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Evaluation of Primary School Teachers and Students Opinions About Conscious Consumerism

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The aim of this study was to present the conscious consumerism perceptions and behaviors of second grade elementary school students and teachers. For this reason, a basic qualitative research design was used in the study. The aim of basic qualitative research is to focus on how individuals give meaning to the reality in the social world. Participants were selected using the criterion sampling strategy, which is a purposive sampling method. The study was conducted with 48 second grade students studying at a school in a district with an average socioeconomic level in the 2020-2021 academic year. Twenty-one of the participants were girls, and 27 of them were boys. The data of the study were collected from the students by instructing them to draw pictures about conscious consumerism and explain the picture they drew, and open-ended questions were asked to the teachers. Three of the teachers were women, and two of them were men. In the examinations of the data on conscious consumerism perceptions, from among the six emerging themes, only the theme of "wishes and needs" was expressed by both students and teachers.

Keywords: Conscious consumerism, life science lesson, primary school teachers

INTRODUCTION

The history of people's consumption activities can be traced back to their existence. They need food, water, and shelter to survive. Consumption is an economic activity that individuals perform to meet their wishes and needs (Tan, 2019). Consumption is a form of behavior that is sometimes performed for psychological reasons such as satisfying wishes and desires, and sometimes for sociological reasons such as establishing a place in society or reinforcing one's position. The individual is in a state of continuous purchase, usage, and consumption, from products which are purchased daily to those which are purchased only once (Özabacı & Özmen, 2005). However, in today's world, consumption has turned into an activity that satisfies people's wishes and passions rather than meeting basic needs. Nevertheless, this sense of satisfaction wears off quickly, as in many things in today's society of consumption. According to the United Nations Food Waste Index Report dated 2021, 931 million tons of food is wasted every year in the world. In the same report, it is stated that an average of 7.7 million tons of food is wasted every year in Turkey, and the per capita amount of the said food waste is estimated to be 93 kilograms (UNEP, 2021). Unfortunately, Turkey ranks within top 10 of the countries where food is wasted the most according to these data. This irresponsible consumption is not just about food, and similar data are found regarding the use of water. Although Turkey is surrounded by seas on its three sides, it is a country that has problems about usable water on a per capita basis. This is also supported by the DSI-State Hydraulic Works (2020) data. The annual amount of per capita usable water was 1.652 m³ in 2000, 1.544 m³ in 2009, and 1.346 m³ in 2020 (dsi.gov.tr). As seen here, there has been a significant decrease in the amount of usable water over the years. This shows the fact that there is a water problem in Turkey. Additionally, although the daily water consumption amount of a person living a modern life varies from country to country, it is accepted to be 150 liters worldwide, while it is 217 liters per capita per day in Turkey (israf.org, 2019). The difference between these two amounts shows the extents of water waste in Turkey. To prevent this water shortage causing major problems in the coming years, it is considered important to take some precautions in Turkey and raise the awareness of individuals and thereby society. Reducing unnecessary consumption not only in basic needs such as water and food but also in all areas prevents waste and plays an important milestone role in environmental sustainability (Kalburan & Güngör, 2021).

As in the rest of the world, some studies are carried out by the government regarding the use of resources and waste management specific to Turkey. One of them is the Zero Waste project. The Zero Waste project aims to prevent waste, use resources efficiently, reduce waste generation, and transform waste (sifiratik.gov.tr). While projects that encourage conscious consumption, such as the Zero Waste project, are very valuable, individual consciousness plays an important role in this struggle for a more radical and long-term change. This is because individual consciousness brings social consciousness with it. Moreover, it is critically important to raise consciousness among individuals at a young age because children are involved in social life as consumers from early ages. The likelihood that parents who think they cannot take care of their children as much as they should due to the pace of their work life exhibit the behavior of meeting the wishes of their children without

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questioning them and that they want to offer their children all kinds of products that they could not reach in their childhood make children an important subject of consumption studies (Malbelegi & Sağlam, 2010).

As long as humans exist, consumption will exist. However, people should consume knowing that their own consumption behavior has an impact on society and the environment they live in. Therefore, it is necessary to raise individuals who distinguish their wishes and needs from each other, participate in consumption activities accordingly, and are not slaves to consumption. Behaviors that are structured in the desired manner at a young age have great importance for the individual to be able to determine their needs and wishes, especially in adulthood, when they will participate more actively in consumption activities, and exhibit conscious consumer behaviors. In the literature, it is seen that different definitions and classifications are made about the conscious consumer. Pakmak and Koçoğlu (2019) considered the conscious consumer to have 3 characteristics, namely socially conscious, environmentally conscious, and health-conscious. Among these characteristics, the socially conscious consumer is the type of consumer who acts with the consciousness that every product they buy and consume also has a social aspect. They use their individual consumption to lead a social change. The environmentally conscious consumer is the type of consumer who is aware that every product they buy and consume has an effect on the natural environment. They also have an environmentalist perspective in that they are aware of their share in environmental pollution and act sensitively for all humanity in their use of resources (Bener & Babaoğlu, 2008). The production, use, and waste stages of the product they buy are important for the environmentally sensitive consumer, and they are aware of their effects on the environment (Karaca 2013). The health-conscious consumer prefers foods that are good for their body to protect their health, reads product contents, and tries to prefer natural ones, namely organic ones, in fashion terms. Additionally, they are more inclined to exhibit healthy behaviors to increase their quality of life and minimize the risk of disease (Ustaahmetoğlu & Toklu, 2015).

The conscious consumer is 'the person who acts in a planned manner about consumption, gives importance to their needs while purchasing products or services, aims to ensure that these products or services are qualified, safe, inexpensive, and robust, knows and defends their rights as a consumer, is not under the influence of advertisements, and is against waste' (Gülmez, 2006, p. 154). For this reason, raising citizens who know that every resource they use and every product they consume has a direct or indirect effect on nature and the society they live in should be among the goals of a state. Schools are the most convenient institutions to achieve this goal. In addition to raising educated and good citizens, schools now also aim to raise conscious consumers (Polat & Ünişen, 2016). The first course in which these goals are provided, and the individual encounters the planned education program is the Life Science Lesson (Binbaşıoğlu, 2003, as cited in Aladağ, 2016).

