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# **SOCIAL STUDIES PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

(SOSYAL BİLGİLER ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ ÇOCUK HAKLARINA KARŞI TUTUMLARI)

**Zihni MEREY<sup>1</sup>**

## **ABSTRACT**

This research aims at determining social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes towards human rights education on different variables. In the research conducted with the survey model, "Children's Rights Attitude Scale" developed by Karaman - Kepenekçi (2006) was used. The universe of the study consists of pre-service teachers who attended the social studies teaching programs and the research sample consists of 451 pre-service teachers attending the 4<sup>th</sup> year of social studies teaching programs at faculties of education of 10 different universities (Tokat, Gazi, Karadeniz Technical, Yüzüncü Yıl, Erciyes, Kars, Adıyaman, Uşak, Kilis and Ankara Universities) during 2011-2012 academic year. The relationship of demographic characteristics to children's rights was investigated through regression analysis. As a result of the regression analysis, only mother's education level was found to be in reverse relationship with attitudes associated with children's rights. However, it was observed that age, gender, income level, father's education level, neighborhood, and taking classes do not predict the dependent variable statistically significantly.

**Keywords:** Social Studies, Pre-service Teacher, Children's Rights, Attitude

## **ÖZ**

Bu çalışma sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adaylarının insan hakları eğitimine yönelik tutumlarını farklı değişkenler açısından belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tarama modelinde yürütülmüş araştırmada Karaman - Kepenekçi (2006) tarafından geliştirilen "Çocuk Hakları Tutum Ölçeği", kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın evrenini sosyal bilgiler öğretmenliği programlarında öğrenim gören öğretmen adayları; örneklemini ise 2011-2012 eğitim öğretim yılında 10 farklı üniversitenin (Tokat, Gazi, Karadeniz Teknik, Yüzüncü Yıl, Erciyes, Kars, Adıyaman, Uşak, Kilis ve Ankara Üniversitesi) eğitim fakültelerinin sosyal bilgiler öğretmenliği bölümünün 4. sınıfında öğrenim gören 451 öğretmen adayına uygulanmıştır. Demografik özelliklerin çocuk haklarına ilişkin tutumlarla ilişkisi çoklu regresyon analiziyle ele alınmıştır. Yapılan regresyon analizi sonucunda sadece annenin eğitim düzeyi çocuk haklarına ilişkin tutumlarla ters yönde ilişkili bulunmuştur. Buna karşın yaş, cinsiyet, gelir, baba eğitimi, yerleşim ve ders alma durumunun bağımlı değişkeni istatistik olarak önemli düzeyde yordamadığı görülmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Bilgiler, Öğretmen Adayı, Çocuk Hakları, Tutum.

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## INTRODUCTION

Not much information about the children was recorded until 16<sup>th</sup> century. The change beginning within the cultural and intellectual spheres with the Renaissance continued through 19<sup>th</sup> century and the perception of children as a distinct group other than adults was quite reinforced. Philosophers of enlightenment put forward new ideas about childhood and child education. Thus, a distinct and gradually developing perception of childhood came up. In line with this developing perception, children were protected from unfavorable effects of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization; and measures were taken for their health and welfare (Akyüz, 2001). In 19<sup>th</sup> century, as educational conditions improved, status of childhood became automatically questioned (Rodham, 1979). In 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, the child was considered the main human resource defining the future of society. This century was called “the century of the child” as philosophers, educators, psychologists, and lawyers studied children and produced ideas on their development and rights (Akyüz, 2001:4). Now, it has become one of the requirements of this age to teach children and promote their basic rights and basic freedoms they are supposed to have.

