

Seventh Grade Students' Conceptual Understanding about Citizenship: Does a Constructivist Social Studies Program Make a Difference? ^{i ii}

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Abstract

Many studies have shown that students at different age levels come into classrooms with a variety of alternative conceptions. Commonly held alternative conceptions are the main source of the difficulties that students and teachers face in learning and teaching. The aim of this study was to compare the conceptual understanding of students who were exposed to previous traditional/behaviorist and the current constructivist social studies programs. Descriptive and quasi-experimental research designs were used together in this study. The participants of this study consisted of 606 seventh-grade students in 15 middle schools located in 5 different districts in Ankara. Data collected through administering a three-tier multiple choice concept test as a post and pre-test was analyzed by using different statistical techniques, such as percentage-frequency tables, independent samples t-test, and chi-square. There was a significant difference between the conceptual understanding of students who were exposed to the previous and the current program after they were taught about the common human rights, democracy and citizenship concepts. This difference was in favor of the current program.

Key words: Conceptual understanding, alternative conceptions, social studies, program.

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Introduction

Concepts are words that include categories enabling us to classify objects and ideas (Ülgen, 2004; Senemoğlu, 2011). Categories represent mental structures (Bruning, Schraw & Norby, 2011). Therefore, concepts can be considered as the categories into which we group those entities, events and concepts that are part of social studies using our experiences. “Conceptual development is a lifelong developmental process and conceptual understanding requires a higher-level, integrative thinking ability that needs to be taught systematically through all levels of education” (Erickson, 2002, p. 8). Concepts help with the formation of basic cognitive structures in primary school pupils’ minds and with the meaningful building of new information on this foundation (Yazıcı & Samancı, 2003).

Defining any concept include: “definition, examples, attributes and nonexamples” (Stern, 2010, p. 51). As concepts are the building blocks of knowledge they play a major role in both internalizing the knowledge, skills and values expected by the students and in converting them into behavioral action. Teaching concepts to students is important in learning reasoning skills and basic scientific principles (Yazıcı & Koca, 2014) because learning a concept is the means by which the student gains a new perspective that helps understanding new ideas and forming real-world relationships. For example, understanding abstract concepts such as democracy paves the way for the student to interpret many better historical and cultural events (Gabler, Schroeder & Curtis, 2003). It should not be forgotten that learning democracy concept will become significant “when a political sphere in which the state protects the rights of its citizens with its unique power” (Touraine, 2002, p. 45).

Strongly held alternative conceptions are the main sources of the difficulties that students and teachers faced in the process of concept learning. The term alternative conception is well defined in the area of science education. Alternative conceptions, which the pupils have acquired as a result of their own experiences before being taught scientific concepts, are the ideas that are different from those accepted as correct by the scientific community (Smith, diSessa & Roschelle, 1993; Tekkaya, Çapa & Yılmaz, 2000; Yakışan, Selvi & Yürük, 2007). According to Güneş (2006), alternative conceptions arise as preconceptions based on superficial information that the individual has acquired largely from non-scientific sources combined with the information derived from the individual's past experiences.

When pupils start school they draw on various experiences of their lives, their families, events that go around them, their friends and media devices in identifying the world they live in (Sewell, 2002). This situation verifies the notion that students do not come to class as blank slate. On the contrary, they come to classroom with a combination of preconceptions based on superficial information acquired from mostly unscientific resources and also scientific information. Although students listen to the same lecture from their teachers, they interpret and make sense of the information presented to them and develop their own perspective due to the differences in their existing thoughts and value judgements (Kabapınar, 2007). It is also seen in other studies that, many students remember the alternative conceptions expressed by peers rather than the target conceptions that the teacher was attempting to develop (Brophy & Alleman, 2008, p. 41). At this point prior-knowledge of the students is of great importance just because the more incorrect, incomplete or incompatible prior-knowledge is, the more difficult is to perceive and make sense of the incoming information (Alkış, 2012).

