

Reactions to Thinking: Turkish Pre-service Teachers' Experiences

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Abstract

Thinking skills are instruments for meaningful learning and academic achievement and in relation, they are indispensable components of 21st century competencies. However, current Turkish policies do not define what thinking is and some inconsistencies regarding forms of thinking exist in different documents. Also, while teachers might not feel competent with teaching thinking skills, teacher education programs do not offer much to practice thinking skills. The analysis of coursebooks and curriculum also presents limited opportunities for thinking as well as Turkish sociocultural practices may reflect thinking as a negative or problematic concept. Regarding these problems, this study aims to explore pre-service teachers' experiences when they say, "I am thinking" via a phenomenological methodology. Participants ($N=42$) were recruited via convenience sampling methodology. Data were collected via focus group interviews ($N=7$) that included 5 to 7 participants. In each interview, participants described (1) thinking, (2) talked about the reactions to their thinking, and (3) named the proverbs that pertain to thinking. Data were analyzed via phenomenological reduction and horizons and structural themes were developed after bracketing was employed. Findings revealed that definitions of thinking highlight individualistic and universal characteristics, and functions of thinking pertain to skills. 80% of reactions to thinking were negative. Also, half of the proverbs highlighted negative connotations. This study suggests that thinking might not be initiated and shared safely as educational practices and cultural reminiscences might not promote such intellectual actions. In this sense, curriculum and materials need revisions regarding sociocultural characteristics of Turkish society and pedagogies of thinking.

Keywords: *Thinking, Phenomenology, Turkish society, Pre-service teachers.*

Introduction

*One is not aware of thinking
and how it happens unless he thinks (Kant)*

Thinking is, still, an important phenomenon for various disciplines including philosophy, psychology, and education. While various definitions and frameworks have been proposed (Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016), thinking may be defined as an active, purposeful, and organized cognitive act for comprehending, comparing, and contrasting concepts, evaluating options, problem-solving, and managing emotions and behaviors (Başerer, 2021). Thinking may be observable via behavioral indicators such as unbiased use of knowledge, using logic for arguments, identifying several reasons or solutions for a problem, identifying assumptions and hypothesis, and obtaining different perspectives for unbiased decisions (Başerer, 2021). Regarding the nature of thinking, thinking skills may be instruments for meaningful learning and academic achievement (Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016). Also, they are indispensable

components of 21st century competencies (Bayrak Özmanlı, 2020; *P21 Framework*, 2009) as both the OECD and WBE reports highlighted (Dilekli & Tezci, 2016) as they are one of the fundamentals for the workforce (Dilekli & Tezci, 2016).

Various forms of thinking may be categorized including creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, reflective thinking, causal-relational thinking, and higher-order thinking, etc. Developing thinking skills is one of the main purposes of Turkish education system (i.e., article 2 in Law of National Education, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2017; Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu, 1973) and since 1997, the efforts to teach for thinking have increased (Dilekli & Tezci, 2016). Indeed, while the curriculum aims to develop thinking skills (Ministry of National Education, 2019), both teachers and students are expected to employ thinking skills. Students need to employ thinking skills for various processes such as for self-regulated learning, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative learning (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2017a) and teachers should integrate them in their instruction and for self-assessment (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2017b). Specifically, teachers' competencies framework highlights creating a learning environment to develop students' higher order thinking skills (B2.6) and practicing analytical thinking skills (B3.7), as well as doing self-assessment (C4.2). In this sense, thinking skills may develop via instruction; they can be taught.

Problem and Purpose of the Study

Current policies in Turkey emphasize developing students' thinking skills. However, the problem that Beyer (1984) highlighted long ago still exists in the educational policies. That is, they do not specify and define what thinking is and set its indicators. For example, it may not be clear what higher order thinking skills are for some practitioners. There are also some inconsistencies in different documents. For example, the basic law of national education highlights scientific thinking while teacher competencies framework underlines analytical thinking. The curriculum, on the other hand, highlights metacognitive skills. These divergencies might be tolerated only when teachers are knowledgeable about various forms of thinking and prepared to teach thinking skills.