Contrary to courses such as Turkish language and mathematics courses, which provide field-specific knowledge, the Life Science Lesson is an important one in which it is possible to proceed with sections directly from the life of the individual, and it provides the individual with the opportunity to make sense of these experiences. The Life Science Lesson, which builds a bridge between real life and school, also plays a key role in raising individuals who are in harmony with their family, country, and environment from early ages. The aim of the Life Science Lesson is to teach the knowledge and skills that will help the individual live in harmony with the society they are in (Şimşek, 2014). The main aim of the Social Studies Curriculum is to raise individuals who have basic life skills, know themselves, lead a healthy and safe life, adopt the values of the society they live in, are sensitive to nature and the environment, research, produce, and love their country (Head Council of Education and Morality, 2018). As seen here, raising individuals with conscious consumer characteristics stands out among the aims of the curriculum. Additionally, it is seen that the targeted outcomes of the curriculum are given in accordance with grade levels with the general aims that 'They develop the ability to use resources efficiently' and 'They become sensitive to nature and the environment' within the framework of 'use of resources' which is directly related to conscious consumerism and 'conservation of nature' skills which are indirectly related to it.

In this context, among the 23 skills that are aimed to be provided to students, those that are associated with the concept of "conscious consumer" are as follows (Table 1):

Table 1: 2018 Distribution of Targeted Outcomes in the Life Sciences Curriculum in the Context of Conscious Consumerism (HCEM, 2018).

Grade	Unit	Targeted Outcome
1st Grade	Life at Our Home	1.2.5. Uses resources at home efficiently. 1.2.7. Distinguishes their wishes and needs.
	Life in Nature	1.6.4. Is sensitive in terms of keeping nature and their environment clean. 1.6.5. Can distinguish items that can be recycled.
2nd Grade	Life at Our School	2.1.6. Shows care while using school resources and equipment. 2.1.11. Spends own money at the school responsibly and in line with their needs.
	Life at Our Home	2.2.6. Researches the contributions of using resources at home efficiently to the household budget. 2.2.9. Can rank their wishes and needs based on priority.
3rd Grade	Life in Nature	2.6.4. Contributes to the recycling of consumed items.
	Life at Our School	3.1.9. Can make unique recommendations regarding the effective and efficient usage of school resources.
	Life at Our Home	3.2.6. Can make unique recommendations regarding the effective and efficient usage of resources at home. 3.2.8. Shows care to preserve own and their family's budget while meeting wishes and needs.
	Healthy Life	3.3.2. Shows conscious consumer behaviors while purchasing foods and beverages.
	Life in Nature	3.6.5. Takes responsibility in terms of protecting nature and the environment. 3.6.6. Can give examples to the contributions of recycling to oneself and the environment one lives in.

It is seen in Table 1 that the targeted outcomes of the curriculum are given in accordance with three grade levels with the general aims that 'They develop the ability to use the resources efficiently' and that 'They become sensitive to nature and the environment.' within the framework of 'use of resources' which is directly related to conscious consumerism and 'conservation of nature' skills which are indirectly related to it.

Among studies on conscious consumerism carried out at the elementary school level, Ersoy and Papatğa (2015) planned an education program through stories to teach conscious consumerism to 4th-grade elementary school students, and at the end of the process, the authors revealed that they contributed positively to the students' acquisition of conscious consumer behaviors. Polat and Ünişen (2016) evaluated how many of the targeted outcomes were achieved among the ones that should be achieved within the first three years of education by 4th-grade elementary school students with the social studies curriculum regarding conscious consumerism, according to the opinions of their parents. Dündar (2017) examined the effects of parental communication and roles on 4th-grade elementary school students on their way to become conscious consumers, in the context of the social studies curriculum. Based on the fact that topics related to conscious consumerism take up more space in the 4th- and 5th-grade social studies curricula, Dere and Aktaşlı (2019) examined social studies textbooks at these grade levels. In their study carried out with 4th-grade elementary school students, Uyanık (2020) determined that the education level of the parents, their profession, and the

socioeconomic environment in which they lived were effective on the conscious consumerism levels of the students. Özay (2019) examined the conscious consumerism levels of 3rd- and 4th-grade elementary school students in terms of different variables and concluded that the conscious consumerism levels of the 3rd-grade students were higher. The conclusion made by Danilane and Marzano (2014) that consumer education makes positive contributions to society revealed the importance of conscious consumerism. Another study in which consumer education at elementary and middle schools was examined is the study conducted by McGregor (2005) which revealed that consumer education was effective in the learning of the rights and responsibilities of individuals as consumers. McGregor (2005) also stated that consumer education improved the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of students regarding conscious consumption.

It is seen among most studies in the literature that these studies have focused on 4th-grade elementary school students and the Life Science Lesson. Considering that the act of consumption and consumer education begin at early ages, the emergence of the degree to which achievements intended to be given within the scope of the Life Science Lesson are met in practice, how the concept of conscious consumerism is perceived by younger age groups and their teachers, what the students integrate into their lives about saving, and how conscious consumerism is handled in the curriculum and the teaching-learning process are issues that are considered to be important.

A conscious society is required for the sustainability of the world and in terms of living in harmony with nature and society, and for a conscious society, individuals who use resources effectively, minimize food waste, and do not consume unnecessarily by being aware of their wishes and needs are required. To develop these attitudes and skills, it is necessary to create a common consciousness in individuals from early ages. In this context, the general aim of this study is to reveal the conscious consumerism perceptions and behaviors of 2nd-grade elementary school students and their teachers. Within the scope of this aim, answers were sought to the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of teachers and students regarding conscious consumerism?
- What are the conscious consumer behaviors of teachers and students?
- In which courses is conscious consumerism taught according to teachers?
- What are the activities and methods used by teachers to enable the development of conscious consumer behaviors in the Life Science Lesson?
- What are the problems that teachers encounter in acquiring conscious consumer characteristics and the solutions they offer for the said problems in the Life Science Lesson?