Unlike science education, the introduction of alternative conceptions in the area of social studies education is less sufficient. When we search the literature for alternative conceptions qualitatively and quantitatively, we found out that these studies were limited to contents related with Science and Technology (Yürük, 2005; Subaşı & Geban, 2009; Okoye, 2015) Mathematics (Türkdoğan, Güler, Bülbül & Danişman, 2015) and Geography (Öztürk & Alkış, 2010; Pınar & Akdağ, 2012; Akbaş, 2013) courses. According to Driscoll (2005) “most constructivist instruction aims to debunk students’ naive conceptions or alternative conceptions particularly in the areas of

science and mathematics” (p. 395). Bal (2011, p. 283) states that alternative conception is also one of the main problems encountered during concept teaching which plays a big role in the achievement of historical thinking capabilities. In other words, students who can not learn the concepts have difficulty in understanding the subjects, too (Bal & Gök, 2011). One of the chief obstacles to improving social studies instruction is teachers’ disparaging view of students’ knowledge and understanding. In the early elementary grades, teachers often believe that students are incapable of understanding topics such as history, geography, citizenship, or economics (Barton, 2010, p. 312).

The importance of concepts in the area of Social Studies, must not be overlooked in the process of learning. Social Studies course is not a lesson to be learnt by heart, but as a lesson in exercising the mind so as to identify today's societal problems and find solutions to them by drawing lessons from the past (Binbaşıoğlu, 1991). Moreover, social studies program help students to give meaning to the society and the world they live in (Tokcan, 2015). One of the basic aims of social studies includes raising democratic citizens. Education in this context is a process which plays a key role in actualizing the acquisitions related with democracy concept in social studies (Yanpar Yelken, 2011). According to Dönmez (2003, p. 33) social studies, covers basic and common elements that are necessary for people living in a society and the findings of social science research.

It is believed that teaching-learning activities that occur at the conceptual level contribute to the creation of the targeted human profile. Here comes the important role of the concepts in internalizing and adopting the building stones of information in the area of social studies, specifically citizenship. However, the importance of alternative conceptions in learning social studies concepts was overlooked in the literature. There is a limited number of studies regarding students’ alternative conceptions in the area of geography. Therefore there is a need for conducting studies that examine students’ alternative conceptions in the field of social studies or that compare the effect of different teaching programs on students’ conceptual understanding in the same field. In addition, these concepts are made up of verbal arguments requiring high-level mental abstracts (Ministry of National Education, 2005). Akbaş (2013) in his research conducted with geography and social studies teachers stated that the possible reasons for the alternative conceptions of the students are; lack of knowledge and mastery learning as well as permanent learning in previous educational levels or the misconceptions of the concepts during the lesson. The other reasons are indicated as students’ lack of interest in the lesson, the incorrect information acquired from their environment, the structure of the concept and the daily usage.

In Turkey the fundamental and important information with regard to citizenship topics is largely provided as part of the Social Studies program. The existing alternative conceptions regarding the citizenship may not only prevent students to construct an acceptable conceptual understanding of citizenship concepts, but also make it harder for citizenship rights and freedoms to be used within the framework of human rights and democracy. Kepenekci (2014) pointed out that before making further discussions on the human rights and citizenship course, it would be rather useful to define the concepts to be used in the discussions.

Purpose of the Study

The primary education Social Studies course program in Turkey underwent a reform in 2004 taking into account the criteria of the modern education approach necessitated by this century. This change came out towards the beginning of the 21st century when it was understood that knowledge was not simply transmitted to students passively and that approaches to education involving the continual conditioning of the student with the emphasis on behavioral rather than mental functions would be unable to raise future generations of the desired quality (Güneş, 2007). According to this view learning is no more a process which includes the exact transition of the information from the resource to the learner foreseen by the traditional understanding. Instead it is a process in which the learner makes sense and constructs the new information regarding the current information (Eryaman, 2006; Kabapınar, 2014). Due to the deficiencies observed in the previous program which is based on the application of behaviorist theory a current program whose basis is formed by constructivism has

come out. The current program stresses the teaching of the structural concepts and their scientific meanings without mentioning the names of the disciplines that constitute social studies (Ata, 2009).