The role of teachers to develop students' thinking is crucial. They indeed, need to know about thinking skills and how to teach those skills. Those teachers are also aware of the difficulties that students may experience; therefore, they should know methods to still enable students become thinkers (Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016). However, a literature review for

Turkish pre-service teachers' perceptions, experiences, or proficiency with thinking skills between 2019-2022 revealed a lack of research. Indeed, this resonated what Dilekli and Tezci (2016) argued, previously. They stated that research on thinking skills is limited in Middle East (Dilekli & Tezci, 2016). There were few studies done before 2018 (e.g., Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016; Dilekli & Tezci, 2016) and they highlighted that pre-service might not feel competent with thinking skills and teaching them.

In relation, an analysis of teacher education programs offered by the Higher Education Council was conducted. The analysis revealed that the program does not offer much for pre-service teachers' explicit practices of thinking skills or teaching thinking skills (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu, 2018). There is one elective course on thinking skills: analytical and critical thinking skills. However, this class may not be available for all pre-service teachers at different departments and universities. Also, this class may not focus on teaching analytical and critical thinking skills. Moreover, while the programs offer some must courses (i.e., philosophy of education, language skills on the first year) whose descriptions highlight thinking, pre-service teachers might practice various forms of thinking if only tasks are offered by the faculty. Finally, there is another elective course (i.e., history and philosophy of science) where the content might focus on various schools of thought.

Moreover, national curriculum and materials (i.e., books) may present potentials for thinking skills. However, few research was conducted on the analysis of coursebooks or curriculum, i.e., English and Turkish language materials. Yüce and Emir (2020) found that activities and expressions presented in the 8th grade English language book may run the risk to support a culture of thinking. Similarly, the Turkish language curriculum (Bayrak Özmutlu, 2020) and textbooks (Karadağ & Tekercioglu, 2019) are limited regarding thinking skills.

The scarcity of opportunities regarding thinking or thinking education may relate to the socio-cultural elements of the context. Thinking might be impacted by the social signs (Vygotsky, 1978) and individuals tend to employ the cognitive tools of their social environment (Sternberg, 1997). Thinking is, indeed, a social construct and children internalize many of the observed attributes (Sternberg, 1997). In this sense, thinking may also reflect cultural reminiscences (Özer, 2016). In his thematic analysis, Özer (2016) found that Turkish proverbs that relate to thinking may reflect it as a negative or problematic concept. Thereby, this study aims to identify social experiences or reactions that pre-service teachers got for thinking. For this, this study will answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of

pre-service teachers when they said, “I am thinking”? To understand their experiences, what thinking is for pre-service teachers, and which proverbs pre-service teachers remember hearing the word “thinking” was also investigated, respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Perspectives of Thinking

Thinking is a unique and individual act. In this sense, Aydoğan (Aydoğan, 2019) relates thinking to one’s essence, meaning, or individuality. One must be attentive to thinking and what Aydoğan emphasizes as attentiveness might be initiated by personal relevance. In this sense, Schopenhauer and Aydoğan might relate thinking to personal interest in something (Aydoğan, 2019).

Schopenhauer argued that only few can think (Aydoğan, 2019). These individuals who can think employ cognitive tools, attention, motivation, interest, and tolerance. They can also construct and sustain their thinking system which is continuously tested, confirmed, modified, and evaluated.

To Heidegger, thinking is a response to a *potential* to think (Aydoğan, 2019). In this sense, individuals tend to think about something when it has a personal meaning or relevance (Aydoğan, 2019; Yurt, 2018). Also, when one starts to think about himself, they learn thinking (Aydoğan, 2019; Yurt, 2018). Learning occurs only when every action responds to the self (Yurt, 2018).

