

Research Article

**The Role of Social Studies Course in Creating Society with Skilled Citizens:  
Pre-Service Elementary Teachers Express their Views <sup>1</sup>**

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*In memory of Sefik Yasar*

**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to reveal pre-service elementary teachers' views about the role of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens. An interpretive research design was adopted in the study. The participants of the study were senior students attending the department of Elementary School Teaching at the Education Faculty of Anadolu University. The data were collected through focus group interview, open-ended survey and elementary school pre-service teachers' lesson plans. The data were analysed through inductive analysis. In this study, the results of the analyses revealed several themes such as "perception of being skilled", "skilled citizens and society with skilled citizens", "importance of Social Studies course in creating society with skilled citizens", "problems experienced" and "suggested solutions". As a result of this study, which examined the elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the importance of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens, it was concluded that elementary school pre-service teachers gave importance to the course. Moreover, elementary school pre-service teachers determined

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The Role Of Social Studies Course In Creating Society With Skilled Citizens:  
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problems about the content of the Social Studies course and about the implementation of the curriculum, and they put forward suggestions related to the teaching-learning process, content and the stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *Elementary school education, social studies, society with skilled citizens, pre-service teacher*

## Introduction

Society, in traditional sense, is formed by citizens who live within same boundaries and share a common culture. However, with globalisation, a society can be identified as a structure which embodies citizens who have different languages, religions and ethnicity. Societies aim to develop constantly to meet the needs of entire society, to live in better conditions, to live in harmony with citizens who have diverse characteristics and to be skilled. In this sense, skilled citizens can contribute to the constitution of a skilled society. It could be stated that skilled citizens are those who are sensitive to social problems, constantly develop themselves, have high order thinking skills, adopt national and universal values, and can adapt to the information and communication era.

A reflection on the educational and cultural aspects of information could result in a better-qualified society made up of responsible and critical citizens (Hesse, Muller & Ruß, 2008). An institute of education, a social open system established to meet the needs of individuals in a society, is a tool that develops the well-educated qualified man force of a country. In addition, an institute of education could also be said to have an important place in providing the welfare and happiness of both individuals and of the society. In recent years, while expressing the development levels of countries, the focus has been on the ratio of man force of countries as well as on the per capita income (Hosgorur & Gezgin, 2005). Training children as responsible, conscious and skilled citizens is important for the present and future of societies (Aral and Gursoy, 2001). Development of children in many aspects through education is the basis of creating socially, culturally, economically and politically developed societies with skilled citizens (Cilga, 1999). In other words, for societies with skilled citizens, children should be exposed to a qualified education starting from early ages. Education provided at schools is of great significance considering the fact that all the citizens supposedly attend these institutions.

In order to reach a certain level of development, societies expect citizens to have skills such as being cooperative, effective in communication, problem solving, critical thinking, using technology effectively, conflict resolution, being empathetic, being assertive and productive. Besides, with increasing information, citizens are asked to have the skill of using information effectively. In this sense, Erdem and Akkoyunlu (2002) listed the characteristics of citizens

who can use information in reading, writing, speaking, listening, decision making, reasoning, and taking responsibility. In elementary education all courses contribute to teach skills. However, Social Studies is one of the important course aiming to teach these skills in elementary education. Also, Social Studies aims to enable citizens to take part in the society as effective citizens.

Social Studies is a course which helps children become a part of the society as knowledgeable individuals and which attaches importance to the development of good and social relationships. This course focuses on how the lives of individuals are affected by the environment, how they affect the environment, how institutions were formed in the past, how individuals coped with the difficulties in the past and how they do today (Shamsi, 2004). Social Studies is defined as a course that uses the information and method from social sciences to train effective citizens who can make decisions and solve problems in cases of changing conditions (Ozturk, 2009). Providing one of the most comprehensive definitions, NCSS (1993) defined Social Studies as a course fed by anthropology, archaeology, economy, geography, history, constitution, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion and sociology as well as humanities, mathematics and natural sciences. In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education (2004) approached to Social Studies as an elementary school course that aims to help individuals fulfil their social existence; which reflects social sciences and citizenship subjects such as history, geography, psychology, philosophy, political science and justice; which includes combining learning areas in a unit or theme; in which the interaction of people with their social and physical environment is examined in the context of today and future and is formed based on a holistic approach to teaching. Emphasizing social sciences, the Social Studies course enables skilled citizens to be trained with related content. As for the primary aim of the Social Studies course, it is to help students develop a social personality. The most important characteristic of social personality is being a good citizen. A good citizen is one who knows his/her responsibilities and is aware of the events in his/her environment (Sozer, 2008, p.49). At the same time, a good citizen is an individual who has adopted and internalized the culture of the society and had an understanding of developing that culture. In fact, maintaining the sustainability of nations is only possible with training good citizens (Safran, 2008, p.15). In this respect, implementing the Social Studies course which aims to train good citizens effectively could be said to play a key role in creating societies with skilled citizens.

When the literature on the Social Studies course is examined, it is seen that there are studies which focused on the citizenship practices from various aspects in the course (Ersoy, 2007; Hoge, 2002; Karaduman & Ozturk, 2014; Goz, 2010); which aimed to develop different skills (Gurdogan Bayir, 2010; Celikkaya, 2011; Yazici, 2006; Whitworth and Berson, 2002); which investigated the effect of different activities on academic achievement (Cengelci, 2005; Karakus, 2006; Box and Little, 2003); and which examined the practices regarding the values of education (Cengelci, 2010; Baydar, 2009; Rainey, 1999). However, in related literature, there is no research conducted to examine elementary school preservice teachers' views about the role of the course of Social Studies in creating societies with skilled citizens. Accordingly, identifying the views of future teachers in this respect would be of great significance. In this sense, the aim of this study was to reveal elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the role of the Social Studies course in creating societies with skilled citizens. The following research questions were directed in line with this purpose:

- What are elementary school pre-service teachers' views about skilled citizens and about societies with skilled citizens?
- What are elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the importance of the Social Studies course in educating societies with skilled citizens?
- What are the problems experienced in relation to the Social Studies course according to the elementary school pre-service teachers?
- What are elementary school pre-service teachers' suggestions regarding effective Social Studies teaching?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study was conducted using the qualitative research method. In this study, the interpretive research design, which is an umbrella term in qualitative research, was used. Interpretive research focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences, on how they structure their own worlds and on the meanings they attach to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In this study, which was based on the elementary school pre-service teachers' experiences in their undergraduate courses and school practicum, their views about the role of the Social Studies

course in creating a society with skilled citizens were examined through an open-ended survey, focused group interview and the lesson plans they prepared.