The Social Studies course is important as it gives students the opportunity to develop the understanding, behavior and skills that are the preconditions for good citizenship. This importance also means that students may be influenced by changes carried out in educational programs. The change carried out in educational programs was structured in a way that the programs were firstly implemented at the classroom level in different pilot schools and then the results of this implementation were used to evaluate the program in order to rectify their faults. This structure has resulted in the previous and current programs being applied at different educational institutions at the same time.

At schools where the previous program was applied, the traditional method of teaching was the norm. This method of teaching generally entailed the teacher explaining the topic while the students listen to what is explained as passive receptors of knowledge. The lessons were presented to the students in a teacher-centered fashion using the behaviorist approach. In contrast to this, in those institutions where the current program is applied, a constructivist approach to learning is the norm. In the constructivist learning theory the emphasis is on the students' constituting meaningful wholes by forming relationships between existing knowledge and new knowledge, and by associating all new information with the existing information. In this study, the term "previous program" refers to the program which emphasizes traditional method of teaching, foundations of which are formed by the behaviorist approach; whereas the "current program" is comprised of methods and techniques of instruction, the foundations of which are based on the constructivist learning. The current program includes a spiral approach in which topics are expanded and elaborated throughout the years. The program emphasizes conceptual learning, multiple intelligences, active learning and problem solving techniques in its integrality. Unlike "traditional teaching views knowledge as transmitted by the teacher or textbook the constructivist theory creates a network of experiences, ideas and relationships that educators call knowledge" (Sunal & Haas, 2011, p. 30-31). According to "constructivism, as a set of beliefs about knowing and knowledge, can be used as a referent to analyze the learning potential of any situation" (Tobin & Tippins, 1993, p. 8). Constructivism is a learning theory which is based on the central notion that as learners we construct our own understanding of the world around us based on our experiences as we live and grow (Eryaman, 2007; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Giambattista Vico has expressed his thoughts about constructivism with these statements "who can explain anything it knows" or "to know how to make" (Glaserfeld, 1995; Özden, 2005). In the previous program (1998) course objective statements mostly include expressions at cognitive level such as "gain", "comprehend" and "learn" (Dönmez, 2003a).

The primary aim of this study is to compare conceptual understandings of the 7th grade primary school students who were exposed to previous and current social studies program regarding the common citizenship concepts taught in the social studies, citizenship and human rights education course.

As a result of this study the strengths and weaknesses of the current program in terms of students' conceptual understanding in citizenship concepts were identified. Identifying the deficiencies of the current program compared to the previous program will enable us to develop more efficient social studies programs. This in turn will enable social studies to take one more step towards the goal of turning out good and productive citizens by instilling students, who will be the adults of tomorrow, with the skills that social life requires (Jarolimek, 1964).

Methods and Procedures

Research Design and Participants of the Study

Descriptive and quasi-experimental research designs were used together in this study. "Quasi-experimental designs are the types of research in which experimental process is applied but not all the external variables could be taken under control" (Özen, 2015, p. 316). In other words, "if an

experiment does not possess all of the features of a standart experimental design then it is a quasi-experiment: it may look *as if* it is an experiment ('quasi' means 'as if') but it is not a true experiment, only a variant on it" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 275). Quasi-experiments include "assignments, but not random assignments of participants into groups" (Creswell, 2012, p. 309). Moreover, "as establishing control on the participants of the research is quite limited quasi-experimental method is applied" (Ekiz, 2013, p. 112). The other used resarch design in the study, descriptive studies, "describe a given state of affairs as fully and carefully as possible" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 14). "Descriptive studies aim to define the interactions among the situations taking into account the relations of the current events with previous events and conditions" (Kaptan, 1998, p. 59). The research was conducted in five pilot schools where the current program and in 10 schools where the previous program was followed. The schools were randomly selected from different districts representing the various different socio-economic strata (5 districts: Çankaya, Keçiören, Yenimahalle, Mamak and Elmadağ) in Ankara, Turkey. The sample of this study consisted of 289 students from five pilot schools and 317 students from 10 schools. Briefly from these 15 schools, totally 606 seventh-grade students participated in this study. In this study first quantitative then qualitative data was collected to identify students' alternative conceptions of citizenship topics.