To Kant, thinking occurs for valid judgments (Başerer & Duman, 2019). However, one first need to comprehend those representations or categories and self-awareness may create self-thought ideas following the mind’s a priori rules (Zöller, 1992). In this sense, Kant (Aydoğan, 2019) proposed that one must be oriented to rational thinking by limiting any civil compulsion, restrictions, and presuppositions. Thinking is using logic and individuals manage an autonomous organized systematic set of cognitions by thinking (Aydoğan, 2019; Başerer & Duman, 2019).

Vygotsky (1987) elaborated on affective and volitional aspects of consciousness. That is, thinking cannot be eliminated from the “full vitality of life, from the motives, interests, and inclinations of the thinking individuals” (p.50); otherwise, thinking may be transformed into “a useless epiphenomenon” (p.50). Indeed, individuals may hold affective remnants to different ideas (Vygotsky, 1987).

Guillon (2011), a contemporary philosopher, also contemplated on thinking. To him, thinking occurs when one is enthusiastic about the stimulus and asks questions free from presuppositions, prejudices, habits, or expectations. To find answers to these questions, one must think, that is, use logic. To Guillon (2011), thinking pertains to reasoning and conflicting ideas. Indeed, because conflicting ideas to some extent are true, the confrontation initiates thinking. That is, when individuals experience an intellectual conflict, they engage in reasoning to comprehend the rationale for a choice over another in relation to one's essence.

Different definitions of reading may pertain to the individual dynamics. For thinking, either the stimuli appeal to *the personal relevance* (i.e., meaning, essence, individuality), initiate *attentiveness* (attention, willingness, enthusiasm), or *appeals to interest* (choice, motives, inclinations). However, these may not be enough to think unless individuals employ reasoning, logic, or cognitive skills. That is, without a legitimate *reason* and *appropriate tools*, thinking may not emerge.

Tools for Thinking

Language is a tool for and indicator of thinking. Vygotsky (1987) and Guillon (2011) emphasizes language's function in carrying out meaning or ideas. To Vygotsky (1987), thinking may be "an arrested or soundless form of speech" (p.112) as they are linked "in the integrated structure of consciousness" (p.43). For this reason, Vygotsky proposes a causal-genetic analysis of thinking and speech and he stated that "every word is a concealed *generalization*" (p.47, emphasis in original) and generalization (concept) is a "*verbal act of thought*" (p.47 emphasis in original).

Vygotsky (1987, 2012) also emphasizes that to "discover speech, the child must think" (1987, p.112). For this, he argued about the crucial role of inner and socialized speech. The plays "a role as a facilitating factor in the transition from thought to over speech" (Vygotsky, 1987, p.44) and the development of child's logic is a function of socialized speech (p.120). Thereby, the development of "thinking depends on the mastery of social means of thinking, that is, on his mastery of speech" (p.120).

Piaget also emphasized egocentric speech for its role in understanding thinking. Egocentric speech arises when a child plans operations or functions to solve a problem and "*this process becomes thinking*" (Vygotsky, 1987, p.114, emphasis in original). While children accumulate mental experiences and deal with tasks by external signs, they assimilate the behavior forms of social environment. As they accommodate those social cues by their own

laws, thinking proceeds from autistic to egocentric, and to logical thinking (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Vygotsky, 1987).

Instruction can be another tool for thinking skills. There may be a class on thinking skills or thinking skills may be integrated into several curriculum (Sternberg, 1997). Also, thinking skills can be taught explicitly (e.g., Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016; Fisher, 1998, 2007; Tishman & Perkins, 1997). Especially, teachers' modeling thinking skills may be one of the most emphasized feature for a thinking- friendly classroom (Akınoğlu & Karsantık, 2016; Fisher, 1998). They may also use questioning, writing, and information processing techniques (Marzano, 1993). Moreover, teachers may share the process of strategic thinking with students (Duffy, 2002), have students collaborate to think together (Pressley et al., 1992), or offer instructional aids that facilitate thinking (Kolencik & Hillwig, 2011).