In the light of the information provided above, children's rights are benefits protected by legal regulations in order for the children to, normally and healthily, develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally in freedom and dignity (Akyüz, 2000; 2012). Children's rights are authorizations and benefits, persons defined as children have. Children's rights have been formed based on human rights. These rights serve the purposes of children in establishing common good, the child's knowledge of basic rights as an individual and taking direct action for issues associated with the child (Wald, 1987). An approach protecting child's interest as an individual and combining social good with the child's interest paves the way for the idea that the child is society's future. Raising children as responsible, aware, and qualified individuals serves society's present and future purposes (Aral and Gürsoy, 2001:36).

Protecting the child and children's rights is among the most significant problems that require immediate solution today. Therefore, adults' responsibility to realize the children's rights takes place in any international regulation associated with human rights. Based on children's precious decision, the necessity of children's rights education is included in the “Convention on the Rights of the Children” (CRC) which is a legal text.

Convention on the Rights of the Children defines raising “qualified individuals” as the basic target along with the rights and standards it provides. Raising the children and youth as individual and social beings in all aspects through education is effective on creating a qualified society in social, cultural, economic, and political perspectives (Cılga, 1999). With this convention, children are considered significant right holders and wise people satisfying their rights, regardless of abilities, origins, and genders (Save the Children, 1999). This convention provided the children's rights with a global awareness (Libal, 2010). The Convention on the Children's Rights, like all other accepted human rights

conventions, is an important agreement for satisfying rights associated with children (Roche, 1999:488). The convention contributes in the process of saving the child from being an object of parents', employers', and the state's disposal at will and granting him/her the status of an independent, honorable, and respected individual (Serozan, 2000).

The issue of children's rights has become an international one discussed on international documents beyond domestic laws of countries. The most important of these documents, without a doubt, is the Convention on the Children's Rights approved in the United Nations' General Assembly in 1989. 54 provisions associated with children's individual, political, social, and cultural rights are included in the convention. All children's rights to survive, develop, protection, and participation are organized in details (Karaman - Kepenekçi, 2006).

Protecting children's rights is one of the most important issues around the world today. Among many problems in Turkey, the issue of children's rights is one of the most discussed these days. Children's rights in Turkey are protected both by national and international law. Within the national law, first of all, provisions associated with children's rights (e.g. articles 41, 42, 50, 58, 61, 62) were included in 1982 Constitution. Besides, it attracts attention that children's rights are provided within civil law, criminal law, and labor law (Karaman - Kepenekçi, 2006).

Social Studies course always offers important possibilities for Human Rights education (Tezgel, 2008). This is clearly expressed in social studies curriculum and National Education basic law. It is observed that within the explanations on general purposes and implementations of social studies curriculum, direct emphases on citizenship education take place: *educating independent individuals (article 1), participating (article 14), and adopting democratic life (article 15)* (Social Studies, 2011). On the articles associated with implementation of social studies curricula, *educating Turkish citizens with democratic skills and values, open to scientific thinking, respecting human rights, able to work in collaboration, with a developed love for republic, knowing their rights and responsibilities (article 11)* is emphasized in implementations of elementary social studies curriculum as well as gains of social studies. For instance, within social studies curricula I and II level gains, human rights in general and children's rights in particular are emphasized along with other gains: ... "*researches issues, standards, and subjects associated with the universal human rights (p. 70); defines basic human rights and freedoms as the basic concepts of democratic republic (p. 73); defines human honor, equality, and similar concepts as basic concepts of democratic republic and provides examples of these (p. 73); recognizes and defines the individual human honor as the basic concept of the democratic republic government (p. 73); advocates the idea that in democratic governments right to live, right to individual immunity, freedom of religion and consciousness and freedom of thought should be provided; analyzes the developmental process of human rights based on historical documents; analyzes the responsibilities of institutions and organizations obliged to protect children's rights*"... etc. (MEB, 2011).

