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Students' Perceptions of Citizenship Preparation in Social Studies: The Role of Instruction and Students' Interests

- Enjoying social studies is strongly associated with perceptions of citizenship preparation.
- Aspects of students' perceptions of the teachers' instruction are significant factors.
- Building on students' interests may have positive implications for citizenship preparation.

Purpose: The main purpose of this study is to explore how 16- to 17-year-old students' experiences within the social studies classroom and their online political communication are related to their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Design/methodology/approach: To meet the purpose of this study, regression analyses were executed based on a survey of 264 Norwegian students aged 16–17. The dependent variable was the students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Findings: The analyses indicated that enjoying social studies was strongly associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. The teacher's contributions, discussing democracy and politics in social studies lessons, and students' online political communication were also significantly associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Research limitations/implications: Some limitations exist in the instrument and in internal and external validity. Future research could add more content to improve the model's explanatory adequacy. More nuanced explanatory factors from outside school are needed to study factors indirectly influencing students' perceptions of citizenship preparation.

Practical implications: These results indicate that focusing on students' interests and quality instruction have positive implications for students' perceived value of the subject when it comes to preparing them for civic and political engagement.

Keywords:

Citizenship education, social studies, 16- to 17- year- old students, teaching

1 Introduction

A politically competent and engaged citizenry is of vital importance for the political sustainability of Western democracies (Dahl, 1998). Both school education and experiences with politics outside school prepare young people for political participation as youths, as democratic citizenship is not restricted to legal and adult citizenship (Stokke, 2017), and later in life. Therefore, the importance of preparing and motivating young people to participate in local, national, and global contexts is widely recognised (Onken & Lange, 2014; Reichert, 2014). This is not limited to participation in working life and democratic decision-making. It also entails a broader concept of participation, including the ability and the desire to be updated and to reflect on social, political, economic, and cultural developments, as well as to engage in the public discussion of such developments. That is, democratic citizenship includes feeling a sense of belonging to society and exercising one's opportunities to improve it. The

quality of citizenship education in school has critical implications for the long-term well-being of a democratic society (Niemi & Junn, 1998), as 'what happens in classrooms can have a significant impact on students' commitments to civic participation' (Kahne & Sporte, 2008, p. 754). In Europe, a substantial part of this kind of citizenship preparation has been assigned to the educational systems, and objectives pertaining to citizenship or civic education can be identified both in general curricula and, more specifically, in social studies or citizenship curricula (Eurydice, 2017). Barton and Avery (2016) noted that 'teaching these subjects contributes to students' ability to participate responsibly in the public sphere, and to their desire to do so' (p. 986), and Whiteley (2005) asserted that 'exposure to and perceptions of citizenship education, are robust predictors of participation' (p. 51). However, democratic politics is not a static condition (Biesta, 2011), and theories of political opportunity structure (e.g. Meyer, 2004; Vráblíková, 2014), propose that different political landscapes influence people's mobilisation and participation. One implication of this is that it is never possible to foresee what characterises the political spaces students will be a part of when they leave school. Subsequently, the concept and content of citizenship education needs to be sufficiently open and dynamic to be able to prepare for the unknown, while providing some firm ground on which to scaffold political curiosity, interest, and reflection.

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Research on social studies and citizenship education is a growing field. Large-scale studies, such as the International Civic and Citizenship Education study [ICCS] (e.g., Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, & Agrusti, 2017), have documented the importance of students' perceptions of an open classroom climate and room for discussion in school, and several studies have investigated the increasingly important role of social media in young people's political engagement and participation (e.g., Banaji & Buckingham, 2013; Ekström & Shehata, 2016). Few studies, however, have taken an in-depth look at social studies teaching, students' perceptions of this teaching, or the subject's aims and contents. This paper investigates antecedents of 16- to 17-year-old Norwegian students' perceptions of the value of social studies in preparing them for citizenship. In European countries, these young people are often school learners who are on their way towards adulthood and positions as fully legal and responsible citizens. By focusing on 16- to 17-year-olds, this study investigates young people's perceptions of citizenship preparation in the transition from formal education to formal enactment. The main question addressed in this study is: Which factors are related to students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies?