## Participants

The participants of the study were senior students attending the department of Elementary School Teaching at the Education Faculty of Anadolu University. In this research criterion sampling which is one of the purposeful sampling methods was used. These criteria were determined as taking the courses of Social Studies teaching, school experience and teaching practicum. Therefore, they had experience in observing and teaching in a real classroom environment. The personal characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Characteristics of the Participants*

Personal Characteristics of the Participants	f
Gender	
Female	43
Male	24
Observing Social Studies course at the practicum school	
Yes	33
No	34
Preparing Social Studies lesson plan	
Yes	57
No	10
Enthusiasm with Social Studies course	
Yes	52
No	15
Total	67

As can be seen in Table 1, 43 of the participants were female, and 24 of them were male. Of all the participants, 33 of them observed a Social Studies course, while 34 of them did not. Also, 57 of the participants prepared a lesson plan for the Social Studies course, while 10 of them did not. Besides, while 52 of the participants liked the Social Studies course, 15 of them did not. Following the open-ended survey, a focus group interview was held with 10 of the participants. While selecting these participants for the focus group interview, whether they

had observed a Social Studies course and prepared a lesson plan was taken into account. In addition, 20 students' lesson plans for the Social Studies course were analysed.

### **Data Gathering and Analysis**

The research data in the present study were gathered using different data collection tools. The data collection tools used in this study were as follows:

*Open-ended survey:* An open-ended survey was administered to the elementary school pre-service teachers to reveal their personal characteristics, their perceptions regarding skilled citizens and society with skilled citizens, the importance of Social Studies in creating societies with skilled citizens, the related problems experienced and their suggested solutions. The open-ended survey developed by the researchers was administered, and the participants were informed about the fact that there were not any right or wrong answers. The time allocated for the survey was 30 minutes.

*Focus group interview:* A focus group interview was held with the pre-service teachers in the study. The purpose of this interview was to gather more in-depth data. During the interview, the students were asked to define societies with skilled citizens, to indicate its characteristics, to explain by giving reasons, to explain the roles of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens as well as its reasons, and to present their views about the problems experienced and their suggested solutions to these problems. Therefore, the interview was in the form of a discussion, and it lasted 80 minutes in total.

*Lesson plans:* The lesson plans prepared by the pre-service teachers were also analysed in the study. The type of the activities planned by the pre-service teachers in relation to Social Studies teaching was examined.

The data were analysed using inductive analysis. In inductive analysis, researchers firstly develop categories related to the research topic. They then count the words, sentences or images falling in these categories in the dataset being examined (Silverman, 2001, cited in Ozdemir, 2010). The basic procedure in inductive analysis is combining similar data in certain themes (Yildirim and Simsek, 2008). In this sense, the open-ended survey, the interview and the lesson plans were analysed together in this study; the themes were

developed; and the codes to be included in these themes were identified. These codes were then counted. The themes and the codes revealed in the study were interpreted by relating them to each other. Two researchers were involved in the analysis of the data in this study. Different data collection tools were used together to ensure the validity of the study. As for the reliability issue, the researchers conducted the analysed independently. After the researchers formed their themes, they identified the themes that they agreed and disagreed on. In the study, the pre-service teachers were coded with numbers used in the quotations. Furthermore, the same numbers were attached to the participants for all the data collection tools, and letters were used next to the numbers to represent the dataset from which the quotations were taken. For example, while the open-ended survey data for one pre-service teacher was coded as S18, the interview data were coded as I18 and the lesson plan as P18.

## Findings

The findings revealed in the study are presented under the headings of "perception of being skilled", "skilled citizens and society with skilled citizens", "importance of Social Studies in creating societies with skilled citizens", "problems experienced" and "suggested solutions".

### Findings Related to the Perception of Being Skilled

Figure 1 presents the elementary school pre-service teachers' perception of being skilled.

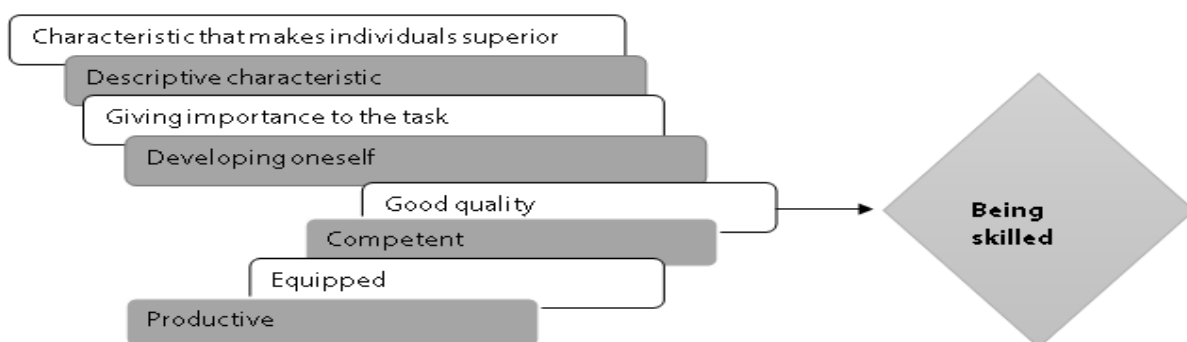


Figure 1. Perception of Being Skilled

The elementary school pre-service teachers' perception of being skilled was found to be related to being productive, equipped, competent, good quality, giving importance to a task, developing oneself, descriptive characteristic and the characteristic that makes individuals



