

## A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE PROSPECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' ROLE-MODEL PREFERENCES

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### ABSTRACT

In this study is intended to investigate prospective social studies teachers' role model preferences and the reflections of these preferences to their daily lives. This study was designed as a qualitative study in the form of descriptive model. The participants consisted of 306 prospective social studies teachers enrolled in nine different state universities in Turkey. Data have been collected by the help of a questionnaire consisting of four open-ended questions. The data were initially analyzed descriptively and later they were coded by using a content analysis technique. The findings showed that most of the prospective social studies teachers found themselves capable enough in terms of their personal traits, mental abilities, and their communication with people. In addition, it was shown that prospective social studies teachers generally modelled political leaders, academicians, teachers, and their family members in terms of their personal characteristics, communicative skills, teaching styles, intelligence, and accomplishments of their role-model preferences. Besides, the data showed that participants adopted their models' communicative skills, world views, determination, honesty, tolerance and patience in their daily lives.

**Key words:** Social studies, prospective social studies teachers, social learning, role-model

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Man opens his eyes to the world within a family. In this period mother, father and siblings make up the vicinity of the baby. The family resembles a small community in the early ages of the child. After children reach a certain maturity in physical and mental terms, they start the school and extend their social environment confined to their own family members and neighbours until then. In this period, teachers and peers have important effects on the individual as well as the family (1).

Once born, men do not know the rules within their group or society. Only after they are born do they learn to communicate, to share with others, to express their feelings and many other things as well as the world. This process can be defined as socialization (2).

Men maintain their lives in contact with their environments. One's environment is where he maintains his contacts and lives, and he is faced with the endeavours to adapt to his environment during most of his life. Accordingly, psychologists have laced the emphasis on the importance of the environment in personality development (3).

Individuals are affected by such external sources as mass-media, their friends and familial environment within a social life, which has caused men to be influenced by each other and the learned points from the social environment to be observed and investigated (4). Especially within the framework of social learning, Bandura has indicated the importance of thinking in the process of learning and stressed the significant place of learning through observation in the children's learning process. However, social learning is also defined as the process whereby children in particular learn new things by observing the adults' behaviours and movements as well as the events around them (5). Social learning refers to men's learning through observation of others or communication with others, and has an important role in the development and protection of the group behaviours (6).

Most of the theories on men's learning at an early age have touched the behavioural principles and emphasized that environmental stimuli on the shaping of human behaviour in this period should take the human movements under control (7). However, men do not take all the behaviours that they see around them. For the one who observes, the age, kinship level, popularity, position and status of the one who is taken as a model are remarkable features in terms of modelling.

Social models have an important place in the emerging and changing of the behaviours (8). In general, men have a higher preference for the high-status models than the low-status ones. Famous scientists, philosophers, artists, Professional footballers, athletes, music stars and world leaders are the models with high status. It is often for this very reason that films stars can be seen in telephone commercials instead of scientists,

basketball players in breakfast commercials instead of food experts, and mannequins in automobile commercials instead of engineers (9).

Moreover, the punishment and award given to the models for their behaviours are also of importance for the observer (10). Also important are the reactions of the school administration, teachers and the other students to the attitude to students' learning at school or classroom. Students learn the rules not through written texts, but through their observation of the way they are practiced at school.

When a lot of students are asked how they learn, it appears that it is their teachers as a model that inspire and excite them to learn. For example, teachers are one of the important role-models that help their student acquire the information and knowledge to be learned at schools by communicating with them (11). Accordingly, the training that teachers take as teacher trainees is also important (12). This is because there is a close relationship between teachers' attitudes to students and students' classroom participation and motivation (13, 14).

Some educators, however, consider that individuals rely on the learning which they acquire through social learning, but that it is highly probable that they make mistakes within individual learning (15). It is for this reason that the knowledge and experience that students acquire from their environment should be measured and deficient or wrong knowledge, if any, should be discovered for their amelioration through a variety of activities.

In this period, teachers' behaviours, beliefs and attitudes pass on to students. Therefore, the education that teachers take and their personality traits are of significance. This case considered on the basis of social studies education, the importance of teachers becomes more apparent in that most subjects of the social studies course have a lot to do with the values and behaviours within the social life (16, 17). For example, while social studies teachers tell the students the importance of honesty and righteousness, they themselves should also be honest and righteous because the agreement between what they say and how they behave or act is of importance as a model for the learning.

Man is a social being. Not self-sufficient and needy for others' care once born, man begins to grow up and mature in the course of time. Unlike other beings, man adopts different styles of learning. Even though there are many types of learning, social learning, namely learning through observation of others, has an important place in this process because individuals observe their surroundings from the early ages on and take some of the behaviours they see through imitation.