Based on the premise that healthy democracies depend on an alert and engaged citizenry (Behrouzi, 2005; Dahl, 1998), the main purpose of this study is to explore factors that are related to students' perceptions of the role that social studies education plays in contributing to their engagement in civic participation. That is, this study examines how students' attitudes towards social studies, their experiences within the social studies classroom, and their participation in online political activities relate to their assessment of the subject's success in providing them with the knowledge and skills that enable and motivate them to reflect on, understand, and engage in various ways in society. This study contributes to the field of citizenship education by providing new insights into the role of subjects such as social studies in preparing young people for democratic citizenship through the perceptions of 16- to 17-year-old students. A secondary purpose of this study is to develop adequate measures of citizenship preparation, students' attitudes towards social studies, and quality aspects of social studies teaching. First, we present some of the central concepts in the study as well as previous research in the field of citizenship education in schools and the study's hypotheses. Second, following a short description of the educational context, we provide an outline of the research design and the methodology for a cross-sectional investigation. Third, we present the results of our study. Fourth, we discuss our findings, avenues for further research, and implications for practice, followed by our concluding remarks.

2 Central concepts

Democracy, politics, and citizenship education are central concepts in this study. These are, however, not concrete or agreed-upon concepts. In this paper, democracy is

understood as more than a form of government and form of political organisation (Biesta, 2011); specifically, democracy includes the processes, activities, and institutions related to democratic politics. We conceive of politics and the political as having to do with conflict and pluralism, particularly in or related to the public sphere or to society, although politics most certainly involves, influences, and is shaped by individuals (e.g., Mouffe, 2005). Citizenship education is meant to improve students' capabilities and interest in being a part of democratic politics, and includes values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Johnson & Morris, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Citizenship is, however, a problematic concept (Biesta, 2011; Hung, 2012). According to Hung (2012), a main problem is that the concept of *citizen* excludes those who for some reason are not legal members of a given society. Stokke (2017) proposed four key interconnected and mutually constitutive dimensions of citizenship to address such challenges: Citizenship as (1) legal status; (2) rights; (3) membership; and (4) participation. This conception of citizenship is sensitive to people's feelings of belonging to various communities, as highlighted by Osler and Starkey (2006), and we adhere to this understanding in this paper. However, the opportunities to practice citizenship are often greatly reduced for people who are not citizens of a nation-state, for example immigrants, and for young people below the legal age. These young people are excluded from certain rights and responsibilities, such as voting in elections, and are sometimes referred to as 'not yet citizens' or 'citizens-in-waiting' (Biesta, 2011, p. 13).

The goal of citizenship education for young people is to foster their capacity to participate in various aspects of civic and political life both as youths and adults; however, the goal should not be to foster *certain kinds of good* citizens (Biesta, 2011). Broadly speaking, it is important that 'people are educated to engage in reflective thought and to contribute to collective action' (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004, p. 270). In this sense, participation includes reflecting on and discussing issues, as well as making changes in one's own life or in some form reaching out to others to effect change. Thus, schools should prepare their students for citizenship, but citizenship education is an elusive construct (Steiner-Khamsi, Torney-Purta, & Schwille, 2002). Although many scholars agree on the wider aims of citizenship education described above, several studies have focused on a narrower outcome, namely expected future participation, as the dependent variable (e.g., Reichert & Print, 2017). However, Wood (2012) found that young people's liminal status before coming into voting age might lead to marginalisation and alienation from politics. We argue, therefore, that a concept of citizenship in an educational context needs to be meaningful for young people not yet eligible to vote. An important aspect of citizenship or social studies education in this respect is to demonstrate and provide opportunities for students to experience how it is very possible to influence political processes through informal channels of participation, for example through social movements (Satell & Popovic, 2017). In



this study, citizenship preparation is understood as how young people can use what they learn in social studies in everyday life, and how the subject challenges them to think, helps them understand the global and social world, makes them curious about the world around them, and prepares them to and makes them want to get engaged in society. In short, citizenship preparation in schools should facilitate students to cultivate interest and participate in society (Keating & Janmaat, 2015). Because it is important to learn more about what inspires young people to engage in social and political issues, students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies is the dependent variable of the theoretical framework. By examining these perceptions, we are able to access students' perspectives in and on the process of preparing for current and future citizenship.