The instruction of citizenship concepts in the current program which started to be applied in the 7th grades at pilot schools in 2006-2007 academic year can be observed in the concerned learning cycles prepared in terms of constructivist, spiral and active learning approaches and multiple intelligence theory. The traditional method of concept teaching in the previous program first elicits the related vocabulary from the students, then provide the meanings of the words elicited from the students and finally classifies the words into groups as related and non-related to the concept. In the current program tool such as meaning analysis table, concept networks, concept maps were used (Ministry of National Education, 2005). It also directs the teacher to find out and to correct if there is a misconception of student (Ata, 2006). In the current program, it is observed that the number of concepts increases proportionally to the grade level and the concept attainment level (entry, development, enhancement) differs in each grade level (Yazıcı & Koca, 2014). Traditional teaching methods based on the behaviorist approach were employed in those schools which used the previous program. Alternative conceptions were compared within the context of schools applying the previous and current programs in accordance with the objectives stated above.

Instrument

The data were obtained using a three-tier conceptual understanding test consisting of 36 multiple choice questions developed by the researchers. First common citizenship concepts within both the previous and the current teaching programs were listed for comparison. The identified concepts covered in the multiple choice test can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1. *Table of concepts*

Constitution	Tolerance	Elections
Independence	Public Opinion	Responsibility
Peace	Participation	Charter
Declaration	Board	Copyright
Republic	Culture	Civilization
Environment	Secularism	Homeland
Solidarity	Nation	Citizen
Value	National Sovereignty	Law
Democracy	Common Heritage	Legislature
State	Freedom	Executive
Sovereignty	Patent	Judiciary
Tradition	Renaissance	
Rights	Reform	

In order to identify students' current understanding of the concepts about common citizenship provided above, a test comprised of open-ended questions was given to a group of 50 sixth and seventh grade students chosen from six randomly selected schools during the 2005-2006 academic year. Taking the data obtained from this test into account, the questions for the conceptual understanding test were written. In writing the test items, the concept attainment level (entry, development, enhancement) of each citizenship concept provided in the current program was also taken into consideration.

Every question in the conceptual understanding test, which was made into a three-tier test, had only one correct answer. The three distracters of each item include students' alternative conceptions in the topics of citizenship gathered from the responses of students to open-ended questions.

The causes of using a three-tier test are both to eliminate errors that are originating from lack of knowledge of students related to questioned concept and to enable highly reliable measurements supporting each other. Furthermore, the mistakes made by the students due to a lack of knowledge of the concepts were eliminated from the test. In previous studies, Eryılmaz and Sürmeli (2002), Eryılmaz (2010), Taşlıdere and Eryılmaz (2015) were able to distinguish students' alternative conceptions from lack of knowledge or errors in the topic of electricity through using three-tier test. Similar to these studies, students' alternative conceptions were differentiated from their lack of knowledge and errors through using a three-tier test in the topic of citizenship. Different from the regular multiple choice tests, the first tier measures students' existing conceptual understanding of a certain concept; the second tier ask students to express the reasons why they choose an option in the first tier in their own words; and the third tier asks students how certain they were of the answers they gave in the first two tiers.

After the opinions of experts were asked regarding the content validity of the data collecting tools, reliability studies were done by using the data collected from 313 seventh grade students in the pilot study. According to the results of the pilot study, the reliability coefficient was calculated as (Cronbach alpha) 0.74 for the first tier of the test. This reliability coefficient showed that the test is quite reliable (Can, 2016).

Three examples to the items of the three-tier multiple choice test and three students' responses to the items are provided below:

Student A (An example of the concept of participation):

1.1 Which of the concepts below is being reinforced by practices that take place throughout the academic year in your schools such as "Student Clubs" "Honor Boards" and "Student Boards"?

- a. Opinion b. Solidarity X c. Ideas d. Participation

1.2 Why did you choose the answer you did?

School is where society takes place. In society everybody's idea not just one person's needs to be heard. Therefore solidarity is necessary.