The fact that students take their teachers as a model at primary and secondary schools in particular reveals the importance of teachers' behaviours and personality traits better. In this sense, the issue of who and which behaviours the prospective social studies teachers take as a model will help us recognize the teachers that will set an exemplary model to students. As researchers, when we evaluate our own education life seriously, we can notice that our teachers' positive or negative features have affected us directly or indirectly in every part of our education life.

In this regard, the goal of the present study has been determined as revealing the role-model preferences of the prospective social studies teachers and an evaluation of the effect of these preferences. Along with this problem, the aim is to seek for answers to the following sub-problems:

- ✓ Which talents or skills do the prospective social studies teachers find in themselves?
- ✓ Who do the prospective social studies teachers take as a role-model?
- ✓ What aspects of the role-models that they take do the prospective social studies teachers admire?
- ✓ What aspects of the role-models that they take do the prospective social studies teachers refer to or apply in daily life?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Model**

The study was designed as a qualitative study in the form of descriptive model. Descriptive method is a proper model for the research that aims to describe a current or past situation as it exists or existed (18).

### **2.2. Participants**

The sample of the study was composed of prospective social studies teachers chosen by using the maximum diversity sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. The purpose of making up a sampling based on maximum diversity was to try to determine whether there are any common or shared facts between the situations with diversity, thus revealing the different dimensions of the problem according to this diversity (19, 20).

This study was conducted on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year teacher trainees currently enrolled at the departments of social studies training at 9 different universities in Turkey.

**Table 1.** Information about the participants

University	Grade	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Afyon Kocatepe University	2	17	9	26
Gazi University	4	27	12	39
Usak University	2	23	23	46
Adiyaman University	2	12	12	24
Karadeniz Teknik University	3	16	24	40
Mugla University	2	19	17	36
Bulent Ecevit University	3	14	23	37
Kastamonu University	1	9	29	38
Cumhuriyet University	2	12	8	20
Total		149	157	306

This study was conducted on 306 students 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year teacher trainees—currently enrolled at Afyon Kocatepe University, Gazi University, Usak University, Adiyaman University, Bulent Ecevit University, Karadeniz Teknik University, Mugla University, Kastamonu University and Cumhuriyet University. Of the students, 157 were females and 149 were males.

### 2.3. Data Collection Tool

This study is concerned with the role-model types that students take for themselves and with the way they transfer into the daily life the behaviours that they adopt from these models. For this purpose, questions were prepared about the problems and sub-problems of this study, and then these questions were presented to the experts of Turkish language, the assessment and evaluation as well as the field.

Some changes were made in the questions in accordance with the suggestions and recommendations from the experts. The scale subsequently prepared was applied to a group of 20 people in order to test whether the tool of assessment collects enough data or not. Upon getting positive results from it, we passed to the real application.

Prospective social studies teachers were asked questions prepared as open-ended and included in the finalized form, and then they were asked to express their feelings and thoughts sincerely on the blanks under the questions. The questions prepared according to the sub-problems and asked to the teacher trainees are given below:

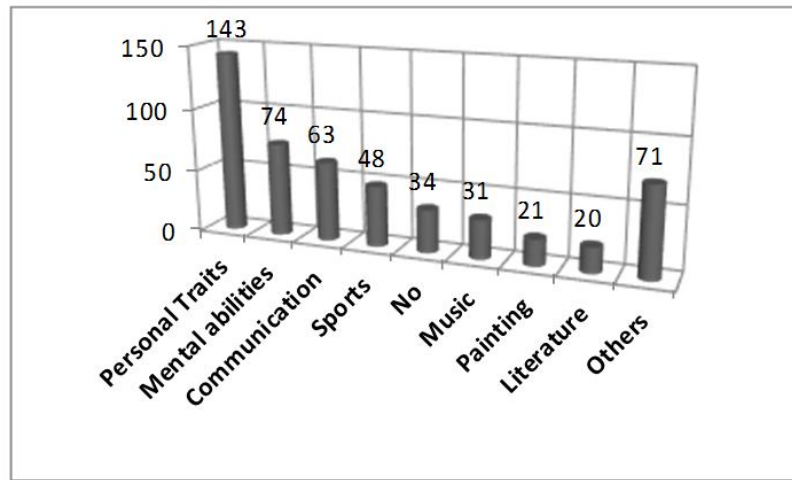
- ✓ What skills do you think you are good at?
- ✓ If you were to introduce to a friend of your the people whom you take as a model for yourself, who would they be?
- ✓ What aspects of the people whom you introduce to your friend as a model above do you find you are affected by?
- ✓ What aspects or behaviours of the people whom you take as a model above do you apply or refer to in your life?