3 Citizenship education in Norway

According to the most recent Eurydice report, Norway, the context for the present study, has a combined cross-curricular and integrated approach to citizenship education in school (Eurydice, 2017). In Norway, the core curriculum (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [UDIR], 2017) states that all school subjects should prepare students for participation in society. This aim is clearly expressed through the inclusion of "democracy and citizenship" as one of three new cross-curricular themes. However, the mandatory subject of social studies is responsible for topics concerning politics and democracy. In Norway, grades 1–10 are mandatory, while grades 11–13 are optional, and approximately 98% of students continue directly from lower- to upper-secondary school (UDIR, 2016). Since social studies is a mandatory subject from grade 1 in primary school (age 6) through grade 11 in upper- secondary school (age 16–17), most Norwegian students study political issues and democracy for 11 years before entering higher education or starting to work. In primary and lower- secondary school, social studies comprises social science, history, and geography, which may be considered an integrated approach to citizenship education. This study focuses on students in upper- secondary school. In year 11 of general and year 12 of vocational education, the subject is still called social studies, but consists only of topics from the social sciences (political science, sociology and social anthropology, and some law and economics) and is studied for three hours each week. The subject consists of five main areas of study: (1) the Researcher; (2) the Individual, society and culture; (3) Work and commercial life; (4) Politics and democracy; and (5) International affairs. Although all these main areas deal with the relationship between individuals and society, 'Politics and democracy' is the area that is most directly focused on citizenship education. Politics and democracy learning outcomes in upper- secondary social studies focus on understanding political parties and institutions, opportunities for participation, pluralism and the rights of minorities, and challenges for democracy (UDIR, 2013). Desired outcomes also include central democratic skills, like discussing and analysing.

4 Citizenship education in school and the present study

To investigate possible antecedents of students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies, we present some previous research on citizenship education in schools, focusing on aspects of instruction and students' engagement in politics.

The basic educational model is that teachers aim to influence students' academic work by communicating learning objectives and expectations, explaining the subject content, and facilitating seatwork and group processes among peers (Hopmann, 2007). This study draws on instructional theory focusing on the learner as an active constructor of knowledge. Broadly speaking, this viewpoint implies that quality instruction facilitates learning experiences where the constructions students make as they try to make sense of their worlds are sensible ones (Resnick, 2017). The independent variables contribute to this underlying concept, as exploring and discussing ideas with peers is instrumental for students' understanding of social and political concepts and processes (Torney-Purta, 1994). Existing research has shown that raising the quality of educators' work can be instrumental in improving students' goal achievement (Rockoff, 2004). A premise in this study is that high-quality teaching is favourable for student learning, also when it comes to aspects of education for democratic citizenship.

Previous research has demonstrated that students' interest in a subject is associated with their perceptions of it. For example, studies have shown that liking a subject is related to academic performance and confidence in learning (Winheller, Hattie, & Brown, 2013) and interest is related to enjoyment, effort, and learning (Wade, 2001). In addition, large-scale studies have documented significant effects of student enjoyment both on achievement (Kaarstein & Nilsen, 2016; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012) and students' interest in continued engagement with the topics under study (Ainley & Ainley, 2011). Therefore, we expect that how well students like the subject, of which a substantial bulk is devoted to politics and democracy, is associated with their evaluation of how well the subject prepares them for democratic citizenship. The first hypothesis is as follows (H1):

H1: There is a positive relationship between the level of students' social studies enjoyment and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Many school subjects might contribute to citizenship education. However, subjects such as social studies in upper-secondary school have a clear responsibility for adolescents' citizenship preparation within an often-mandatory syllabus (Eurydice, 2017). Therefore, teachers in social studies play a vital role in schools' efforts to reach goals of citizenship preparation. We discern two important aspects of teaching which are of interest to our research endeavour: facilitating discussions on the topics of democracy and politics in social studies; and teachers' instruction in social studies. First, an open classroom climate for discussion is associated with