This study investigated whether the attitudes of Social Studies pre-service teachers in Turkey towards children's rights statistically significantly differed on variables of age, gender, income level, parents' education level, neighborhood, and taking classes related to children's rights. Various studies on children's rights in Turkey on elementary, middle school, and higher education levels are available in the literature. However, it is remarkable that studies on attitudes towards children's rights are a few (Karaman – Kepenekçi, 2006; Ay Zöğ, 2008; Salman-Osmanağaoğlu, 2007; Karaman-Kepenekçi and Bayık, 2009; Yurtsever, 2009). No studies on social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children's rights have been found among the studies conducted in Turkey. When studies conducted abroad are examined, it was observed that some research was on topics such as children's decision process and expressing themselves about needs for participation rights (Rogers and Wrightsman, 1978; Morton and Dubanoski, 1980; Helgeson, Goodman, Shaver & Lipton, 1989; Vyverman and Vettenburg, 2009) and some are on maintaining attitudes towards other basic needs (Campbell and Covell, 2001; Ben-Arieh, Khoury-Kassabri and Haj-Yahia, 2006; Daya, Peterson-Badalib and Ruck, 2012; Ben-Arieh and Khoury-Kassabri, 2008; Leonard, 2004; Peterson - Badali, Ruck, and Ridley, 2003; Lin, 1999). Likewise, no studies investigating social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children's rights were encountered among other studies conducted within different cultures.

As stated above, it is observed that the studies reviewed in relation to attitudes toward children's rights focused on the rights (survival, participation, protection, and development) within UN Convention on the Rights of the Children. In addition, literature reviews in Turkey and abroad revealed that not many studies on social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes toward children's rights are available. Therefore, it is believed that this research will contribute in the research on that area.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to investigate social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children's rights on different variables and to determine their levels of attitudes toward children's rights education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this section, research model, study group, data collection tools, and data analysis are described.

### **Research Model**

This research utilizes the survey model. Survey models are research approaches employed to investigate a previous or a current issue (Çepni, 2009:62). Surveys are studies aiming at collecting data in order to determine certain characteristics of a certain group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). According to Karasar (2007), survey models are research approaches which aim at describing a past or present phenomenon as it is. In such study model, no intervention on the researched

phenomenon, object or individual is conducted; only the prevailing issue is found (Karasar, 2007:77).

### Study Group

The study group in this research consists of 451 pre-service teachers attending the 4<sup>th</sup> year at social studies teaching departments of 10 different universities during 2011-12 academic year. In this research utilizing the maximum variety sampling, universities in regions with various socio-economic statuses were included in the study group. The reason for that is to provide generalizability of study results over Turkey, to describe the problem in a larger frame, and to obtain important and powerful clues of the universe values (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009).

Participants are 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate students. 7.54% of the participant students attend Tokat University; 14.63% attend Gazi University; 9.53% study in Karadeniz Teknik University; 7.76% in Van Yüzüncü Yıl University; 15.52% in Erciyes University; 10.86% in Kars University; 6.43% in Adıyaman University; 15.96% in Uşak University; 4.43% in Kilis University; and 7.32% in Ankara University.

56.5% of the students are men whereas 41.9% are women. 7 students did not respond to the question about gender. The average age in the study group is 22.86 and the standard deviation is 2.15. Descriptive statistics are given on Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics Associated with Descriptive Statistics**

		N	Percentage (%)
Gender ‡	Male	255	57.43
	Female	189	42.57
Income‡	Less than 500	117	26.59
	501 – 1000	164	37.27
	1001 – 2000	114	25.91
	More than 2001	45	10.23
Mother's Education Level‡	Illiterate	118	26.82
	Elementary	223	50.68
	Middle School	48	10.91
	High School	37	8.41
	University	14	3.18
Father's Education Level‡	Illiterate	30	6.86
	Elementary	203	46.45
	Middle School	70	16.02
	High School	86	19.68
	University	48	10.98
Neighborhood‡	Village	82	18.59
	Town	41	9.30
	County	122	27.66
	City	196	44.44
Class‡	Taken	118	27.13
	Not taken	317	72.87

‡ Due to inefficient observation on these variables, totals are less than 451.