METHOD

Research Design

This study reveals the conscious consumer perceptions and behaviors of 2nd-grade elementary school students and their teachers. For this reason, a basic qualitative research design was used in the study. The aim of basic qualitative research is to focus on how individuals make sense of the reality in the social world. Meaning is created, but it is not discovered. In other words, it reveals how people perceive their lives and experiences. In basic qualitative research, data are presented through observation, interview, and document analysis. In data analysis, repetitive patterns are aimed to be revealed (Merriam, 2018).

Participants

The participants of this study were 2nd-grade elementary school students and their teachers. Participants were determined by the criterion sampling strategy which is a purposive sampling method. The logic of purposive sampling involves the selection of data sources that will provide rich information to study a situation in depth (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria were determined to include participants at a young grade level, who were currently taking the life science lesson, and had families with an average socioeconomic status. The purpose of selecting students with families who had an average socioeconomic level was that they would likely not have to make savings due to low socioeconomic level, they would be able to give pocket money to their children, and they would be able to meet their needs and wishes at reasonable levels. For this reason, the study was conducted with 48 second-grade students studying at a school of average socioeconomic level in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey within the 2020-2021 academic year. Twenty-one of the participants were girls, and 27 were boys. Additionally, 42 of the participants saved money in their piggy banks. All participants had previously been able to shop on their own from the school cafeteria and the grocery store. Form teachers

in the school where the study was conducted were also selected as participants. Three of the teachers were women, and 2 were men. The professional experience of the teachers varied between 15 and 20 years.

Data collection

The data of the study were collected from the students by instructing them to draw pictures about conscious consumerism and explain the pictures they drew, and from the teachers with open-ended questions. As a data collection tool, a blank side of a paper reserved for drawing pictures and questions on the back of the said paper were distributed to the students. Before the application, all students were asked questions about the subject to reveal their preliminary knowledge, and information was given about how to perform the practice. The students were asked to draw a picture on the blank side of the paper describing what they understood from the concept of conscious consumerism, then to describe the picture they drew as an answer to the first question on the back side of the paper, and to write down what they knew about conscious consumer behaviors as well as which ones they practiced in their own lives in the second question. Six questions in total were asked of the teachers based on the sub-problems. The questions were prepared to allow the teachers to express their perceptions of conscious consumers, their behaviors as conscious consumers, and their processes of enabling their students to develop conscious consumerism in the life science lesson. While preparing the data collection tools, the literature was reviewed, questions were prepared, the prepared questions were submitted for the opinions of two form teachers, two elementary school students, and two lecturers working in the field of social studies teaching, and the final form was created in line with their opinions.

Data Analysis

The inductive analysis method was used in the analysis of the obtained data. Inductive analysis is a form of analysis that aims to reach concepts and relationships in the collected data. Within the scope of this analysis, the stages that are followed include coding the data, finding themes, organizing and defining the data according to the codes, and interpreting the findings (Patton, 2002.). In this study, codes were created on the data which emerged from the pictures and the opinions of the students and the teachers, and then, themes that explained the data in general terms and collected the codes in relation to each other were created based on the codes. After the themes emerged, they were submitted for the opinions of two academicians working in the field of social studies teaching, different opinions were discussed, and the themes were finalized. No numerical calculations were made at this stage. Additionally, citations of the themes are given in detail. Thus, the reliability of the study was improved. To provide the transferability criterion in the study, the results are described in detail. A detailed description is the transfer of raw data to the reader in a rearranged form according to emerging concepts and themes, without adding comments and by staying loyal to the nature of the data as much as possible (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). The Method section in this study describes in detail how the qualitative data collection tools were prepared, how the data were collected, and how the collected data were analyzed. Additionally, direct quotations were frequently included in the Results section. The results referring to the participants are presented with participant codes to keep their identifying information private.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the students and those obtained from the teachers were analyzed separately, and the answers given regarding conscious consumerism and consumer behaviors are presented in combination as they contained common themes.

Conscious Consumerism Perceptions

The perceptions of the participants regarding conscious consumerism are presented in Figure 1:

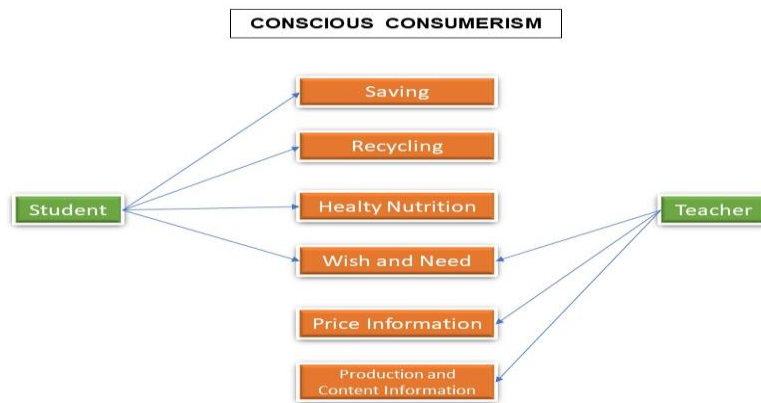
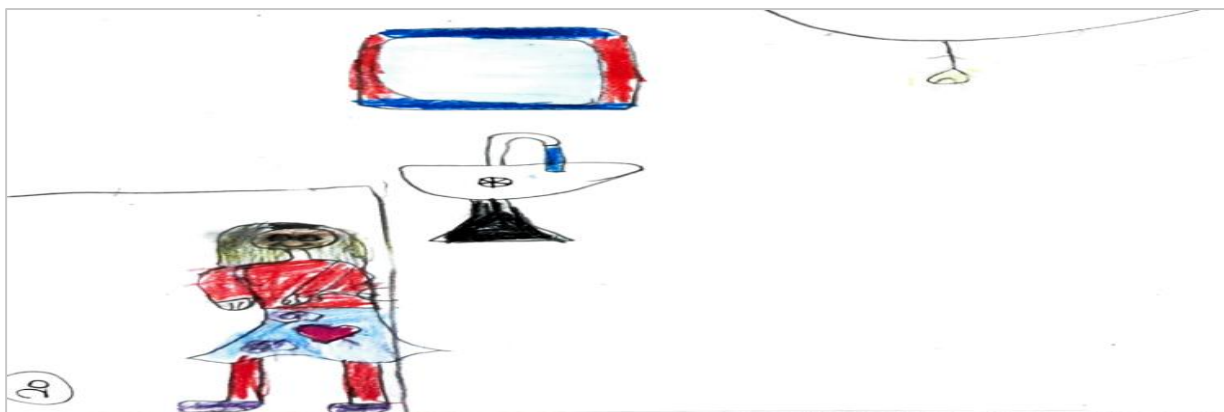