positive student outcomes, such as higher knowledge, more positive attitudes, and interest in civic and political issues (Barton & Avery, 2016; Schulz et al., 2017). Classroom discussions are therefore seen as an arena for practicing competencies relevant for citizenship. According to Reichert (2014), such competencies include the ability to analyse and judge political problems and incidents, and to formulate and advocate one's own opinions and convictions. Accordingly, social studies' teachers are expected to carefully facilitate and manage political discussions among classmates. Carefully facilitating discussions includes avoiding manipulation, for example by consciously presenting skewed information or assuming an authoritarian role in the classroom (Freire, 2014). This implies, for example, for teachers not to impose their political preferences on their students. The teachers' task is to constructively channel disagreements between students, which is an important feature of democracy (Leighton, 2012). Further, researchers have found that discussion about topical aspects of politics and democracy to engage students in truly challenging issues that matter to them contributes strongly to commitments to civic participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008); as a result, students in social studies education should be given ample opportunities to voice opinions about political issues (Jahr, Hempel, & Heinz, 2016). From research on young people's perceptions of democracy and politics, we know that these concepts are often related to formal institutions, such as elections and government, but also to ideas of shaping society and making a difference (e.g., Mathé, 2016, 2017; O'Toole, 2003; Sloam, 2007; White, Bruce, & Ritchie, 2000). As discussions of political issues are important in social studies and citizenship education (Jahr et al., 2016; Kahne & Sporte, 2008), we formulate this hypothesis (H2) on facilitating discussion:

H2: There is a positive relationship between discussing the topics of democracy and politics in the classroom and students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Second, according to Rowe (2007), teachers and teaching are important factors in students' experiences of and outcomes in school. The quality of the teacher's presentation and facilitation of instructional content, including engaging students in instructional activities, is arguably an important factor for students' perceptions of the value of the subject (Fauth, Decristan, Rieser, Klieme, & Büttner, 2014; Reimers, Ortega, Cardenas, Estrada, & Garza, 2014). For example, students' perceptions of teaching quality have been linked to their subject-related interest (Fauth et al., 2014) and a study by Sohl and Arensmeier (2015) linked students' report of engaged teaching to political efficacy. Another study reported that instructional factors have a significant effect on students' reported quality of experience, and that the participants reported high levels of engagement in the subject of social studies (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). The quality of the teacher's presentation and facilitation of instructional content, including

engaging students in instructional activities, is arguably an important factor for students' perceptions of the value of the subject (Fauth et al., 2014; Reimers et al., 2014). We deduce this hypothesis (H3):

H3: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the teacher's contribution in social studies and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

Citizenship preparation does not only take place within the school setting, and many young people are engaged in different ways in civic and political issues (Kahne, Crow, & Lee, 2013; Sloam, 2014). For example, young people increasingly use social media for political purposes, and they may act upon their political interests in social media. Although, as Keating and Melis (2017) discovered, this certainly does not apply to all young people. While social media might facilitate political discussions for some, these platforms may also constrain political debates (Ekström & Shehata, 2016; Mathé, 2017). Nonetheless, social media are important because formal political activities are only a part of young people's political engagement (Keating & Melis, 2017). In other words, political engagement could be more broadly defined to include participation in informal, horizontal networks. Based on this previous research, we expect that students' use of the Internet for political purposes is related to their perceptions of citizenship preparation (H4):

H4: There is a positive relationship between students' interest in online political communication and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

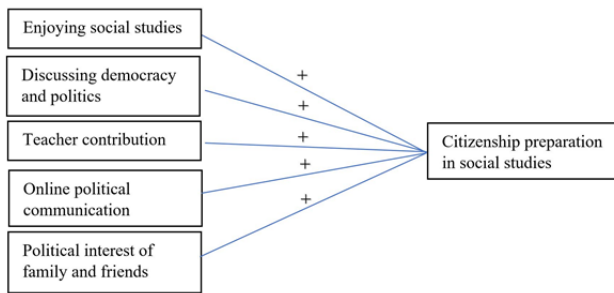
Finally, previous research makes it reasonable to assume that family and friends are important for young people's development of political interest and as role models for civic behaviour (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Quintelier, 2015). For example, Andolina et al. (2003) found that 'young adults who grow up amid regular political discussions are much more involved in a host of activities' (p. 277), and Quintelier (2015) concluded that students' discussions with peers and family are much more important for political participation than school factors. Therefore, we formulate this final hypothesis (H5):

H5: There is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the political interests of and discussions with friends and family and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies.

To summarise, although previous research has shed light on many aspects of citizenship education and young people's engagement, there are many mechanisms we do not yet understand (e.g., Keating & Melis, 2017). In this study, we investigate some in- and out-of-school factors that may influence young people's civic and political interest, engagement, and perceptions of their education. Based on the research and hypotheses presented

above, Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model of the present study.