### 2.4. Data Analysis

First of all, the data obtained were controlled and the answers of 20 participants who we judged had not filled in the scale with due care and importance were excluded from the analysis. The data obtained were solved with descriptive and content analyses. Initially, the answers to each question were collected in a list and codes were made for them. Then these codes were brought together under the themes related to each other. After that, these codes and themes were presented to two experts of the field and one expert of assessment and evaluation.

### 3. FINDINGS

**Graphic 1.** Descriptive data on the skills that prospective social studies teachers find in themselves

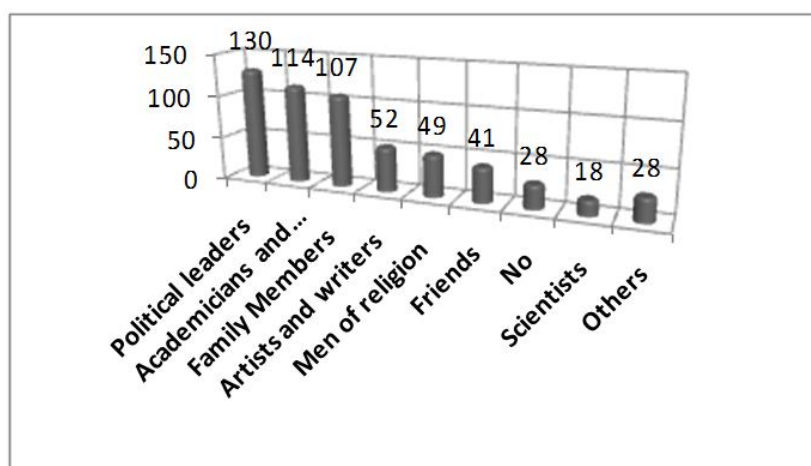


The answers to the questions about the high skills that they find in themselves were given in Graphic 1. In it, 143 of the participants reported that they find themselves skilful in terms of personal traits, 74 in terms of mental abilities, 63 in terms of communication with people, 48 in terms of sports, 31 in terms of music, 21 in terms of painting, and 20 in terms of literature. 34 teacher trainees stated that they do not have a given skill when compared with their friends, while 71 teacher trainees said that they have skills in fields except for the one mentioned above.

**Table 2.** The Skills that prospective social studies teachers find in themselves

Skills	Sub Dimensions
Personal traits	Viewing the life from different perspectives; being tolerant; being determined; being patient; being benevolent; having the ability to convince; being optimistic; being reliable; having a vision.
Mental abilities	Analytical thinking; critical thinking; memorizing ability; problem-solving ability; creative thinking; practical intelligence.
Communication	Addressing; empathy; being a good listener; building an effective communication with and among people.
Sports	Sports.
No	–
Music	Playing an instrument; singing.
Painting	Painting.
Literature	Writing poems.
Others	Cooking; imitation; photography; computer using.

Table 2 includes the answers of prospective social studies teachers about the fields in which they find themselves skilful. According to the answers of prospective social studies teachers, the answers mostly repeated are viewing the life from different perspectives, being tolerant, being determined, being patient, being benevolent, having the ability to convince, being optimistic, being reliable and having a vision. In field of mental abilities, analytical thinking, critical thinking, memorizing ability, problem-solving ability, creative thinking and practical intelligence are among the most frequent answers. As far as the communicative ability is concerned, however, addressing, empathy, being a good listener and building an effective communication with and among people are among the most frequent answers. In field of music, playing an instrument and singing are among the most frequent answers. In field of painting, drawing a picture is the most frequent answer. As for literature, writing poems is the most frequent answer. Under the other titles, cooking, imitation, photography and computer using are among the most frequent answers.