superior. One of the elementary school pre-service teachers who related being skilled to being equipped reported that *"In relation to being skilled, I firstly think of being equipped. Being skilled is closely related to being equipped; in other words, being versatile (S21)"*. Regarding self-development, one pre-service teacher said: *"It is individuals' effort to develop themselves in every aspect as much as possible (S36)"*, while another pre-service teacher reported: *"it was developed, and it includes everything necessary; it is good... (S34)"*. One pre-service teacher who related being skilled to good quality said: *"... I think of good quality; it is related to being skilled (S12)"*, and another pre-service teacher said: *"It means good quality in everything and effectiveness in the task (S49)"*. Similar to this view, another pre-service teacher explained his/her views as follows: *"It is the way it should be. If a task is to be performed, it should be good-quality; then, it means being skilled and performing a task conscientiously (S57)"*. One of the pre-service teachers who defined being skilled as a descriptive characteristic provided another definition as follows: *"It is the non-numeric characteristics of something. In other words, the standards that are described and seen (S16)"*, while another defined it as *"a set of characteristics used to describe a concept, phenomenon or event. It is used to make sense of something (S43)"*. Based on the views of the elementary school pre-service teachers, it could be stated that they perceived being skilled as the characteristics that individuals should have and that they believed these characteristics should be developed.

### **Findings Related to Skilled Citizens and Society with Skilled Citizens**

The elementary school pre-service teachers' views about skilled citizens and societies with skilled citizens are presented in Figure 2.

The Role Of Social Studies Course In Creating Society With Skilled Citizens:  
Pre-Service Elementary Teachers Express Their Views

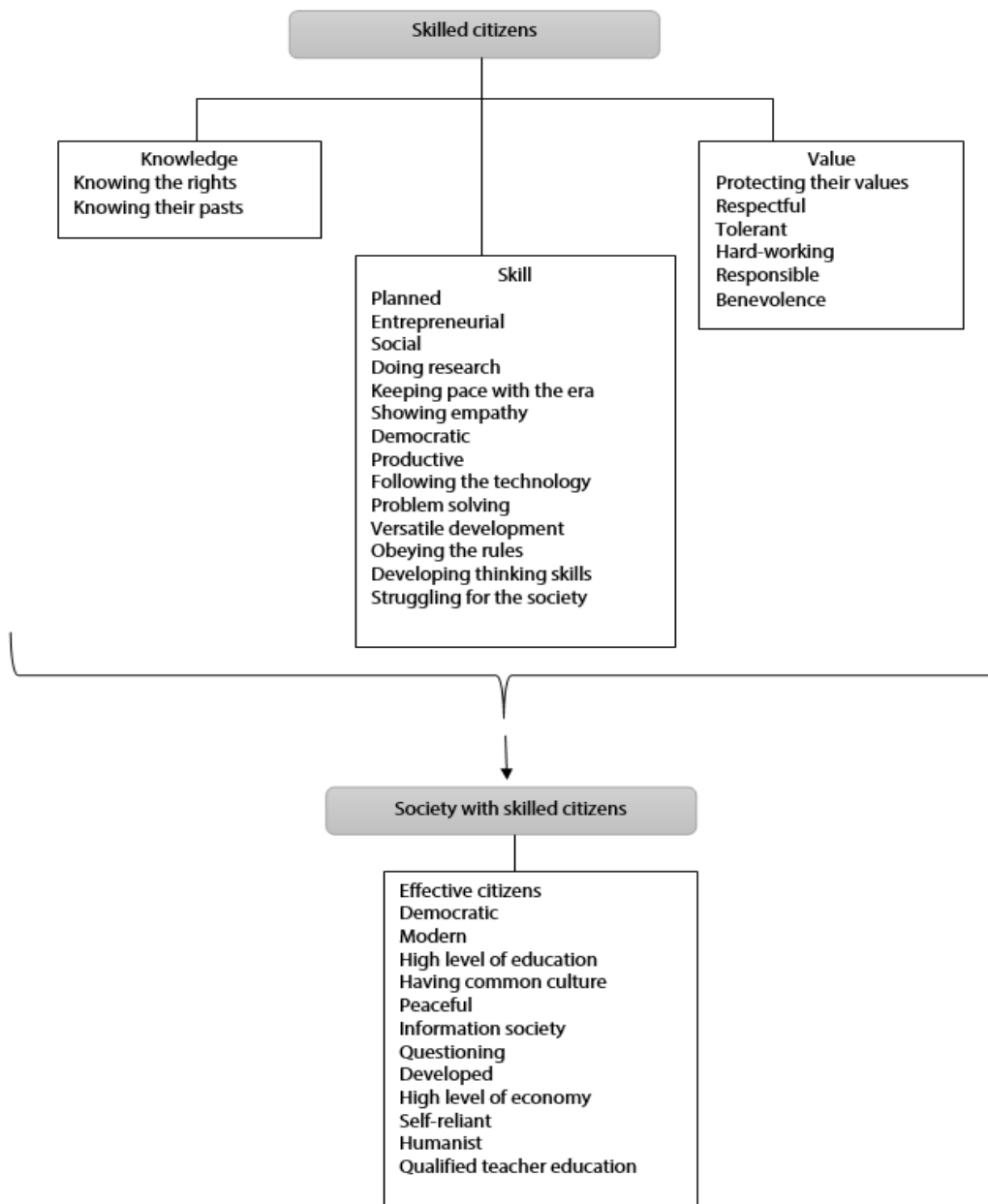


Figure 2. Skilled Citizens and Society with Skilled Citizens

It was observed that the elementary school pre-service teachers discussed the characteristics of skilled citizens in terms of the dimensions of knowledge, skill and value. The elementary school pre-service teachers stated that skilled citizens should be knowledgeable about their rights and past; about the skills of being planned, entrepreneurial, social, doing research, keeping pace with the era, showing empathy, being democratic, productive, following the technology, solving problems, versatile development, obeying the rules, thinking, and struggling for the society; and about the values of protecting their values, being respectful,