## MEASURES

### Demographic Questionnaire Form:

Gender, income level, parents' education level, neighborhood, and taking classes associated with children's rights were considered on the demographic questionnaire form used in this research.

### Data Collection Tools

"Attitude Scale of Children's Rights" (ASCR), previously developed by Karaman - Kepenekçi (2006) in order to determine social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes toward children's rights, was used. The scale was prepared as 5-point Likert scale with options of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree". The scale includes 22 items in relation to children's rights in four different areas (survival, developmental, protection, and participation). 19 of the statements in the scale are positive and 3 are negative. Responses to negative statements (2<sup>nd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> items) are reverse-scored. The lowest score on the scale is 22 whereas the highest is 110. Karaman - Kepenekçi (2006) stated the following was provided upon the study on the validity and reliability of the scale: the scale is a single-factor one; item-total correlation coefficients of items on the scale vary between .32 and .61; Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient is .85; semi-test reliability coefficient is .77.

### Data Analysis

First of all, the descriptive statistics of the study group were calculated. The effects of demographic characteristics on participant students' attitudes toward Children's Rights were investigated through regression analysis. In regression analysis, age, gender, mother's education level, father's education level, neighborhood, and taking classes associated with children's rights were included in the model as independent variables. In the multiple regression analysis, the effect of demographic characteristics on the attitude scores of dependent variable of Children's Rights was investigated. Gender, mother's education level, father's education level, neighborhood, and taking classes were coded as dummy variables in the analysis. Statistical significance level was considered  $p < .05$ .

## FINDINGS

Participants' average of scores obtained from the Attitude Scale of Children's Rights is 97.53 and the standard deviation is 11.19.

The relationship between the demographic characteristics and the attitudes associated with children's rights was examined through regression analysis. As a result of the regression analysis, only the mother's education level was found to be in reverse relationship with attitudes toward children's rights. In the regression model, independent variables explained the scores of Attitude Scale of Children's Rights with 13%. In the regression model, only the mother's education level among independent variables was found to be in reverse relationship with scores of

attitudes toward children's rights ( $\beta=-0.129$ ,  $t=-1.988$ ;  $p<.05$ ). However, it is observed that age, gender, father's education level, neighborhood, and taking classes associated with children's rights do not significantly predict the independent variable.

**Table 2. Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis**

	B	Standard Error	B	T	P
R <sup>2</sup>	.13				
Age	0.047	0.266	.009	0.177	.859
Gender	2.201	1.182	.097	1.863	.063
Income Level	0.057	0.675	.005	0.084	.933
Mother's Education Level	-1.457	0.733	-.129	-1.988	<b>.048</b>
Father's Education Level	0.453	0.638	.047	0.711	.478
Neighborhood	-0.034	0.543	-.003	-0.063	.950
Taking Classes	0.494	1.232	.020	0.401	.689

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims at determining social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes toward children's rights. For this purpose, "Attitude Scale of Children's Rights" was applied on 451 social studies pre-service teachers attending 10 different universities in Turkey. Following results were obtained upon application.

Results of this research showed that social studies pre-service teachers' ages did not have a significant relationship with attitudes toward children's rights. In the related literature review, a few studies investigating children's right to participation in elementary social studies textbooks were found. It is remarkable that in a similar research on the topic, Karaman - Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009) found a negative, low level, and significant relationship between attitudes of pre-service teachers at special education, classroom teaching, pre-school, computer and educational technologies departments of Educational Sciences Faculty, Ankara University, toward children's rights and the variable of age. Yurtsever (2009) observed that age is a variable playing a significant role, in a study investigating parents' attitudes toward children's rights. The study showed that as children's ages become younger, parents maintained attitudes in favor of "care and protection" and as children's ages become older, father maintains attitudes in favor of "making decisions on their own". Peterson-Badali, Ruck, and Ridley (2003) also observed significant relationships between college students' attitudes toward children's rights and their ages. Age is a significant factor affecting attitudes toward children's rights. As people become older, they tend to maintain more positive attitudes toward children's rights. In this research no relationship was found between age and the attitudes and the fact that the study was conducted only among 4<sup>th</sup> year college



students is the most significant reason for this. Since the age range was narrow, a relationship was not observed. However, in the studies conducted, it was observed that positive attitude toward children's rights increased as participants moved to upper levels. Karaman - Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009) concluded in their study that increase in age positively affected the attitudes toward children's rights. Finding no relationship between age and the attitudes toward children's rights in this research may be associated with the fact that study was conducted among only the final year students of social studies education at the Faculties of Education.