Method

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative methodology: phenomenology. A phenomenon is what an individual perceives as reality of an object in the consciousness (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Human beings are naturally disposed to the experiences that are considered meaningful and their meaning is “embedded in practices, feelings, and cognitions” (Wilson, 2015, p.38). In this sense, phenomenological research focuses on the meaning of experiences and it “seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.91).

Participants/Co-researchers

In phenomenological research, participants may be co-researchers as they bring their perceptions and experiences of the lived experience. Their narratives, indeed, help understand the phenomenon while data are simply analyzed by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Participants (N=42) came from a state university on the west coast of Turkey. They studied at the department of English Language Teaching. They were 18-32 years old.

Those participants were initially invited to the study via convenience sampling method as I taught various classes to them. Then, the volunteer participants who had no hesitation of and willingness for sharing previous reactions to their thinking were purposefully recruited for data collection. The criteria for inclusion were also implemented. That is, the freshman,

sophomore, and juniors could attend the focus group interviews as the seniors were busy with internship and job hunting. Table 1 presents the distribution of the participants by each level.

Table 1

Distribution of the Participants

<i>Class</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Freshman	18	43
Sophomore	10	24
Junior	14	33
Total	42	100

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected via focus group interviews. The interviews began with a social conversation and participants were informed to feel free to communicate their experiences; therefore, I could create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere as Moustakas, (1994) suggested. Seven focus group interviews of 5 to 7 participants were conducted. Each interview lasted around 17-22 minutes. During the interviews, participants described (1) thinking, (2) talk about the reactions they got when they say, “I am thinking”, and (3) state the proverbs when they hear the word “thinking”. I collected data till saturation was reached (30- to 90 min.; Mapp, 2008) and then, data were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the data, I employed bracketing (Neubauer et al., 2019; Wilson, 2015; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). That is, I packed up and pushed aside my knowledge, assumptions, and interpretive filters about thinking and reactions to thinking in Turkish society as much as possible. Then, I did a phenomenological reduction of the raw data to clear out all elements that are not directly related to the experience (social reactions to thinking) and repetitive or vague expressions (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). At this stage, horizons (codes, units of meaning) that represent the textural description of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019) were created. Those pertain to thinking, reactions, and proverbs. Then, I analyzed data for structural themes that Moustakas (1994) called imaginative variation. During the task of imaginative variation, a researcher seeks meaning by employing polarities and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, positions, or functions to reach a structural description of an experience for a composite description. Following structural themes were adopted for each horizon; nature

and functions for thinking as well as positive, natural, and negative for reactions and proverbs. Following these procedures, data were synthesized to understand and explain how reactions to thinking were deeply. That is, structural themes were analyzed to detect any potential essence to each one. To ensure validity, some methodologies such as bracketing, member check (Neubauer et al., 2019), and analyzing the data at two different intervals were used.

Findings

What is Thinking?

Participants' definitions of thinking were analyzed in two categories (horizons); the nature and functions of thinking. For the nature of thinking the following themes emerged; the individual (existentialist, unique, background knowledge, culture, religion, and creative, dilemma) and universals (automatic, constant, free, object/stimulus, mental, tool, unconscious). For functions of thinking, various skills were identified as in the following: analyzing, imagining, questioning (WWW&H), using logic, comprehending, resolving conflicts, synthesizing, brainstorming, interpreting, reacting, making choices, problem solving, producing ideas, making decisions, and discussing.

Reactions to Thinking

There were 56 responses for the reactions of thinking, and these were categorized into three: positive, negative, and neutral. 80% of them were negative reactions. These negative reactions highlight that

- thinking occurs when there is a problem (e.g., Karadeniz'de gemilerin mi battı? What is to think? What is your problem? You will get crazy! Why are you depressed?),
- thinking takes too much time (e.g., Are you playing chess or what? Why do you think so much? Do not think that long. I cannot wait for you that long. Think fast, Düşün düşün nereye kadar. Skip it, I cannot wait for you),
- thinking makes one vulnerable to the personal attacks (e.g. Filozof mu olacaksın sanki? You are selfish, As if you have a brain to think! Can you think? Your poor brain! You are delusional),
- others may be indifferent to thinking (e.g., Just relax, never mind, Take it easy, Do not worry)
- actions matter rather than thinking (e.g., Stop thinking, just study, Düşünmek karnı doyurmuyor, Just do it, stop thinking, Mind your life).