tolerant, hard-working, responsible and benevolence. One of the pre-service teachers indicated that skilled citizens should know their rights saying: *"They know their citizenship rights and what their rights are (S41)"*, while another pre-service teacher said: *"...they should know their own culture, and they should do this based on their past (S18)"*. Another pre-service teacher stated during the interview that *"Citizens who know their past and learn from their past... Skilled citizens are those who show respect to their past and learn from it for their future (I35)"* and reported in the open-ended survey that *"They know their past and show respect to it; they should know their past so that they can learn from it... (S35)"*. Arguing that skilled citizens should have research skills, another pre-service teacher said: *"They should be citizens who conduct research... (S35)"*. One of the pre-service teachers stated that citizens should keep pace with the era saying *"They should keep pace with the era by following the developments (S48)"*, and another pre-service teacher argued that *"They should be open to any innovation brought about by the era... (S21)"*. Similar to these views, another pre-service teacher explained that citizens should follow the technology saying *"They should use the technology and follow the developments (S18)"*. One of the pre-service teachers who thought that skilled citizens should develop themselves in versatile aspects said: *"The society develops in line with the development of various fields together. For this reason, citizens should develop themselves in many areas (S24)"*. One other pre-service teacher indicated that obeying social rules is a skill that skilled citizens have, saying: *"...they obey the rules because people show respect to others' rights as long as they obey the rules. In this way, conflicts are prevented (S36)"*, while another pre-service teacher said: *"Citizens who live in accordance with the rules while waiting for a bus in the queue or communicating with others...(I42)"*. Another pre-service teacher who focused on owning thinking skills pointed out that *"They should be critical citizens who can do questioning because those who live based on others' opinions cannot progress (S47)"*, and another pre-service teacher said: *"They have thinking skills and also express their opinions appropriately... I44)"*. Arguing that individuals should have the skill in struggling for the society, one of the pre-service teachers reported via the survey that *"Individuals should help each other and be beneficial for the society (S9)"* and pointed out during the interview that *"If teachers or doctors work for the society and do their job in the best way they can, that society will develop (I18)"*. Another pre-service teacher reflected this argument in their lesson plan by asking students *"If there is a problem in the society, what can be done to solve it? How can the public opinion be moulded for solving this problem? (P22)"*. One of the pre-service teachers reported his/her

views about showing respect in terms of the values citizens should have, saying: *"They show respect to individuals' views and opinions... (S17)"*. Another pre-service teacher, giving examples regarding the days special for societies, pointed out that citizens should show respect to such issues (P20). Another pre-service teacher used a poem in his/her lesson plan regarding the value of benevolence and stated the students that they would be asked questions as *"What is benevolence, and what is its importance in the society? (P18)"*. One pre-service teacher explained the importance of protecting values saying *"They should protect the customs, religion and the judicial traditions of the society (S60)"*. Based on these views of the elementary school pre-service teachers, it could be stated that they thought the characteristic features that skilled citizens have are important.

Regarding the characteristics that society with skilled citizens should have, the pre-service teachers' statements included being made up of effective citizens, democratic, modern, having high level of education, peaceful, being an information society, questioning, advanced, having high level of economy, self-reliant, humanist and having qualified teacher education. One of the pre-service teachers pointed out that societies with skilled citizens are made up of effective citizens saying *"It is the society in which citizens vote, pay their taxes, know when to take responsibility for their country and have conscious and sensible ideas (I41)"*. In addition, another pre-service teacher who associated the society with skilled citizens to being democratic said: *"The government should apply a transparent policy to citizens. In other words, the active justice should be the same with the existing one. Namely, it should be democratic (I2)"*, while another said *"It should be a democratic society; namely, it should have freedom of thought (S26)"*. One of the pre-service teachers indicated that modern societies are skilled saying: *"It is the society that has reached the level of modern civilization (S37)"*. During the interview, another pre-service teacher said: *"It is the modern society and a modern country that meet the needs of the current era (I34)"*. Another pre-service teacher mentioned peaceful societies saying *"They are societies that live in peace (S28)"*, and another said during the interview that *"There are people living peacefully in those societies, everybody is in peace\_(I42)"*. Indicating that information societies are skilled, one of the pre-service teacher reported his/her views as follows: *"A society with skilled citizens is knowledgeable; thus the productivity is high (S4)"*. One of the pre-service teachers regarded the development level as an indicator of being a society with skilled citizens, saying *"Societies with skilled citizens are those who have different characteristics and who are*

*socially and culturally developed in every aspect (S33)", while another pre-service teacher reported the same view saying: "It is the society with the desired level of development (S18)"* Emphasizing that development should be constant, one pre-service teacher said: *"We are in the era of technology, and a society with skilled citizens should follow it, develop and be open to development (I17)".* It could also be stated that the elementary school pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of skilled citizens in creating societies with skilled citizens.

### Importance of the Social Studies Course in Creating Societies with Skilled Citizens

The elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the importance of the Social Studies course in creating societies with skilled citizens are presented in Figure 3.

