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## Political Literacy Status of Pre-Service Social Studies Teacher

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### Abstract

In this study, it was aimed to determine the political literacy status of pre-service social studies teachers, who are expected to raise active citizens in Turkey. The study used the case study, which is among the qualitative research designs. Study group is consisted of totally 60 pre-service social studies teachers, who receive education at the 4th grade of Ahi Evran University, faculty of education. Content analysis was used during the process of data analysis. Following results were obtained at the end of the study; pre-service social studies teachers seem to be unconcerned about the concepts of policy and political literacy. Pre-service teachers believe that political subjects should be taught in a limited way. Even though the pre-service teachers discuss about the national and international issues, they do not show an active participation in the society.

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### 1. Introduction

Examining the concept of political literacy, different definitions by different persons are observed. Political literacy is briefly the state of having political information (Krosnick, 1990). Zaller (1992) defines the political literacy as individuals' comprehensions regarding a political event and their political awareness. Besides, political literacy could also be defined as the state of individuals to be acquainted with the political process and political affairs as effective citizens in order to fulfill their roles and comprehension of these issues by individuals (Denver and Hands, 1990; Wormald, 1988).

Different definitions of the political literacy emphasize the phenomenon of political knowledge. However, political literacy can not only be defined as knowing the political knowledge or simply the functions of political institutions and government. Political literacy is related not only with knowledge, but also skills and values. Skills require an affective participation in the social life; however, unless the individual is enabled to participate, these

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skills can not be expected to develop. A politically literate citizen is not only an informed beholder. Being a politically literate citizen, the individual is an active participant in social events, regarding her/his own issues (Fyfe, 2007).

A politically literate citizen not only comprehends her/his current state, but also gets involved in the state in an active and effective way and directs it. An individual with the skill of political literacy has the skills of understanding other people's viewpoints, realizing their effect upon her/him and responding to them in an ethical way (Fyfe, 2007). Additionally, a politically literate person has the basic knowledge, skills and values regarding how to express her/himself in everyday life.

In a society that is arrayed with knowledge, skills and values, which are required by the democratic life, and consisted of individuals, it is much easier for the democracy to become a life style. Since this process does not occur automatically, it is necessary to bring at least basic political knowledge in all individuals in the society. However, some historical obstacles were observed regarding this issue in Turkey until the 2000s. Especially due to the youth events that occurred in Turkey during the 1970s and 1980s and the subsequent military coups, the grownups do not even want the youth to be involved in political and social discussions. Students are advised to abstain from political affairs. Teachers are asked not to talk about political affairs in the classroom. This situation poses a great obstacle in front of the political literacy in our country. However, it has been changing slowly in recent years. The interest in these issues has increased again, especially due to the fact that active citizenship has recently been brought to the agenda and emphasized within the system of education again.

Lesson of social studies is considered to be the most convenient lesson, in terms of teaching the political literacy at the primary education level in Turkey. Regarding political affairs, the knowledge, awareness, in other words the political literacy of social studies teachers who teach this lesson affect their instruction as well. Thus, it is required for pre-service social studies teachers to learn these subjects at university. In this study, it was aimed to determine the political literacy status of pre-service social studies teachers.

## **2. Method**

The study used the case study, which is among the qualitative research designs.

### *2.1 Study Group*

The study group is consisted of 4th grade students, who receive education at Ahi Evran University, Faculty of Education, department of Social studies teaching. 32 male, 28 female and a total of 60 students participated in the study. These pre-service teachers will graduate at the end of the terms (June-2013) and those who succeed the national exam will take office as social studies teachers.

### *2.2 Data Collection Tools*

The data that are collected in qualitative studies show diversity. The data being collected could be observation notes, interview records, documents, images and other graphical presentations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). During the attainment process of the data, students were asked seven open-ended questions, which were developed by the researcher as a written text. Questions about the dimensions of both the political knowledge and participation of pre-service teachers were asked in the data collection tool. The dimension of knowledge involved questions such as (what is policy, political literacy?, who is the active citizen?, how is the government formed in our country?, should the political affairs be taught at schools?). The dimension of pre-service teachers' ideas involved questions such as (Do you discuss about national and international issues? Have you ever participated in an activity, which was on behalf of the society or aimed to affect the social politics?). In this context, the essays of students were used as documents and basic data sources in this study.

### *2.3 Data Analysis*

The attained written documents were analysed by using the content analysis. Categorical analysis, which is among the content analysis methods, was used for the analysis of qualitative data and the following phases were

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