Figure 1. Conscious Consumerism

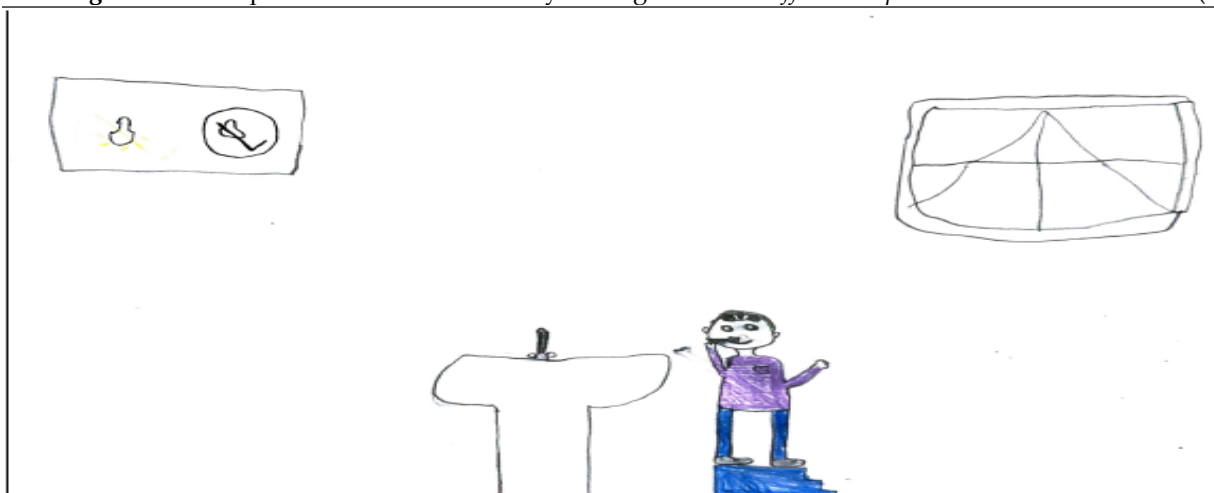
According to the answers given to the questions about conscious consumerism, six main themes emerged. While the teachers and the students presented common opinions on the theme of wishes and needs, saving, recycling, and healthy nutrition were the themes expressed only by the students, and price information and production and content information were the themes expressed only by the teachers. The students associated conscious consumerism mostly with saving, and they also expressed the concepts of water and electricity most, among the resources that need to be saved. Additionally, food, money, time, and fuel were also stated as resources to be saved.

Drawing 1. A picture drawn regarding conscious consumerism (s20).



For example, S20 explained the picture she drew as “A girl leaves the water and electricity on when she comes out of the toilet. In doing so, she wastes money”, she mentioned both water and electricity savings, and she stated that the irresponsible use of these resources would lead to waste of money.

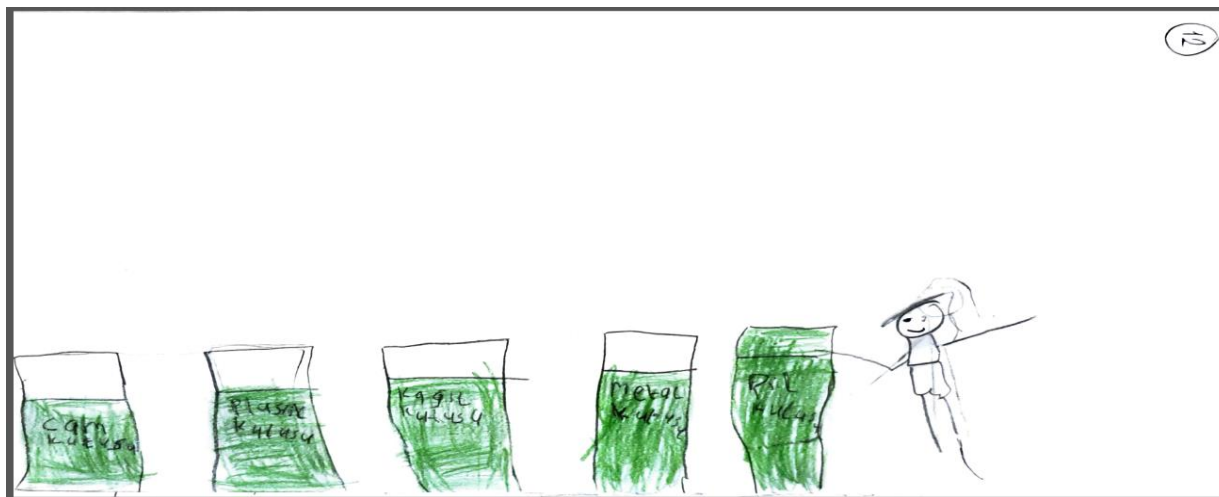
Drawing 2. An example of water and electricity saving. “We turn off the lamps and water we do not use” (S21).