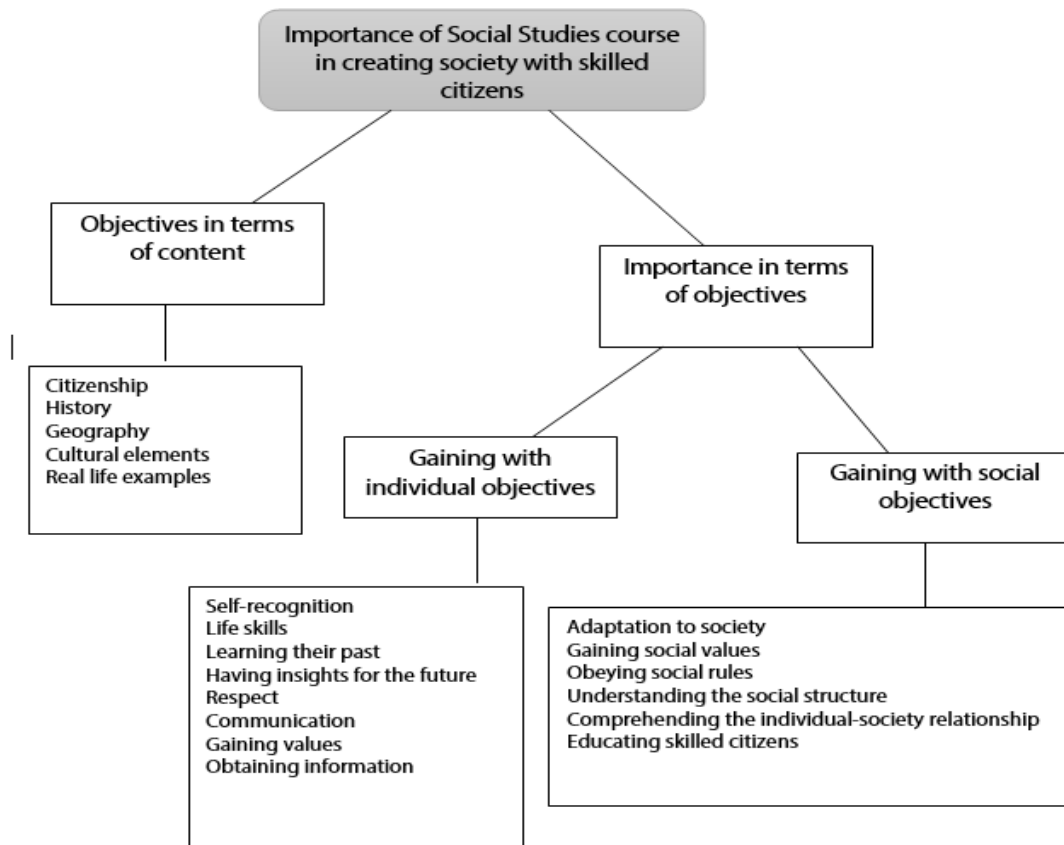


Figure 3. Importance of the Social Studies Course in Creating Society with Skilled Citizens

The elementary school pre-service teachers discussed the Social Studies course in terms of its importance regarding the content and the objectives of the course. They explained its importance in terms of the individual objectives as self-recognition, life skills, learning the

past, having an insight for the future, gaining the value of respect, having communication skills, and obtaining information. One of the pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of self-recognition as one of the individual objectives saying: *"The course enables individuals to develop self-recognition (S26)"*. Arguing that the course is important for helping individuals acquire life skills, another pre-service teacher said based on his/her experiences: *"It also helped me acquire the skills that I can use in my own life (S49)"*, and the same pre-service teacher supported this view saying: *"Social Studies is a course intertwined with daily life. For this reason, it helps individuals acquire life skills. They should attend this course to form a society with skilled citizens (S49)"*. Another pre-service teacher thinking that the Social Studies course is important in terms of teaching the past stated: *"It allows individuals to know their past and to be aware of the past events; namely, it helps them learn their past (I43)"*. Emphasizing the importance of the course in helping individuals develop an insight for the future, one of the pre-service teacher said based on his/her prior experiences that *"Social Studies helped me learn from the history. Consequently, it helped me make better decisions about my future (S13)"*, while another pre-service teacher explained the same notion as follows: *"People learn the history, geography and culture of the region they live in and shape their future (S11)"*. One of the pre-service teachers claimed that the Social Studies course helped equip students with values, saying based on his/her experiences that *"It taught me the values that I should gain in relation to my social environment (S12)"*. Similarly, another pre-service teacher stated that the course is important in increasing one's knowledge, saying based on his/her experiences that *"It was theoretically useful and informative, and it taught me the basic knowledge to progress to the next phases (S60)"*. One pre-service teacher who reflected the notion of gaining knowledge into his/her lesson plan and provided information about the responsibility of local government units for the purpose of teaching local government units (P7). In relation to the importance of the course in terms of the social objectives, the elementary school pre-service teachers mentioned adaptation to the society, learning social values and rules, understanding the social structure, comprehending the society-citizen relationship and educating skilled citizens. Regarding adaptation to the society, one of the pre-service teachers said: *"Citizens adapt to the society by being informed about its structure at early ages (S2)"*. Thinking that the Social Studies course is significant in teaching social rules, one pre-service teacher said *"The Social Studies course teaches the rules that should be obeyed in the society (S46)"*. Discussing the importance of understanding the social structure, another pre-service teacher reported that *"The Social Studies course*

*enables students to understand the social structure by recognizing the societies and their management policies (S38)*". Some of the pre-service teachers related this situation to their own experiences saying *"I have raised awareness of the society and of the social structure (S28)*". Similarly, another pre-service teacher said during the interview that *"Through this course, citizens learn social rules at elementary school. Therefore, the course is important in terms of learning how to become a society (I42)*". Considering these views of the elementary school pre-service teachers, it could be stated that they considered the Social Studies course to be important in creating a society with skilled citizens both individually and socially.