**Graphic 2.** Descriptive data on the people whom prospective social studies teachers take a model for themselves

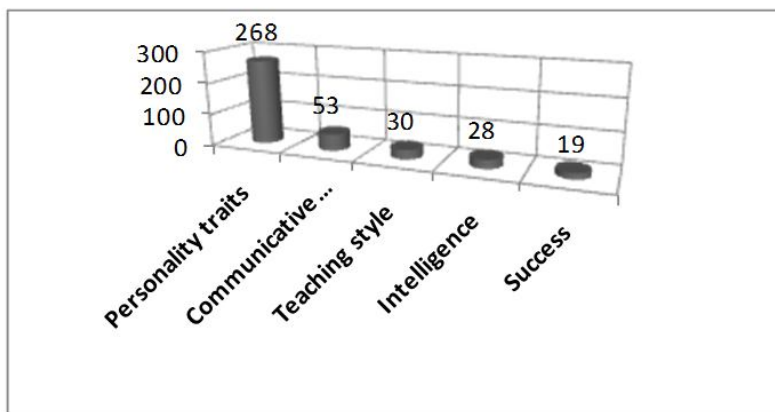
The prospective social studies teachers' answers to the questions about their role-model preferences were given in Graphic 2. In it, 130 of the participants reported that they model themselves on political leaders, 114 on academicians and teachers, 107 on family members, 52 on artists and writers, 49 on men of religion, 41 on their friends and 18 on scientists. 71 participants, however, said that they model themselves on people (others) except for these figures. 28 teacher trainees answered, saying that they take nobody as model for themselves.

**Table 3.** People whom prospective social studies teachers model themselves on

Status	People
Political Leaders	Ataturk, Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Alparslan Turkes, Yavuz Sultan Selim
Academicians and Teachers	Academicians, primary and secondary school teachers.
Family members	Mother, father, elder brother, elder sister, grandfather and maternal uncle.
Artists and Writers	Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Necip Fazil Kisakurek, Mehmet Altan, Atilla Ilhan, Okan Bayulgen. Baris Manco.
Men of Religion	H. Muhammed, H. Fatma, tariqat and religious group leaders, Mevlana.
Friends	Friends
No	—
Scientists	Mimar Sinan, Descartes, Gazali, Karl Marx. Edison.
Others	Fatih Terim, Messi, Steve Jobs,

Table 3 includes the answers of prospective social studies teachers about their role-model preferences. According to the answers of prospective social studies teachers, they mostly model themselves, among the political leaders, on Ataturk, Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Alparslan Turkes, Necmettin Erbakan and Yavuz Sultan Selim; these are followed by academicians, primary and secondary-school teachers; as for the family members, mother, father, elder brother, elder sister, grandfather and maternal uncle are the ones that they take as a model; as far as artists and writers are concerned, the list includes Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Necip Fazil Kisakurek, Mehmet Altan, Atilla Ilhan, Okan Bayulgen and Baris Manco; H. Muhammed takes the lead among the men of religion, and he is followed by H. Fatma, sect leaders and Mevlana; the list of the scientists who serve them as a model are Mimar Sinan, Descartes, Gazali, Karl Marx and Edison. Besides them, there are some others, including Fatih Terim, Messi and Steve Jobs.

**Graphic 3.** Descriptive data on the aspects of role-model preferences that prospective social studies teachers take as model



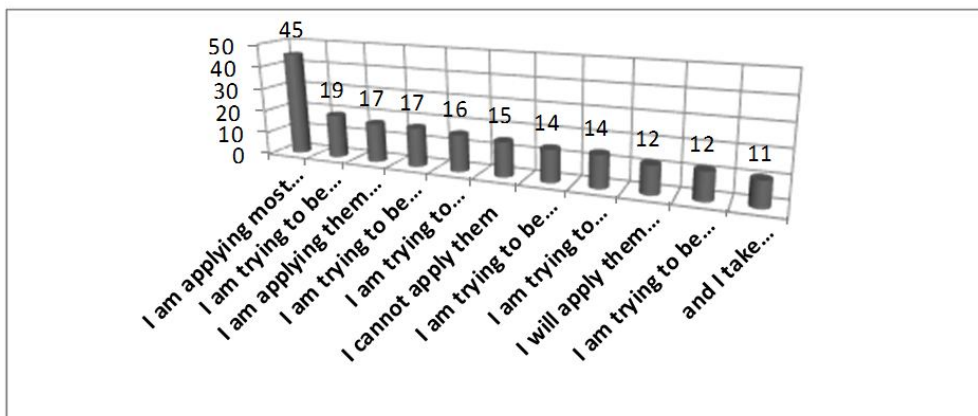
In Graphic 3, the behaviours that prospective social studies teachers take as an example from role-model preferences are gathered under the heading of personality traits, communicative abilities, teaching style, intelligence and success.