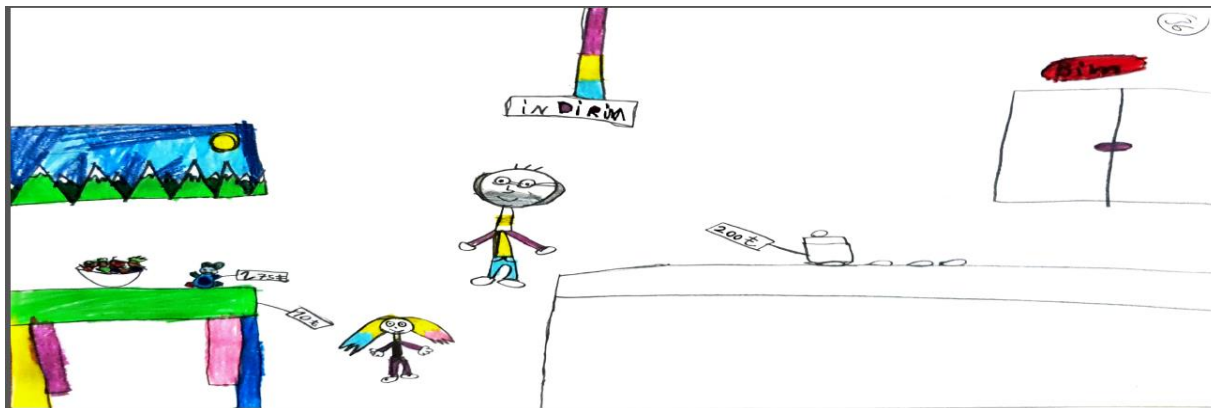
The students evaluating conscious consumerism in the theme of healthy nutrition drew pictures of people who buy snacks instead of vegetables and fruits, and they tended to compare foods that are beneficial for health and those unhelpful for health: *"She bought snacks instead of buying healthy fruit"* (S31), *"She bought snacks instead of buying fruit from the grocery"* (S43).

S1 explained the relationship between conscious consumerism and the theme of recycling by drawing another child, warning that the child who throws the packaging of the cake he ate on the ground about the expectation that he should throw it into the recycling bin, while S45, on the other hand, emphasized that a conscious consumer should be active in recycling with the statement *"it is necessary to recycle the garbage instead of throwing it on the ground."*

Drawing 3. A picture drawn on the theme of recycling for conscious consumerism. *"The girl is going to throw the glass bottle in her hand to the recycling bin"* (S12).



In the theme of wishes and needs, all teachers emphasized wishes and needs, and the students mostly stated that needs should be met first and explained this by giving examples. For example, S46 stated that water and fruits would be bought by a responsible person, and ice cream and fizzy drinks would be bought by an irresponsible person and expressed this with a drawing. While S26 defined conscious consumerism as buying their needs instead of wishes with the statement *"Hüseyin did not buy what he wished with the money his mother gave him, he bought what he wished."*, T4 defined it with his following words *"it is to determine what we will buy according to our needs, without falling into a shopping spree. When determining these needs, deciding with certainty whether we really need it or not is the first step of conscious consumerism."* S28 and S36 pointed out that buying the things one needs is doing the right thing, and buying the things one wishes to have but does not need is doing the wrong thing, whereas S27 emphasized that a budget should be allocated for needs first with the statement *"If we spend our money on things we do not need, we will have no money for our needs."* T1 emphasized the importance of needs in the budget with examples given on not buying unnecessary products with the statement *"...the conscious consumer must first determine what their needs are, then know how much they can allocate as a budget..."*.



Drawing 4. A picture emphasizing the difference between wishes and needs regarding conscious consumerism. "A girl and her grandfather are shopping, but the girl is buying the wrong things" (S36).

While T1 emphasized the importance of purchasing products with clean content with the statement "...to pay attention to the content of the products bought, to look at the effect of the product to be bought on nature...", T5 defined conscious consumerism with the words "... one who knows that everything they consume is obtained from a source existing in the world; one who is aware that with everything they consume, they actually consume the raw material spent for its production..." It may be stated that these teachers defined conscious consumerism through the indirect effects of consumption.

Considering the theme of price information, T3 stated that buying affordable products is one of the requirements of conscious consumerism, using the words "What we need is to research the price of a product and buy it from the most appropriate place." T2, on the other hand, stated buying products with high performance to price ratio is one of the requirements of conscious consumerism with the words "...to find the most suitable product in terms of both quality and price and buy it."

Conscious Consumer Behaviors

What teachers and students stated doing as conscious consumers is presented in Figure 2.

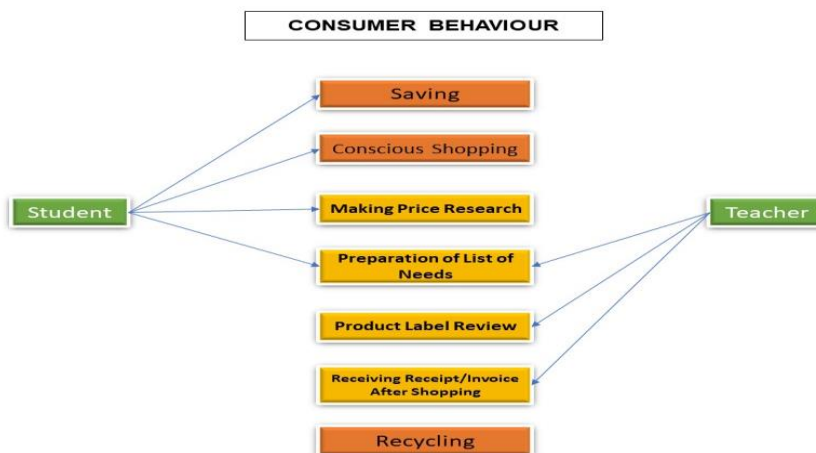


Figure 2. Consumer Behavior

The conscious consumer behaviors exhibited by the teachers and the students emerged in three main themes. These were savings, conscious shopping, and recycling. While the students stated that they made savings, practiced conscious shopping behaviors, and recycled as conscious consumers, it was revealed that the teachers made savings and practiced conscious shopping behaviors. Regarding the theme of conscious shopping, it was revealed that the participants conducted research on prices, they kept receipts/invoices after shopping, they made lists of needs, and they examined the labels of the products they purchased.

