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Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Understanding of Global Education

Mehmet AÇIKALIN*

Abstract: Global education has gained much importance in recent years and become more influential on the educational systems all over the world. Likewise, the recent curriculum reforms in Turkey have brought global education into perspective. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate Turkish preservice social studies teachers' understanding of global education and how they relate it with social studies education. Data analysis indicated that although the majority of the participants had precise understanding of "global", they had misconceptions about "global education perspective" and trouble to establish a connection between this perspective and social studies education.

Keywords: Global education, social studies, Turkish preservice teachers.

Global education (Alger &Harf, 1985; Hanvey, 1976; Merryfield, 1997, 2002) has gained much importance due to recent developments on the world. According to Kirkwood (2001), today we live in a global world where all countries are connected to each other in some way.In this world, developments in one country may affect other countries or even the whole world; and global issues such as hunger, environmental pollution,and terrorism influence the planet. Global education has been debated and studied for the last two decades when very significant global issues arouse. Yet, still there are different approaches and conceptualizations of global education (Merryfield, 1997).Although global education has been conceptualized in different ways (see Hicks, 2003;Marshall, 2007; Pike, 2000), it has become significantly influential on the educational systems and curricula of many countries including United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Sweden (see Calder, 2000; Ibrahim, 2005; Marshall, 2005, 2007; Kniep&Tye, 1991; Scheunpflug&Asbrand, 2006; Tye 2003).

The recent curriculum reform movements in Turkey have brought global education into perspective as well. Unlike the former ones the current social studies education curriculum is included a learning theme named "global connections" (Açıkalın, 2010; MilliEğitimBakanlığıTalimTerbiyeKuruluBaşkanlığı [MEB], 2009a, 2009b).Instructional units such as "My away friends", "Our World", and "Bridges between Countries" that focus on global and cultural connections are also included in the current edition of the social studies curriculum (MEB, 2009a, 2009b). In addition, the current social studies teacher education program is included a required course entitled "Contemporary World Issues". There seems to be the influence of global education on social studies curriculum has taking effects both at K-12 and teacher education levels. Nevertheless, in Turkey there have not been done much about the preservice social studies teachers understandings of global education, although they are expected to teach based on this perspective in their future careers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate what Turkish social studies preservice teachers understand from the concept of global education and how they relate it with social studies education.

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What is global education?

There are a number of definitions and conceptualization of global education discussed by educators (see Hicks, 2003; Marshall, 2007; Pike, 2000). Accordingto Ukpodoku (1999), global education aims to develop students'knowledge and understanding about people and cultures in other lands, including their values and customs. Likewise, JohnMcFadden, Merry M. Merryfield, and Keith R. Barron (1997) stated that"Global education develops the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the basis for participation in a world characterized by cultural diversity, inequity, interconnectedness, cooperation and conflict"(p. 10). On the other hand, David Hicks (2003) definedglobal educationas "the term used internationally to designate the academic field concerned with teaching and learning about global issues, events, and perspectives" (p.274). National Council for Accreditationof Teacher Education (NCATE) (2008), a professional teacher education organization, define global perspective "an understanding of the interdependencyof nations and peoples and the political, economic, ecological,and social concepts and values that affect lives withinand across national boundaries. It allows for the explorationof multiple perspectives on events and issues"(p.87).

While it seems that an ambiguity about the definition of global education exists, there are explicit goals or themes of global education which are accepted by many scholars. Toni F. Kirkwood (2001, p.12) in the article entitled "OurGlobal Age Requires Global Education" summarizes anddiscusses different definitions and dimensions of global education.According to her, the existing global education isgrounded in four major themes:

- multiple perspectives (also see Hanvey, 1976; Hicks, 2003;McFadden et al., 1997; Pike, 2000),
- comprehension and appreciation of cultures (also seeMcFadden et al.,1997; Merryfield,1997),
- knowledge of global issues (also see Hanvey, 1976; Merryfield, 1997), and
- the world as an interrelated system (also see Alger &Harf, 1985; Hicks, 2003; Pike, 2000; Ramler, 1991).

As the literature indicates, these four themes are alsowidely acknowledged by many scholars in the field. Therefore,they are going to be used in the following sections asthe criteria for analyzing and evaluating preservice social studies teachers' understanding of global education.

Methodology

An open ended questionnaire was developed for this study. The questionnaire was also reviewed by two other educators, one an elementary education program professor and the other a social studies teacher. The questionnaire was then modified by the researcher according to their suggestions and recommendations. The questionnaire had two sections. The first section contained the demographic questions for the participants. The second section contained three questions to evaluate the participants' understanding of global education. Forty-five social studies preservice teachers were participated in this study in one of the large universities located in the Northwest of Turkey.

Findings

The data were analyzed using inductive analysis approach (Bogdan&Biklen, 1998); and thus coding categories were created and presented in tables for each questions. As can be seen from Table I almost two-third of the participants (64.5 %) associated the word "global" with such concepts

"universal", "universalism", and/ or "globalization". Here are a couple of selected responses from the participants who indicated that.