1.3 How certain are you of your answers?

- a. Certain X b. Undecided c. Not certain

Student B (Example of the concept of Value)

11.1 The right target must be chosen,
Laziness is the greatest obstacle and must be overcome without waiting,
Correctness and industriousness must be the key principles,
This *Culture* in our life must be preserved.

Which of the following concepts is the correct one to fill in the blank above?

a. Culture X b. Opinion. c. Value d. Change

11.2 Why did you choose the answer you did?

In this paragraph it tells us to be industrious. An industrious person is a cultured person and this culture must be preserved.

11.3 How certain are you of your answers?

a. Certain X b. Undecided c. Not certain

Student C (Example of the concept of Patents)

29.1 A student friend of yours in Erzincan makes a mathematical discovery by finding out that the difference in the squares of any two consecutive numbers is equal to the third number. Your friend needs to obtain a document in order to show that he or she has the right in the practical use of this discovery. Which of the documents below matches this concept?

a. Copyright X b. Patent c. Declaration d. Charter

29.2 Why did you choose the answer you did?

Copyright is the right of protection of an idea, a theory or a work of art.

29.3 How certain are you of your answers?

a. Certain X b. Undecided c. Not certain

Data Analysis

Independent samples t-test and chi-square were used in this study. 0.05 was accepted as the significance level.

In evaluating the three-tier conceptual understanding test by alternative conceptions, "1" point was given for the first tier when the students marked the wrong choices; if in the second tier the written statement as to why they answered so gave the impression that the student had misunderstood the concept another "1" point was given, but "0" score was given only if the conclusion was that they had not misunderstood the concept or if they left it blank; in the third tier "1" point was scored if the students were certain of their replies and "0" score was given for the replies of "Undecided" and "Not certain." In other words, if the student scored "1" in every tier of the test an overall score of "1" was recorded but if during any tier of the test a score of "0" was given, then the overall score was recorded as "0" in the statistical program. The responses of the students provided in the second tier of the three-tier test, namely the open-ended answers of the students, were analyzed through content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013) to identify their alternative conceptions regarding citizenship concepts.

Results and Conclusions

The results of the study are provided under two main headings:

a. The Conceptual Understanding of Students Before the Instruction

In order to determine whether or not there was a significant difference between the conceptual understandings of students before they were exposed to the previous and current programs the developed three-tier concept test was administered. The data obtained in the conceptual understanding test, which had been applied as a three-tier test, were used in the analysis of the t-test and chi square tests of the independent samples and the results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *The difference between the conceptual understanding of students before being exposed to the previous and current program*

Program applied in school	N	\bar{X}	S	t	sd	p
Previous program	317	17.08	5.02	1,090	604	0.276*
Current program	289	17.50	4.61			

*p>0.05

There was not found a significant difference between the conceptual understanding of students before being exposed to the previous and the current program regarding the citizenship concepts. According to the Table 2, the mean of the scores of students gathered from the three-tier test administered as a pre-test before being exposed to the current program was $\bar{X} = 17.50$; the mean of the scores of students gathered from the three-tier test administered as a pre-test before being exposed to the previous program was $\bar{X} = 17.08$. Although there was a slight difference in the means the difference was not significant (p>0.05). In other words, no significant difference was found between students before being exposed to the previous and the current program in terms of the 37 concepts regarding citizenship (p>0.05).

b. The Conceptual Understanding of Students After the Instruction

Independent samples were tested and analyzed to see whether or not there was any significant difference between the conceptual understandings of students in the previous and current programs after their respective program's modules on citizenship concepts had been taught, and they are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *The difference between the conceptual understanding of students after being exposed to the previous and current program*

Program applied in school	N	\bar{X}	S	t	sd	p
Previous program	317	28.53	3.80	2,234	604	0,026*
Current program	289	29.24	3.93			

*p<0.05

When it was tested to see whether or not there was any significant difference between the conceptual understanding for the students in the “previous” and “current programs” a significant difference was found to exist between the two (p<0.05). According to Table 3, the conceptual understanding of the students at the schools on the current program was $\bar{X} = 29.24$, which is higher than the level of $\bar{X} = 28.53$ for the students on the previous program. This result show that students taught with using previous program had more number of alternative conceptions compared to the students taught with using the current program.