**Table 4.** The aspects that the participants take as an example from role-model preferences

Skills	Sub Dimensions
Personality traits	Morality, honesty, being hard-working and visionary, giving value to people, being determined, self-trust, leadership, being tolerant, patient and sincere, benevolence, patriotism and being inquisitive
Communicative abilities	Addressing, being a good listener, building empathy
Teaching styles	Teaching styles
Intelligence	To be intelligence
Successful	To be successful

Table 4 includes the answers to the aspects that prospective social studies teachers as an example from role-model preferences. Prospective teachers reported that they take the following personality traits from the role-model preferences; morality, honesty, being hard-working and visionary, giving value to people, being determined, self-trust, leadership, being tolerant, patient and sincere, benevolence, patriotism and being inquisitive. Under the theme of communicative abilities, addressing, being a good listener, building empathy, teaching styles, intelligence and being successful are the aspects that teacher trainees take as a model from role-model preferences.

**Graphic 4.** Descriptive data on the aspects of role-model preferences that they apply to their own lives



Graphic 4 includes the answers of prospective social studies teachers to the way they apply in their own lives the aspects and behaviours that they take from role-model preferences. Accordingly, the answers by the teacher trainees are as follows; I am applying most of them, I am trying to be determined, I am applying them in my communication with others, I am trying to be honest, I am trying to increase my level of knowledge, I cannot apply them, I am trying to be tolerant, I am trying to change my world view, I will apply them when become a teacher, I am trying to be patient, and I take examples about how to behave where.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The models preferred in life affect the formation of one's personality negatively or positively. This fact is more applicable to teacher trainees because it is known that teachers leave indelible effects on students. This study, therefore, has been designed to determine who the prospective social studies teachers that are due to work at schools as teachers in the future take as a model for themselves and how these models affect these prospective teachers' behaviours. The findings obtained are as follows:

Prospective social studies teachers find themselves able and good at personal traits (viewing the life from different perspectives, being tolerant and decided, having patience, being benevolent, having the ability to convince others, being optimistic, having the capacity to memorize and solve problems, thinking creatively and using the intelligence practically and quickly); at communication (addressing, building empathy, being a good listener, communication with others); at music (playing an instrument and signing); at painting (painting a picture); at literature (writing poems) and at others (cooking, imitating, taking photographs, using the computer)

34 teacher trainees, however, reported that they have no idea about what talent or skill they have. Assessing the answers about the talents and skills they have, it is thought that the answers given are fit and suitable for a teacher as such in general. Prospective social studies teachers model themselves on political leaders, academicians and teachers, family members, artists and writers, men of religion, friends and scientists. As mentioned within a conceptual framework, teacher trainees take their family members and teachers as a model in their close circles. In the other categories, however, it is understood that they take as a model the writers, men of religion and politicians not alive today. In others, such successful figures as Messi and Steve Jobs, who take the lead in their fields, seem to be a model for them. In other words, prospective teachers take the successful figures as a model for themselves.

Prospective social studies teachers reported that they are impressed by the following traits and abilities of their role-model preferences: morality, honesty, hard work, high vision, love of man, decidedness, self-confidence, leadership, justness, patience, sincerity and benevolence, patriotism, inquisitiveness. They also tend towards such abilities as addressing, being a good listener, building empathy, teaching successfully. The fact that they are clever and successful is another reason why they prefer to take them as a model for themselves. Yigittir and Ocal (21) arrived at the conclusion that students' value inclinations are chiefly towards honesty, benevolence, tolerance, cleanness and love, etc. Also in Oguz's study (22) teacher trainees reported that they mostly value universality and benevolence. In the study by Mahmud (23) et al. on four different cultures, the value of success was concluded to be on the top of the list of the values mostly preferred by teachers and students. In the study by Tonga (24), it was found out that students' affective tendencies towards patriotism, benevolence and hard work are very high, a finding which is in agreement with the results of this study.

As to the behaviours that prospective social studies teachers take from their role-model preferences and use in their everyday lives, the following results were taken: "I use most of them; being determined, communicative, honest, enhancing my knowledge level, being tolerant, view of life. I will use when I become a teacher; being patient and knowing how to act or respond where."

Some of the teachers responded, however, saying "I cannot apply." The answer of 45 students at different universities, "I use most of them." is not satisfactory. This suggests that the participants do not know what they take from the models and use, or that they relay do not use. This is because it is something to say that emotional tendency about a value is high and that value is important, while it is something else to transfer it into life. Inability to know what he or she transfers into life is a more complex case.

Assessing the results and findings about the four sub-problems, it appears that teacher trainees both find themselves talented in such themes as "personality traits, mental abilities and communication" and take those with these themes as a model for themselves. It also appears that they reported that they apply the behaviours of these fields in their own lives. Accordingly, it has been concluded that there is a connection between the skill and the models with these skills and the extent to which teacher trainees reflect them in their everyday lives. Family environment, success, popularity, personality and moral values have been found out to have a significant place in the prospective social studies teachers' preferences for a role-model.

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