It was observed that the pre-service teachers perceived the course as important in creating a society with skilled citizens because it included contents such as citizenship, history, geography, cultural elements and real life examples. One of the pre-service teachers indicating its importance in terms of citizenship content said: *"Since the Social Studies course provides basic information, it has the content necessary to make them good citizens (S18)*". Besides, another pre-service teacher explained the same notion during the interview as follows: *"Since the aim of this course is to educate good citizens, it is important to include such contents (I1)*". One of the pre-service teachers related the teaching of history contents to his/her prior experiences, saying *"Learning about the history developed me a lot (S40)*", and another pre-service teacher referring to his/her experiences said: *"Learning history contents was important for me (S12)*". Mentioning the importance of the geography contents, one pre-service teacher reported that *"It makes us get to know the country we live in and other countries as well (S1)*". Another pre-service teacher stated that the course includes cultural elements, saying *"Students learn their rights and wrongs with the cultural elements being presented in the course... Learning cultural elements is important for a society with skilled citizens (I44)*". With regard to giving real life examples, one pre-service teacher said *"... this course also touches the events and discusses topics from real life, which makes it important in this respect (S8)*". The elementary school pre-service teachers perceived the Social Studies course content to be important for creating a society with skilled citizens in terms of presenting citizenship content, making students get to know their environment and providing real life examples.

### Findings Related to the Problems Experienced in the Social Studies Course

The elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the problems experienced in the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens are presented in Figure 4.

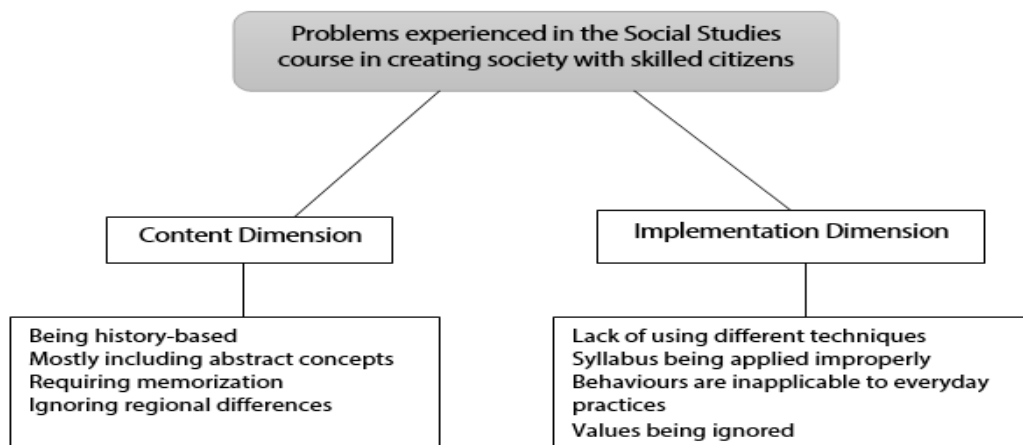


Figure 4. Problems Experienced in the Social Studies Course

The elementary school pre-service teachers stated that the problems experienced in the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens were related to the dimensions of content and implementation. They described the problems regarding the dimension of content as the content being mostly related to history and involving abstract concepts, the contents being perceived to require memorization and the regional differences unpaid attention to in the content. One of the pre-service teachers thinking that the course is mostly history-based said: *"We always tell them about wars since the course contents are heavily loaded with history, which affects the effectiveness of the lessons (I17)"*. One pre-service teacher related the contents requiring memorization to history: *"There is history, and we expect students to memorize it, not comprehend it well (I34)"*. Regarding the problem of not considering the regional differences in the contents, another pre-service teacher said *"No attention is paid to regional differences while preparing the syllabus. As a result, different lifestyles in different regions cannot be presented, it is not possible to give examples regarding the climates. Teachers do not want to spend time on this (I18)"*. In relation to the problems with the implementation dimension, the statements of the pre-service elementary teachers included lack of using different techniques, the syllabus being unapplied properly, ignoring the values and failure to turn behaviours into practice. In relation to lack of use of different techniques in the teaching process, one of the pre-service teacher said *"The content cannot be made*



*concrete since different techniques are not used. For example, children's rights are covered by students coming to the board and reading the rights loudly. It can be covered using different techniques (I44)". One of the pre-service teachers thinking that the values are ignored said: "I observe cultural alienation in children, which results from the ignoring the values that constitute a society within the scope of the Social Studies course (I18)". Arguing that the syllabus is not applied properly, one of the pre-service teachers said: "The syllabus, which was changed in 2005, is a perfect syllabus with all its contents. However, we see that it is not applied in the classrooms. The teachers only provide the titles and move on. The syllabus is not applied properly (I34)". The same pre-service teacher pointed that behaviours do not turn into practice saying "For instance, think about critical thinking. We can see that it is not acquired by students. The information we present only remains at the theoretical level (I34)". The pre-service teachers stated that the problems were due to the content and that there were difficulties in implementation as well.*

### **Findings Related to the Suggested Solutions**

The pre-service teachers' suggestions for effective teaching of the Social Studies course to create a society with skilled citizens are presented in Figure 5.