Neutral reactions (8%) simply focus on the stimuli or the object of thinking and the other party asks the thinker about it. On the other hand, positive reactions (12%) focused on sharing the ideas; however, they assume that the thinker has a problem, and the listener is there to support him/her.

Turkish Mottos

Participants highlighted fourteen proverbs or idioms that relate to thinking. 2 of them were positive and they were related to being smart (e.g., Akıllı söylemeden düşünür, akılsız düşünmeden söyler. Akıl akıldan üstündür). Neutral (N=5) reactions pertain to that thinking takes time (e.g., Düşünüp taşınmak, İki kere düşünmek, Enine boyuna düşünmek, Bin düşün bir söyle, Düşünceye dalmak). Half of the proverbs or idioms highlighted negative connotations. These were related to having a problem or bad intentions and spending too much time for thinking (e.g., Kara kara düşünmek, Türkün akılı ya kaçarken ya s..... gelir, Fesat düşünmek, Akıllı düşününceye kadar deli oğlunu evlendirir, Düşün düşün b... işin, Kafa patlatmak, Keskin sirke küpüne zarar).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the sociocultural reactions to thinking. As educational policies highlight various forms of thinking without its indicators, curriculum and materials may not support thinking, and classroom practices may lack practices. Thereby, the extant circumstance, indeed, might reflect social characteristics of the status quo.

In this study, young adults were knowledgeable about the nature and functions of thinking. Their definitions almost captured a variety of definitions proposed by previous philosophers (i.e., Schopenhauer, Kant, Heidegger, Vygotsky, Guitton). However, Turkish society may limit individuals' thinking via sociocultural reactions. Participants got reactions from peers, family members, and teachers to their thinking and most of those reactions bear negative connotations. When one stated that he/she is thinking, they were exposed to personal attracts or it was assumed that there was a problem. As it was related to a problem, others might be indifferent to the thinker. Indeed, this might be a social practice to suppress thinking as Özer (2016) previously found.

Thinking might be impacted by the social signs. Regarding Sternberg (1997) and Vygotsky's (1987) understanding of thinking, it is, indeed, a social construct. However, thinking might not be developed, initiated, and shared safely although they are crucial components of

21st century framework because of cultural reminiscences. As Özer (2016) previously highlighted, Turkish idioms or proverbs that relate to thinking reflected it as a negative or problematic concept.

Conclusion

Social reactions and the cultural reminiscences mostly emphasized that thinking occurs when there is a problem, and it takes too much time. It may be because Turkish society is action oriented and they pro-react problems. It may be scholars or smart people think; however, ordinary people may not engage in thinking as it is time consuming. On the other hand, it is also probable that thinking may be considered as a taboo because its research is scarce.

Regarding the 21st century's dynamics, educational policies need to focus on thinking and help society adopt an appreciation toward thinking and thinkers. For this, thinking should be defined and specifically, policies should present indicators of different thinking skills while they also ensure the consistency across grades. Also, perception of thinking might be very limited and bound to problems or wasting time. In this sense, extant curriculum, materials, and assessment practices need revisions regarding sociocultural characteristics of Turkish society and pedagogies of thinking.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study's findings were limited to its participants, data collection tools, and context. Because the data were collected via interviews, it might be biased to participants' interpretations. Future studies may employ observations to support interview data. Also, findings may change with different age groups and socioeconomic or cultural characteristics. Moreover, as workforce requires all to manage thinking skills for efficient outcomes, research on thinking skills in Turkey may examine potential barriers to thinking at schools, families, and workplace.

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