kills fish. I’m calling out to all people. Let’s not pollute our nature, let’s protect it; if we protect our nature, we protect ourselves.” (7M7).

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, the students identify the social studies course with environmental awareness and respect for nature. These findings reveal the multidimensional and interdisciplinary structure of the social studies course.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The current research tried to explore middle school students’ conceptions of the social studies course in three stages. In the first stage, the students were asked to draw the first five things that the social studies course evoked in them. This allowed us to get an overall picture of the participants’ conceptions of the social studies course. The drawings were categorized into 10 themes. The drawings mostly depicted maps of Turkey and the world. Based on this finding, we can argue that maps have an important place in students’ conceptions of the social studies

course. Also, many drawings were collected under the theme of “history.” The fact that the students identified the social studies course with history may be due to the fact that history occupies a lot of space in the social studies curriculum. In a study conducted by Cetin and Dinc (2017) to examine middle school students’ conceptions of the social studies course, the students mostly identified the social studies course with history, which is consistent with our findings. In another study conducted by Dinc and Uztemur (2017) with prospective social studies teachers, the social studies course was mostly identified with history. Considering the students’ overall conceptions of the social studies course, the drawings also depicted elements that represent the national identity, Turkish culture, and traditions. This finding is also consistent with the findings reported by previous studies (Deveci & Bayır, 2011; Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Gömleksiz, Kan & Öner, 2012). The drawings collected under the theme of “national identity” mostly depicted the Turkish flag. This finding is important in terms of showing the role of social studies classes in creating citizenship awareness in students. In the Turkish education system, there is no “citizenship” course at the middle school level; instead, the subject of citizenship is covered in the social studies curriculum. The social studies course makes important contributions in terms of developing citizenship awareness in middle school students and helping them adapt to the society they live in. In fact, the “communication-socialization” theme that emerged as a result of the analysis of the drawings proves this contribution of the course.

In the second stage, to find out about the participants’ selective conceptions, they were asked to pick one drawing among five, which they most identified with “the social studies course,” and write down why they picked that drawing. As a result of the analysis of the drawings picked in the second stage, students’ conceptions of the social studies course were categorized into 9 themes. Also, it was observed that the themes obtained in the second stage were consistent with the themes obtained in the first stage. Similarly, the three themes that the students identified most with the social studies course are history, human geography, and national identity, respectively. To find out about the students’ reasons behind their conceptions of the social studies course, compositions and interviews were also used. The reasons behind middle school students’ conceptions of the social studies course were categorized into 12 themes. Considering the sub-themes of the theme of “history,” it was found that the course develops historical awareness and empathy in students, which, in turn, helps them better understand historical events. It was seen that the students took lessons from historical events by making a comparison

between the past and the present. Sub-themes such as gratitude, self-sacrifice, and taking pride are important in terms of showing the importance of the social studies course in creating a national identity and raising good citizens. The drawings that fell under the theme of “history” mostly depicted “battle scenes.” These results are consistent with the results of the related research (Altun, 2016; Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Dönmez & Yeşilbursa, 2014; Üztemur, 2020; Yılmaz, 2008; Yılmaz & Kaya, 2011). In a study conducted by Donmez & Yesilbursa (2014) with middle school students, the participants mostly identified history with wars and battles. Similarly, in the study conducted by Cetin and Dinc (2017) with middle school students, the participants mostly identified the social studies course with wars and battles. These findings can be attributed to the weight of history topics in the social studies curriculum and the weight of wars and battles in history topics. In the theme of “historical figures,” students talked about major names like Ataturk that have an important place in Turkish history and stated that they follow their example. This finding shows that the social studies course not only teaches students about important historical figures but also develops historical and cultural awareness in them.

The theme of “national identity and values” consists of sub-themes of “patriotism, unity and solidarity, and the values inherent in Turkish culture.” Based on this finding, we can argue that values taught in social studies classes are embraced by students. Students' identifying the social studies course with independence is valuable in terms of students' socialization process. When the sub-themes that fell under the theme of “individual and society” are examined, it can be said that the social studies course helps students develop a sense of belonging to the society in which they live. Sub-themes such as democratic values, division of labor, solidarity, and belonging show that the students have developed citizenship awareness and acquired social skills.

The students in the theme of “relating knowledge to everyday life” emphasized that they can relate to everyday life the knowledge they acquire in social studies classes. These results are consistent with previous studies in the relevant literature (Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Dinç & Üztemur, 2017; Gömleksiz et al., 2012; Mertol, Doğdu & Yılar, 2013). The students also stated that the social studies course contains content that facilitates their everyday lives. They said that they can use in real life what they learn in their social studies classes. On the other hand, some of the students were of the opinion that the social studies course is a boring course that always teaches about the same subjects (history subjects, wars, and etc.). In fact, when the

relevant literature is examined, it is possible to come across studies that reported that the social studies course has no relevance to real life (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2004; Ata, 2009; Byford, 2002; Çetin & Dinç, 2017; Özkal et al., 2004). These findings are valuable in that they show that the social studies course has a very broad and complex scope. For a thorough comparison of the results of relevant research, the social sciences that constitute the scope of the social studies course should be analyzed analytically. The current research aimed to explore middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course by using the 'draw-write-tell' method, which merges different data collection tools. Students' conceptions of a course certainly have a direct effect on their performance in that course. We hope that revealing middle school students' conceptions of the social studies course will contribute to all stakeholders in the education system, especially social studies teachers. Considering the fact that one's conceptions of a phenomenon or concept are influenced by place, time, and people, it is important to carry out studies with different samples and to compare the findings of such studies with the findings reported in this study.

Exploring students' conceptions of the social studies course in three stages using the draw-write-tell technique allowed different data collection techniques to be used together. This data triangulation technique also enabled the authors to examine the participants' conceptions of social studies as a course in depth. To the best of our knowledge, no study has so far been conducted to explore students' conceptions of the social studies course using the draw-write-tell method. This shows the strength of the current research. Future studies can adopt a longitudinal approach to reveal the change in students' conceptions of the social studies course over time.

Statements on ethics and conflict of interest

The ethics committee approval was obtained from Usak University with a document number of "28620816/341" on 06.03.2020. Ethical issues were considered throughout the study. There is no conflict of interest in this study.

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