Most students emphasized that a conscious consumer should be thrifty in parallel with the pictures drawn, and they also gave similar examples from their own lives. When the students talked about the behavioral

patterns of conscious consumers, they used the expressions *"I do not use water in vain. I use everything economically (S9)"*, *"I do not waste my money (S17)"*, *"I do not leave the lights on, I take only as much food as I can eat on my plate (S6)"*, *"Conscious consumers turn off the light in the mornings... (S13)"*. T5 stated that he made savings with the statement *"We try to be as careful and thrifty as possible in the consumption of water, electricity, heating, markets, food, clothing, etc."* S42 emphasized that they acted economically about water, electricity, and food by saying, *"We turn off the lights, turn off the water, use the heater less frequently, and finish our meal"*.

Another theme associated with consumer behavior was conscious shopping. T2 and T4, who mentioned price-related research, stated that they always learned the price of the product sold by different vendors before buying it, and T3 presented an opinion accordingly with the words *"If the product is necessary, I do research on prices on several platforms..."* S48 stated that *"The conscious consumer is a careful and inquisitive person. They do price research..."*

S17 and S26 emphasized that before buying something, it is necessary to think about whether one needs that product or not, and T2, T3, and T4 stated that they first questioned about whether they needed the product or not as conscious consumers. Additionally, while T2 stated that things that one wishes can be bought after allocating a budget for needs with the words *"...we should get what we wish without deceiving ourselves, realistically without disturbing the balance of our budget"*, S18 presented a similar opinion with the words *"As a conscious consumer, I can get what I need first and then buy what I wish to buy with the remaining money."* S20 exemplified this situation with the words *"we should buy a notebook first, then we should buy a lollipop if we have money left."* Only T1 mentioned another characteristic of a conscious consumer by stating that he received a receipt/invoice after shopping.

Another topic in the theme of conscious shopping was the examination of the product label, which includes information such as product contents, production conditions, and consumption conditions. Regarding this, S1 and S48 stated that they looked at the expiration dates of the products they bought. T1 stated that he looked at the expiration dates of the products he bought and checked the contents of the product, and T5 stated that he preferred the products he would purchase to be natural, healthy, reliable, and of high quality. The last theme emerging within the scope of consumer behavior was participation in recycling. The students stated that a conscious consumer should recycle the waste left over from consumption, but no emphasis was made by the teachers on recycling, which is an indicator of conscious consumerism. This was one of the remarkable findings of this study.

Associating Conscious Consumerism with Courses

The courses that were associated with conscious consumerism most by the teachers are presented in Figure

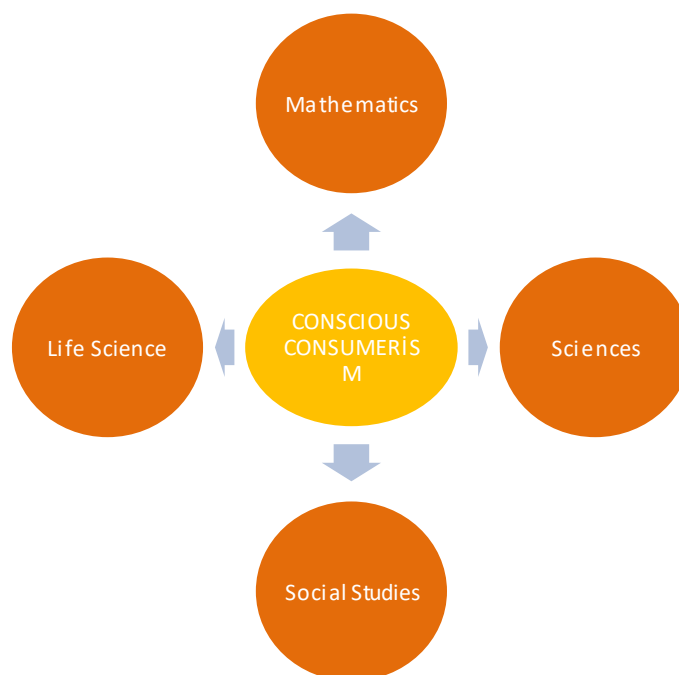


Figure 3. Courses Associated with Conscious Consumerism

Conscious consumerism was associated with Life Science, Sciences, Social Sciences, and Mathematics courses, and the Life science lesson was the common response of all teachers. In the statements of the teachers, it was

noted that this course is 'intertwined with daily life, providing the opportunity to give examples from the lives of students', and it was stated that conscious consumerism is a concept that they will encounter throughout their lives. The life sciences course was also found to be associated with conscious consumerism because it 'brings students together with social life' (T4) and 'the behaviors expected to be acquired in the course are close to daily life' (T1). While T5 associated conscious consumerism with sciences, using the words "A course in which the scientific relationship between production and consumption, as well as the relationship between natural resources and natural balance, are explained", T1 also established an association with this course in the context of the conscious consumption of resources. T3 associated conscious consumerism with the mathematics course, using the words "... will do mathematical calculations in every shopping exchange."

Teaching-Learning Process to Gain An Understanding of Conscious Consumerism in The Life Science Lesson

The methods that the teachers use to enable their students to develop conscious consumerism in the life science lesson are presented in Figure 4.