> I think global means, something is not local, …universal (P. # 15).
>
> It [global] literally means "universal". These days, globalization (universalism) is noticeable. International differences, such as language, religion, and ethnicity, disappear with globalization (P. # 12).

Table I
What does the word "global" mean to you?

Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Universal & globalization	29	64.5
Related & affected the whole world	8	18
Unification of the world	5	11
International / cross-borders	2	4.5
Comprehensive	1	2

Nearly one-fifth of the participants (18 %) used the term "global" something related or affected to whole world.P # 19 stated that "Global means social, environmental, economical, and political concepts or events that relate whole world. These concepts and events may be emerged as problems. For instance, problems like hunger, unemployment, and wars are global problems concerned the entire world."As can be seen from table 1 and participants' responses, two major categories (Universal & globalization and Related & affected the whole world) seem to be acceptable definition of "global" concept. Thus, it seems that majority of the participant grasped the foundational meaning of the "global" and generally they were able define the concept.The rest of the participants were not able to come up with a coherent definition or explanation of "global" and they generally made sense of global as "unification of the World", "international / cross-border", and "comprehensive." Although few students pointed out these descriptions, three other categories created based on participants' responses and presented in Table I.

The data analysis for the second questionclearly showed that participant students had difficulties to define "global education" perspective as an educational concept. Majority of the participants (n=32, 71%) indicated that unification of educational systems or methods on the world as definition of global education. For instance, P. # 17 stated that "[Global education] means all people over the world get the same education. It is having everybody to take the same education with one single curriculum." Similarly, P. # 8 stated that "[Global education]is making up all educational systems and approaches to be commonly and universally accepted on the world." Only nine participants who constitute exactly one-fifth of the total participants were able define global education perspective in some way and some of them cited the importance of global issues (i.e. environmental issues, global warming). For instance, P. # 28 pointed out that "Global education is more than your own culture. We all use the world culture and heritage and interested in global issues and problems. … These problems influence the whole world more than the locals." Another participant named few global issues when describing global education. S/he (P. # 34) stated that "[Global education is] getting education beyond national issues and focusing on world problems such as environmental pollution and global warming."As can be understood from these responses, these participants when they were defining global education, they were able to articulate a couple of global education themes including knowledge of world cultures and global issues. Thus, it seems that only this group of the participants was able to define and explain global education perspective to some degree.

Table II
What do you think global education means?

Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Unification of educational systems / methods	32	71
Definition and / or citing themes of global education	9	20
Other	4	9

Although the participants had trouble to define "global education" majority of them thought social studies and global education somehow related. As can be seen from table 3, when the participants asked to establish a connection between these two concepts, 80 % of the total participants stated global education and social studies education were somehow related whereas one-fifth of the total participants (n=9, 20%) believed that they were not related at all.

Table III
How do you describe the relation between social studies and global education?

Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Related	36	80
Not related	9	20

Although majority of the participants believed social studies and global education somehow related, most of these participants were not able articulate a valid connection or relation between these concepts. Only few participants were able to define the connection between social studies and global education evidently.Interestingly, exactly one-fifth of total participants (n=9, 20%) were able to state a valid connection between these fields. Here are examples from selected students who established this connection between these fields.

> Global problems (i.e. hunger, global warming, environmental pollution, water shortage, economic crisis etc.) which are considered a part of global education can also be considered a part of social studies education. (P # 29)

> Like global education, social studies also helps us to understand and learn world cultures; and thus, I think these [concepts] are related. (P. # 8)

These responses also showed that these students were focusing on world cultures and global education when they established a connection between social studies and global education perspective. Although this is a significant finding, only few students were able establish this relation in a meaningful way. Thus, it can be concluded that although the majority of the students correctly defined the concept of "global", they had misconceptions about "global education perspective" and trouble to establish a valid connection between this perspective and social studies education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data analysis indicated that although this group of Turkish preservicesocial studies teachers generally had clear understanding of "global" concept, they had misconceptions and trouble to define "global education perspective" in a meaningful way. Even most of the participants were not able to state any global education themes in their responses. Rather, they tried to define global education based on the literal meaning of "global". Thus, this way of thinking led them to believe "global education was the unification of educational systems or methods on the world." Although majority of the participants had misconceptions about "global education" they thought this educational approach somehow related to social studies education. However, most of the participants were not able articulate a valid connection or relation between social studies and global education.

Thus, it can be concluded that this group of Turkish preservice teachers had trouble to define global education, graspthe principles of this concept, and associate it with social studies education. Accordingly, there is a need to focus more on global education in social studies teacher education programs in Turkish universities. Perhaps, more courses should be offered to social studies preservice teachers with focus on various aspects of global education. Also more research is needed to understand the current state of global education at K-12 levels and how to infuse global education into Turkish social studies curriculum.

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