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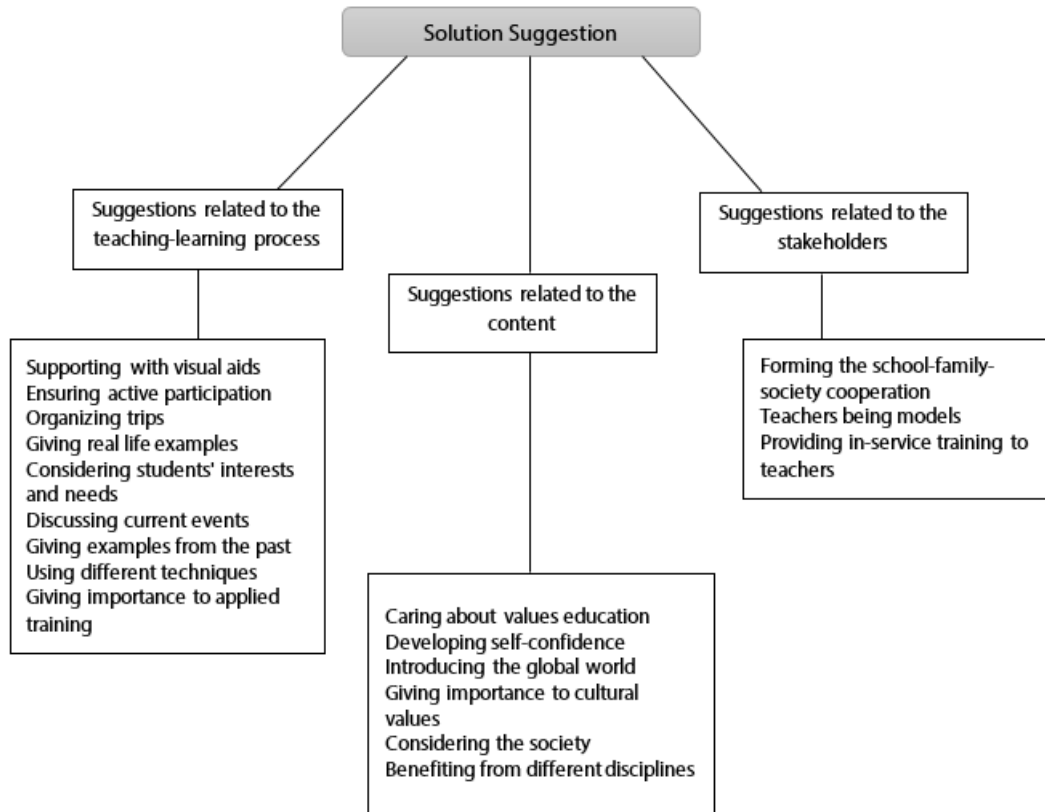


Figure 5. Suggested Solutions

For effective teaching of the Social Studies course to create a society with skilled citizens, the elementary school pre-service teachers offered suggestions related to the teaching-learning process, the syllabus contents and the stakeholders. Regarding the teaching-learning process, the pre-service teachers' statements included supporting teaching with visual elements, ensuring active participation, organizing trips, providing real life examples, considering students' interests and needs, discussing current topics, giving examples from the past, using different techniques and attaching importance to applied training. One of the pre-service teachers arguing that visual elements should be used in the teaching-learning process explained his/her views as follows *"The contents in the Social Studies course should be supported with audio and visual tools to present the environment better (S48)"*. Another pre-service teacher reflected this idea by using a video in his/her lesson plan regarding public institutions (P22). One pre-service teacher indicating that organizing trips is important said: *"Trips should be organized to introduce students into real life experiences, and lessons should not be conducted only in the classroom (I41)"*. Another pre-service teacher also emphasized the importance of trips saying *"Activities like trips and observations provide*

*students with opportunities for real life experiences (S7)*". Regarding the use of current events in the course, a pre-service teacher explained his/her views as follows *"While preparing the curricula, the necessary explanations should certainly be included to mention current phenomena (I2)"*. Moreover, in his/her lesson plan, a pre-service teacher used a newspaper bulletin related to public opinion regarding the topic covered (P50). One of the pre-service teachers arguing that the lessons should be taught in an applied way reflected this view in his/her lesson plan by creating an election in the class while covering the election topic (P55). Based on these views of the elementary school pre-service teachers, it could be stated that they pointed out the necessity of the students to be active in the teaching-learning process.

Related to the elementary school pre-service teachers' suggestions for the content, they put forward the idea that importance should be given to values education and that developing self-confidence, introducing the global world, caring about cultural values, considering the society and benefiting from different disciplines should be included. One of the pre-service teachers focusing on developing self-confidence said *"The contents should be related to developing self-confidence. Confidence is important for students to develop themselves (S8)"*. Another pre-service teacher explained the importance of introducing the global world as follows *"Besides learning cultural values, understanding the global world is also important (S28)"*. The elementary school pre-service teachers mostly suggested that different topics should be included in the Social Studies course content in detail.

The elementary school pre-service teachers' suggestions related to the stakeholders included forming school-family-society cooperation, teachers' being models and providing in-service training for teachers. One of the pre-service teachers focusing on school-family-society cooperation reported his/her views as follows *"Teachers should cooperate with parents. Schools should be intertwined with the society. This cooperation is important for children (S18)"*. The same pre-service teacher pointed out that teachers should become models saying *"Teachers should be models both for the society and for the students (S18)"*. One of the pre-service teachers suggested that teachers should be provided with in-service training saying: *"Teachers should constantly develop themselves; for this reason, they should be provided with in-service training to follow the current trends and to improve the quality of the society*

(I42)". Probably, the elementary school pre-service teachers perceived the *stakeholders* as important in creating a society with skilled citizens.

In the present study, the findings revealed the importance of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens. However, it was found that there were several problems experienced in the teaching process of the Social Studies course. In addition, according to the elementary school pre-service teachers, these problems can be solved through improvements in various dimensions.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the importance of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens were examined in terms of perception of being skilled, skilled citizens and society with skilled citizens, the importance of the Social Studies course in this process, the problems experienced, and suggested solutions.

In this respect, the elementary school pre-service teachers defined being skilled with concepts such as characteristics related to individuals, characteristics that individuals should have, good quality, being productive and being equipped. Turkish Language Institution (2014) defines being skilled as "the characteristics of something related to being good or bad; good quality". In this sense, the elementary school pre-service teachers' definitions are consistent with those included in the dictionary.