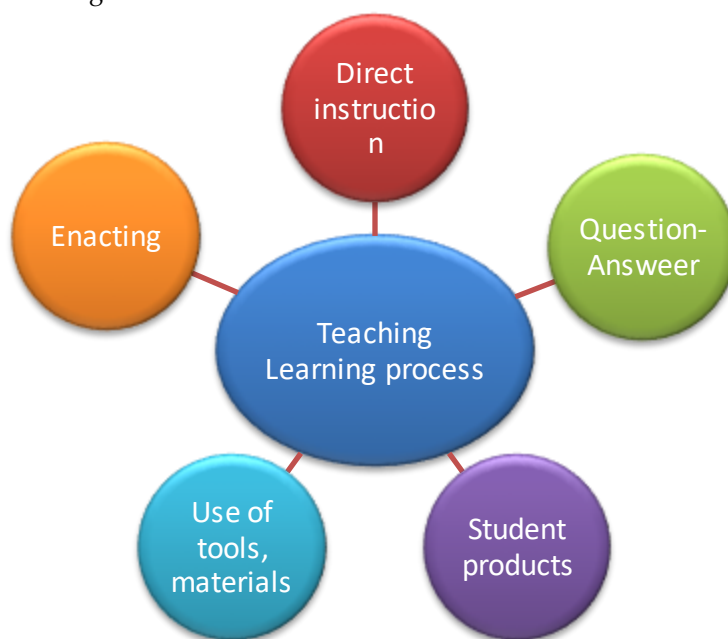


Figure 4. Teaching-Learning Process

When the teachers were asked about what they did to enable the development of conscious consumerism in their students in the life science lesson, they stated that they mostly used the methods of direct instruction, question and answer, enacting, student performance assignments, and plenty of tools and materials. While T5, who expressed that performed direct instruction, stated that 'I tell them what they should pay attention to when they go to the grocery and the importance of reading product labels correctly', T4, who expressed that he used question and answer activities, stated that 'I ask about their wishes and needs, and I want them to compare responsible and irresponsible consumer behaviors and their outcomes'. Additionally, the teachers presented examples of student practices (T4, T1, T2) such as creating budget examples, writing stories about the subject, and drawing pictures. T4, who stated that he used tools and materials, said, 'I have them watch videos about shopping, it's very effective since we can't go to the grocery'. Based on the answers of the teachers in general, it is seen that the majority of them used the question-and-answer method, and it seems that this was not very suitable for a skill that comes from life.

Problems Encountered in Enabling Conscious Consumer Characteristics in Students

The sources of the problems experienced by the teachers in the process emerged under two main themes as family and school.

The teachers stated that the family has a great effect as much as in-class activities for enabling conscious consumerism in students, and this effect often creates problems. While T2, stating that the family is the wrong role model, explained his opinions with the words "Generally acquired habits in the family can sometimes be more effective on the child", similarly, T3 stated that 'Many of the things that are taught at school to enable conscious consumerism in students are not practiced at home'. Regarding the possibility that the financial difficulties experienced by the family create problems, T5 stated that "Families either do not understand conscious

consumerism at all or only superficially understand it as consumer rights. Conscious consumerism is a necessity in our country. There is unnecessary consumption and waste, unfortunately, when there is financial opportunity... No one cares much. Again, the fact that what is taught at school has no equivalency at home, and the behaviors that are the opposite of what is desired create another problem." The opinions of T5 can be interpreted as the one-dimensional perception of conscious consumerism, because families with insufficient means are in a forced stance of conscious consumerism, and what is learned is limited to the school, this may cause the inability to transform what is learned into behavior.

The first problems encountered in the school dimension were the inadequacy of the targeted outcomes and their lack of suitability for every region. T3 and T5 stated that the targeted outcomes of the course were insufficient, and T3 argued that these targeted outcomes should also be added to the curricula of other courses. T4 also supported these opinions, using the words *"Some of the course topics and targeted outcomes do not comply with the lives of students in every region, or their lifestyles. Other than the social studies and science courses, the likelihood of associating real-life issues with school subjects is low."* Another problem was stated as obstacles to carry out extracurricular activities. T5 explained this situation saying, *"...The curriculum is not suitable particularly in terms of time to talk about, discuss these issues in detail, and engage in activities related to it in and out of school."* T1 also gave an example to the inadequacy of extracurricular activities by mentioning the lack of a club to guide students for conscious consumption. The negative impact of students on each other was the last problem stated in the context of the school dimension. T2 pointed out that since students tend to imitate the behaviors of their friends, ill-advised behaviors are learned quickly. Additionally, all the teachers stated that the targeted outcomes in the curriculum for conscious consumerism and the allocated time in the schedule were insufficient.

Recommendations for Enabling Conscious Consumer Characteristics in Students

The teachers offered recommendations for the problems they experienced in the process, in terms of the family, school, and curriculum dimensions.

The recommendations given by the teachers considering the family dimension to enable conscious consumer characteristics in students were raising awareness in families, having families become role models for their children, and giving more responsibility to the child in the family. T3, who thought that families should be role models, expressed his opinion with the words *"First of all, the elders of the family should apply it, should be a model for the child, and show it concretely at different times in life."* T4, who argued that the family should give responsibility to the child, expressed his recommendation as follows: *"...they can be asked to prepare a list of needs and organize shopping activities together."*

The recommendations in the school dimension were that the schools should provide an environment for learning by doing and experiencing, more audio-visual elements should be included, and the targeted outcomes of the curricula should be arranged and improved according to the socioeconomic level of the region where the school is. For example, T1 recommended that schools be transformed into centers of learning by doing and experiencing with the words *"Applied training can be included more [prevalently]... Social clubs can be established, and it can be ensured that they work effectively."* Regarding the curriculum, all teachers stated that the number of targeted outcomes related to the concept of conscious consumerism should be increased, and differences in socioeconomic levels should be taken into consideration while making these outcomes more pronounced in the curriculum. T1 expressed his opinions regarding this situation with the words *"Considering the country's socioeconomic status, family structure, and culture, relevant targeted outcomes can be included. While a student living in a village and a student living in a city do not have the same opportunities, this can also be reflected to the targeted outcomes of the course. There can be a lot of positive and negative examples in the textbooks."* Additionally, T2 and T4 stated that teaching materials should be enriched, and content (games, cartoons, short films) which is richer and appropriate for children's levels could be produced by the Ministry of National Education for the digital learning dimension, and accessibility could be provided at schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Conscious consumerism, besides being a skill to be acquired, is thought to have become a necessity in today's circumstances. In this study, the conscious consumerism perceptions of 2nd-grade elementary school students and their teachers, as well as their reflections on the Life science lesson were examined. In this context, based on the data on conscious consumerism perceptions, from the 6 themes that emerged, only the theme of wishes and needs was expressed by both the students and the teachers. While the themes of saving, recycling, and