When other findings of the study were examined, it was observed that social studies pre-service teachers' attitude levels toward children's rights did not show a significant difference on the variable of gender. This finding supports the findings of the study conducted by Karaman - Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009); however, it differs from the research findings by Ay Zöğ (2008), Karaman-Kepenekçi (2006), Selman - Osmanağaoğlu (2008). Seman-Osmanağaoğlu observed in his/her study that male children had more positive attitudes toward children's rights. Again in a study conducted by Karaman - Kepenekçi (2006) on college students' views about children's rights, it was observed that female students had more positive views of children's rights than male students. However, Karaman - Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009) observed in their study that gender affected the attitudes among students who had not taken any classes of human rights or children's rights. In the student group who had taken no classes, female students had more positive attitudes than male students toward children's rights. In this research, on the other hand, it is observed that the variable of gender did not affect social studies pre-service teachers' democratic attitudes.

In this research, social studies pre-service teachers' attitude levels had a significant relationship with mother's education level. This result is in consistence with Ay Zöğ (2008) and Yurtsever's (2009) study results. Ay Zöğ (2008) found in his/her study that mothers with higher levels of education are more aware of their children's personal rights. In this research, reverse relationships were observed between mother's education level and attitudes toward children. The analysis showed that although there was a significant relationship between mother's education level and attitudes toward children's rights, as mothers' education levels became higher, attitudes of children of mothers with higher education levels toward children's rights were significantly on lower levels. This may be explained with the effects of increase in mother's education level on parenting attitudes rather than mother's education level. Secondly, increase in mother's education level may be bringing along excessive need for control and perfectionist expectations.

Social studies pre-service teachers' levels of attitudes toward children's rights were observed to have no significant difference with father's education level. This conclusion does not support Ay Zöğ (2008) and Yurtsever's (2009) studies. Yurtsever (2009) observed in his/her study that as parents' education levels are higher and the family earns more income, parents maintain attitudes in favor of "care and protection". Ay Zöğ (2008) in his/her study stated that students' attitudes toward children's rights differed on parents' education levels. In the study, along

with a significant relationship with attitudes toward children's rights, it was observed that as parents' education levels were higher, children had more positive attitudes toward children's rights. According to the findings of the study, it can be concluded that father's education level is not a significant factor effective on social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes.

It was observed that social studies pre-service teachers' attitude levels toward children's rights did not have a significant difference on neighborhood. Thus, it can be said that neighborhood does not affect social studies pre-service teachers' attitudes toward children's rights.

In this research, it was observed that social studies pre-service teachers' levels of attitudes toward children's rights did not significantly differ on the variable of taking classes associated with children's rights. The obtained result supports Karaman – Kepenekçi and Baydık's (2009) research results. Researchers observed a significant difference between students attending programs with classes associated with human rights or children's rights and those attending programs without such classes. It can be said that taking education related to human rights or children's rights positively affects attitudes toward children's rights (Covell and Howe, 1999 quoted by: Karaman- Kepenekçi and Baydık, 2009; Karaman–Kepenekçi, 2006). However, in this study, no difference between attitudes of undergraduate social studies students who took children's rights and the attitudes of those who didn't take such classes, toward children's rights, was found. It can be thought that undergraduate social studies students, taking classes such as citizenship, introduction to law, and democracy and human rights, have a general awareness of children's rights. More research on the topic is needed.

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