The elementary school pre-service teachers referred to the characteristics that skilled citizens should have as knowledge, skill and values. The pre-service teachers indicated skills such as doing research, showing empathy, following technology, problem solving, and having thinking skills. Today, the skills that individuals should have in relation to the 21st century skills are described as creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, cooperation, knowledge and technology literacy (Partnership for 21st century skills, 2011; OECD, 2013; MEB, 2007). Besides, these skills were also among the skills that should be taught within the scope of the curriculum of the Social Studies course which was put into practice in 2005 (Ministry of National Education, 2004). Therefore, the skills mentioned by the elementary school pre-service teachers are among the ones mentioned in related literature

today. The elementary school pre-service teachers explained the values that individuals should have as respect, tolerance, being hard-working, benevolence and responsibility. In a study conducted on values by Can (2008), the most frequently emphasized values were found to be responsibility and respect. The elementary school pre-service teachers mostly emphasized the value of respect that skilled citizens should have. Besides, these values mentioned by the elementary school pre-service teachers are also included in the curriculum of the Social Studies course. However, apart from these, the curriculum includes many values such as being fair, independence, peace, environment and cooperation. The elementary school pre-service teachers described societies with skilled citizens using characteristics such as information society, developed, high education level, modern and peaceful. According to the elementary school pre-service teachers, skilled citizens could constitute the societies with skilled citizens.

The elementary school pre-service teachers mentioned the importance of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens in terms of the course objectives and the course content, and they discussed the objectives in terms of individual and social objectives. Similarly, in the curriculum of the Social Studies course, the values that should be taught are gathered under headings such as knowledge, skill, value and concept (Ministry of National Education, 2004). In addition, the objectives of the Social Studies course are categorized as those related to knowledge, skill, values and social participation (Michaelis & Garcia, 1996). NCSS (1992) described these values as individual and cultural identity development, participation in the society, and sensitivity to problems. The most important objective of the Social Studies course is to develop social personality (Sozer, 2008). In this respect, Turner (1999) described the universal objectives of the course as educating citizens, developing awareness of social issues, teaching the methods of social sciences, and developing students' high order thinking skills. Briefly, the importance of the Social Studies course objectives emphasized by the elementary school pre-service teachers is consistent with the related literature. The elementary school pre-service teachers stated that the Social Studies course was also important in terms of its content, and they related this importance to history, geography, citizenship, culture and real life examples. This relationship established by the elementary school teachers is also consistent with the definitions of Social Studies in literature (Ministry of National Education, 2004; NCSS, 1993; Ozturk, 2006). The reason is that according to the definitions, the Social Studies course is related to sciences such as

history, geography, sociology, anthropology, economy and justice. However, it could be stated that the elementary school pre-service teachers had insufficient knowledge about the content since they only mentioned history and geography. At the same time, in studies conducted with elementary school students, the students were found to define the course content with similar statements such as history, geography, social issues and about the past (Yasar and Gurdogan Bayir, 2010; Deveci and Gurdogan Bayir, 2011; Zhao and Hoge, 2005). The results of these studies related to the Social Studies course are also consistent with this study although the age groups of the participants were different.

The elementary school pre-service teachers discussed and regarded the problems experienced in this process as problems with the dimensions of the content and implementation. In the content dimension, they mentioned abstract concepts' being intense, being history-based, ignoring regional differences and being considered to require, while in the implementation dimension, their statements included the syllabus being unapplied properly, lack of using different techniques, and the values being ignored. Similarly, Sozer (2008) stated that the concepts, principles and generalisations in the Social Studies course result in a perception of a memorization-based course, while in their studies, Aykac (2007) and Ekinici (2007) found that regional differences are not considered within the scope of the curriculum of the Social Studies course. Also, Doganay (2008) stated that curriculum is consistent in terms of knowledge and skills, but there are problems with implementation at schools. In this sense, it could be stated that the problems mentioned by the elementary school pre-service teachers were also revealed in related literature.

The solutions suggested by the elementary school teachers in relation to effective teaching of the Social Studies course were related to the teaching-learning process, the content and the stakeholders. Regarding the teaching-learning process, the pre-service teachers' suggestions included giving real life examples, using visual aids, using different techniques, and organizing trips; values education and benefiting from different disciplines in relation to the content dimension; and school-family-society cooperation, teachers being a model and providing in-service training for teachers in relation to the dimension of stakeholders. Aytac (2007) pointed out that visual elements such as photographs, maps and films should be used in teaching Social Studies and that organizing trips is important. Similarly, Akbaba (2009) stated that the use of visual aids in teaching Social Studies could attract students' attention. In

this sense, the suggestion of supporting teaching with visual elements is also considered important in related literature. In a study study, Akgul (2006) found that teachers used different techniques in teaching Social Studies and that they mostly used question-answer and traditional teaching techniques. Additionally, Ozpolat (2009) emphasized the use of methods that would make students active in the Social Studies course. The elementary school pre-service teachers also pointed out that different techniques should be employed. In their study, Gomleksiz and Curo (2011) reported that importance should be given to values education, which was also suggested by the elementary school pre-service teachers in the present study. Yapici and Demirdelen (2007) reported that the teachers did not get enough in-service training related to the curriculum. The elementary school pre-service teachers also emphasized teachers' receiving in-service training for effective teaching of the Social Studies course. Karatas and Karaman (2010) found that in the Social Studies course, the school-family cooperation could be partially established. Similarly, the elementary school pre-service teachers attached importance to the development of school-family-society cooperation.

As a result of this study, which examined the elementary school pre-service teachers' views about the importance of the Social Studies course in creating a society with skilled citizens, it could be concluded that they gave importance to the course. In addition, the problems in terms of both content and implementation were mentioned. However, suggestions such as preparing and implementing the curriculum, providing in-service training for teachers and enriching the application dimension of the course were put forward. In this sense, in order to create a society with skilled citizens, the Social Studies course could be said to be significantly important considering its aim of socialization.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions could be offered in relation to creating society with skilled citizens:

- Teachers should conduct practices to make students active in the Social Studies course.
- School-family-society cooperation needs to be established.

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- In order to create societies with skilled citizens, all stakeholders should give importance to the Social Studies course.
- Studies on the importance of other courses in creating a society with skilled citizens could be conducted using different methods.
- In order to create societies with skilled citizens, values education should be given importance teaching-learning process.

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