Similar to this finding when Acker (1996), Eryılmaz (1996), İbrahim (2001), Gallop (2002) analyzed the effectiveness of the traditional and constructivist methods of instruction in studies based on the identification and correction of conceptual misunderstanding, they discovered a significant difference favoring the constructivist methods of instruction. According to Doğanay (2008) the current social studies program reflects the contemporary social studies concept with its general qualities as an understanding. However, there is a remarkable deficiency in the teaching activities that emphasize concept learning in social studies. Ünal and Ünal (2012) in their study examined the 7th grade textbooks prepared according to previous and current program in terms of concept teaching. As a result they found out that the textbooks prepared according to the previous program did not serve to the aims in terms of conceptual learning neither quality nor quantity. On the other hand, they stated that the authors of the textbooks of the current program have got rid of the authority role in which they explain the cause and effect relations, form the explanations, make the definitions and decide on the value judgement. Akpınar and Kaymakçı (2012) determined that compared to previous social studies programs, the current social studies program more frequently and systematically include cognitive, affective and psycomotor qualities of Bloom Taxonomy. In addition to this, Bebe and Ünlü (2012) determined in their study that most of the teachers find the course objectives, skills and concepts in the current social studies program more clear and obvious and they think positively about including geography content skills in the program (p. 281). Hesan and Kabapınar's (2008) study examşned the opinions of the parents on the student-centered applications in the current program. According to the results they think that the current program contribute to the self-improvement and social development of the students (p. 151). According to McCray (2007) most teachers agreed that a variety form of constructivism improves social studies skills.

The results of this survey seem to confirm this information. In addition, a further test was carried out in order to determine whether or not there was any significant difference between the previous and the current programs with respect to individual concepts. This test involved a chi-square test for each concept as summarized in Table 4. This table contains only those citizenship concepts that were found to have a significant difference.

Table 4. *Students' ability to learn concepts under previous and current programs*

Concept	Number of Students Misunderstanding the Concept	Program Applied in the School		Total	Chi-Square Value	sd	p
		Current Program	Previous Program				
Participation	N	90	137	227	9.410	1	0.002*
	%n	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%			
State	N	47	72	119	3.985	1	0.046*
	%n	39.5%	60.5%	100.0%			
Value	N	66	96	162	4.280	1	0.039*
	%n	40.7%	59.3%	100.0%			
Public Opinion	N	40	64	104	4.286	1	0.038*
	%n	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%			
Solidarity	N	42	22	64	9.227	1	0.002*
	%n	65.6%	34.4%	100.0%			
Sovereignty	N	64	113	177	13.328	1	0.000*
	%n	36.2%	63.8%	100.0%			
Patent	N	20	40	60	4.882	1	0.027*
	%n	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%			
Civilization	N	100	77	177	7.775	1	0.005*
	%n	56.5%	43.5%	100.0%			
Tradition	N	83	54	137	11.798	1	0.001*
	%n	60.6%	39.4%	100.0%			

*p<0.05

The findings show that there is a significant difference in the levels of conceptual understanding between the students on the previous and current programs for the concepts: “participation”, “state”, “value”, “public opinion”, “solidarity”, “sovereignty”, “patent”, “civilization” and “tradition”. No significant difference was seen in the levels of conceptual understanding between students on the previous and current programs for the other concepts. Keskin, Kirtel and Keskin (2015) found in their study some misconceptions for the association of the government, citizenship, state and public opinion concepts.