healthy nutrition were only expressed by the students, the themes of price information and production and content information were the themes expressed by the teachers. In the relevant literature, it is seen that these themes emerging in relation to conscious consumerism had similarities with those reported in the studies conducted by Uyanık (2020) and Karaboğa (2022). In this study, the students defined conscious consumerism mostly in the context of savings. They also associated saving mostly with water and electricity as resources. It was a remarkable result that the teachers defined conscious consumerism in terms of price, content, and production information of the products needed. The finding that these expressions were only stated by the teachers may have been due to the fact that adults are usually the ones responsible for shopping in a family. The absence of any conclusion regarding consumer rights was another remarkable conclusion. The fact that this subject is not included in the targeted outcomes of the social studies curriculum may explain this situation. Nevertheless, consumer rights are an important part of conscious consumerism, so it is thought that it will be beneficial to study this concept with students through case studies appropriate to the subject in the classroom. Additionally, the healthy nutrition theme expressed by the students was an important result. When we look at the definitions of conscious consumerism with different classifications, it is seen that health-conscious consumers prefer foods that are good for them and natural (Ustaahmetoğlu & Toklu, 2015). Therefore, it may be stated that these students were on the way to becoming health-conscious consumers.

The themes that emerged in terms of conscious consumer behaviors in this study were the themes of saving, conscious shopping, and recycling. The sub-themes under the conscious shopping theme were price research, preparation of list of needs, product label review, and keeping receipts/invoices after shopping. Particularly, the sub-themes that emerged in the theme of conscious shopping had similarities with those reported in some studies in the literature (Makela Peters, 2004; Sağlam, 2010; Malbeleşli & Sağlam, 2013). The aspect that differs from these studies was that conscious consumer behaviors were not only in the shopping dimension, but they also provided results such as the effective/economical use of resources and recycling. In light of these two themes, one may state that individuals whose opinions were obtained were environmentally conscious consumers.

The teachers who participated in this study associated conscious consumerism mostly with the life science lesson. The social sciences course followed this. Some teachers also associated the concept with sciences and mathematics. Indeed, considering the curriculum, it is seen that there are related concepts. The expression of social studies by all teachers may be explained by the fact that conscious consumerism is a concept that we encounter frequently in daily life, and the course has a structure suitable for presenting aspects of daily life. In line with this, the examples of targeted outcomes given by the teachers regarding conscious consumerism were also from the social studies lesson (Danilane & Marzano, 2014). Additionally, it was revealed that the teachers used the methods of direct instruction, questions and answers, enacting, student performance assignments, and plenty of tools and materials while teaching the topics of conscious consumerism in the life science lesson.

The teachers explained the problems they experienced in terms of the family and school dimensions while enabling students to develop conscious consumer characteristics in the life science lesson. They stated problems arising from families as the possibility that the physical conditions of the family are not suitable for conscious consumption, and the students may acquire ill-advised consumption habits as their family members may be negative role models. They expressed the problems they experienced in the school dimension as the inadequacy of the targeted outcomes in the curriculum, these outcomes not being suitable for every region and every lifestyle, and the negative effects of students on each other. Considering the targeted outcomes in the curriculum, it is seen that the scope of the concept of conscious consumerism is sufficient except for its consumer rights aspect, but the time given to the teaching of these outcomes is insufficient. The opinions of the teachers who participated in this study also supported this consideration. The teachers stated that they had a time problem when in-depth learning environments were created to enable the acquisition of conscious consumerism characteristics, which are a concept suitable for in-class and extracurricular activities in terms of the subject, by students. These results are similar to the results obtained by Uyanık (2015). Considering the region and different socioeconomic conditions in terms of the behaviors aimed at in targeted outcomes, it is seen that the behaviors that are aimed at in the targeted outcomes of the social studies curriculum are partly insufficient and irrelevant. Recycling is a good example of this. While recycling has not been widespread in many different regions in Turkey, especially in rural areas, it will be difficult to give students a subject that

they have not seen for which they cannot find an area of application. As stated by the teachers, a curriculum that includes achievements that show flexibility according to regions would be more functional.

The recommendations offered by the teachers to enable the development of conscious consumerism characteristics in students emerged in the family and school dimensions. They offered recommendations for family education to raise awareness, ensuring families to be role models, and motivating children to increase their responsibility in the family, as well as recommendations for schools to create environments that are suitable for experience and enriched with visual elements, ensuring the continuity of the subject with an interdisciplinary approach, and preparing the targeted outcomes by considering regions and families with different income levels. Families play a very significant role in supporting the child's behavioral development through teaching and reinforcement (Ward, 1977). Trying to enable students to acquire a behavior that is not adopted in the family at the school can cause it to remain only within the boundaries of the school. Therefore, family education is very important.

In light of the results obtained in this research, the following recommendations can be made:

- With different methods and techniques in the classroom, as well as participatory home assignments that can be completed with the family, studies can be carried out to enable the development of behaviors such as the examination of product contents, price comparisons, and the preparation of a list of needs.
- Education can be provided to families, who play an important role in conscious consumerism.
- Studies can be conducted at different grade levels to reveal awareness about conscious consumerism.
- Since teachers and families are role models, their perceptions on the subject can also be presented.
- Activities which will increase teachers' awareness about the importance of recycling can be carried out. With in-service training provided in this context, it can be ensured that teachers utilize activities that support recycling in all classes.
- It is important for teachers and students to know what consumer rights are and what rights they have as consumers. In this context, targeted outcomes involving basic knowledge about consumer rights can be added to the curriculum.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The author has no potential conflicts of interest to disclose with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval

Formal ethics approval was granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Kütahya Dumlupınar University.

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Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the research team's university ethics committee of the of Kütahya Dumlupınar University (Approval Number/ID: 31/2022, E.8291:

- This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

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