Conclusion

Alternative conceptions are the conceptions that students have formed in their minds as a result of experiences that differ from scientific knowledge. A change of program has taken place in Turkey. The aim of this study was to compare the conceptual understandings of students who were exposed to the previous and the current programs. The results of the study indicate that there was found a significant difference between students who were exposed to the previous and current program in terms of their conceptual understanding regarding citizenship concepts. The findings indicate that students exposed to the previous program had significantly more alternative conceptions. The current program being applied today takes the alternative concepts that students bring in classrooms into consideration and enables them to build new concepts based on these concepts. It enables concept learning to go beyond the limits of traditional approach which is in the way of just knowing and telling the meaning. This gives students an opportunity to use citizenship rights and responsibilities in the frame of human rights and democracy. If students learn to discuss which is an element of democracy, it means that they have also learnt thinking, listening and showing evidence (UNESCO, 2000). For instance, the source of sovereignty in a democratic state is the “public” (Kepenekci, 2014, p. 60).

It was determined that the students on the previous program had more alternative conceptions than the students on the current program for citizenship concepts such as participation, state, value, public opinion, sovereignty, patent and tradition. However, although there was a significant difference between students, in terms of “solidarity” and “civilization” concepts the difference was in favor of the previous program. Moreover, there was no significant difference between the understandings of the students studying on the previous and current program on citizenship concept such as constitution, independence, peace, declaration, republic, environment, democracy, rights, tolerance, board, culture, secularism, nation, national sovereignty, common heritage, freedom, renaissance, reform, elections, responsibility, charter, copyright, homeland, citizen, law, legislature, executive and judiciary. Although there was found no significant difference in terms of these concepts the number of the students who were exposed to the previous program was higher than those who were exposed to the current program in terms of having alternative conception regarding all these concepts.

Seeing that the results of the preliminary test given to the students were equal it is possible that the differences noted in the test administered after the instruction stemmed from the programs being applied at the schools. It has been emphasized during the study that citizenship concept is a learning process that starts in the family and continues in the school and the society and that the prior knowledge of the students in the formation of alternative concepts is quite important.

The difference found between the programs directly corresponds with the perspectives on the teaching of the concepts. Instruction based on the presentation method, which is how the traditional methods used in the teaching of concepts are reflected in education, not only fails to make abstract concepts more concrete but also it emphasizes verbal expression of the concept being studied. In contrast to this, the approaches inherent in the current program not only allow students' initial understanding of the concepts to be questioned but they also give an opportunity by means of the discovery method to make use of "Tables for Derivation of Meaning, Conceptual Networks, Concept Cartoons and Conceptual Maps" using the activities, teaching strategies and graphic materials offered by instruction. In addition, while the teacher is at the center of the behaviorist and cognitive

approaches to learning, it is the student who is at the center of the constructivist approach to learning. “Concept teaching in social studies should be dealt with real examples from students’ lives” (Ersoy & Kaya, 2009, p. 73). When the studies on the previous and current program have been analysed in terms of various variables, it has been found out that the studies have been conducted with teachers, pre-service teachers, students, parent views, school textbooks, disciplines, teaching materials and technology (Kaymakçı, 2015). More research studies should be conducted regarding the effects of the programs on students’ conceptual understanding about variety of social studies concepts.

Contribution

There are limited number of research studies that have investigated students’ alternative conceptions with respect to the teaching of citizenship concepts on Social Studies courses. Social studies concepts usually embody elaborate meanings that evolve with experience and learning over a period of years (Bryant, 1994, p. 17). This structure makes it harder to eliminate the alternative conceptions within the fields of learning relating to social sciences. The three-tier multiple choice data collection tool used in this study could be used as an alternative mean of determining exactly what the alternative conceptions were in the light of the students’ understanding of the vague concepts found within citizenship topics, which make up part of the social studies lessons given to the 7th grade students, and it could also reduce, albeit by a little, the stated difficulties. In addition to this, this study provided an opportunity to critically question the changes to the social studies program taking place in Turkey through studying the alternative conceptions. Moreover, it is an example of how the alternative conception studies that take place largely in the natural sciences may be also studied for social sciences, which make up the foundation of social studies. In addition, in the development of conceptual understanding test level of the concept attainment (“entry”-“development”-“enhancement”) were taken into consideration. Therefore, in this study taking into account the Bloom taxonomy; the “entry” level has been measured in correspondence to knowledge level, whereas “development” level has been measured in correspondence to comprehension level. Finally, “enhancement” level has been measured as a correspondence to application and analysis level.

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