Figure 1: Theoretical model



5 Methods

5.1 Sample

This study represents the first effort conducted as part of a long-term research endeavour on citizenship preparation among young people today. Data were collected through a 111-item paper-and-pencil questionnaire distributed in person by one of the authors and a research assistant at 11 upper-secondary schools in Eastern Norway. To recruit participants, the heads of the social studies departments at 21 schools in the region were contacted and asked for access to a class of students in the mandatory social studies subject whose teacher would be willing to allow us to use a social studies lesson. We received positive responses from 11 teachers who granted us access to their social studies classrooms, and we ended up with a total of 264 students (43,7% boys and 56,3% girls) in 11 classes (one class at each school). No students declined to participate in the study. The students were 16 or 17 years old when completing the questionnaire. The schools represented in the sample were located in both urban and rural areas in three different municipal counties, and the schools reported having students from mixed to high socio-economic status backgrounds.

5.2 Research ethics

We applied a set of ethical standards required by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (2016). First, the study's participants were fully informed of the project's aims and scope. Second, informed consent was obtained from each participant. In addition, the students were informed that they could pass on ticking the boxes in the questionnaire or withdraw from the study at any time. Third, the participants' privacy and confidentiality were assured since no personal or identifiable information was collected. The code key for the names of the schools was stored in a separate document. All contact prior to data collection happened only between one of the authors and the contact person at each school. As a result, the respondents were assured that their anonymity was guaranteed.

5.3 Measures

A lack of adequate measurements has plagued those who have sought to study antecedents of schools'

citizenship preparation. Therefore, by using professional standards of multi-item constructs (Haladyna & Rodriguez, 2013), this reported instrumentation is the first phase of a long-term research endeavour to measure perceptions of democracy and politics; perceptions of social studies; leisure time; and background questions. The variables (i.e., citizenship preparation in social studies, enjoying social studies, discussing democracy and politics, teacher contribution, online political communication, and political interest among family and friends) are indices based on 2–6 items developed on the basis of previous theoretical and empirical materials presented above (sections 2 and 4). All the included measures in this paper were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, on which 4 was a neutral value. Therefore, all the variables are assumed to be on an approximate interval level.

Citizenship preparation in social studies is aimed at measuring how students perceive the value of social studies in preparing them for democratic citizenship. We adapted three items from the measure developed by Tuan, Chin, and Shieh (2005) directed at science education. We created the three remaining items to tap into central aspects of social studies and citizenship education (sample item: Social studies helps me understand the world around me).

Enjoying social studies aims at measuring the degree to which students enjoy social studies lessons. The variable consists of three items focusing on learning activities in the subject (sample item: I very much enjoy participating in discussions in social studies).

Discussing democracy and politics was included due to the centrality of the concepts of democracy and politics in social studies and education for democratic citizenship. While the open classroom climate variable in the ICCS study measures how often certain things occur during discussions of politics and civic issues, our variable aims at measuring how frequently students report actually discussing the topics of democracy and politics in social studies lessons. *Discussing democracy and politics* is made up of two items (sample item: We often discuss the topic *politics* in social studies). In hindsight, we acknowledge that this measure could have been developed further to include broader and more nuanced conceptions of democracy and politics.

Teacher contribution is aimed at measuring students' perceptions of aspects of the teaching practices in social studies. The six items focus on the teacher's demonstration of passion for the subject, quality of explanations, and on the inclusion of multiple perspectives (sample item: The social studies teacher is very good at explaining complex concepts).

Online political communication aims to measure aspects of students' politics-related communication online, with a focus on political discussions. The variable consists of three items (sample item: I like participating in political discussion online).

Political interest of family and friends is aimed at measuring how students perceive the political interest of their family and friends, and to what extent they

participate in political discussions with these two groups. The variable consists of four items (sample item: I often discuss political issues with my friends).

The instrument, which was entirely in Norwegian, was piloted and discussed with a group of twenty 16-year-old students in social studies, which resulted in some changes to wording. The constructs and items can be found in the appendices. The items were written in Norwegian and later translated to English for this article. Table 1 presents bivariate correlations, descriptive statistics, and Cronbach's alpha (α) for each construct. The reliabilities are quite satisfactory.

5.4 Analyses

Initially, descriptive item statistics were explored using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS]. The item scores were approximately normally distributed in all variables. Then, dimensionalities were cross-checked using exploratory factor analysis, which resulted in the deletion of some items due to their poor psychometric properties. The items in each variable emerged in the same factor in the exploratory factor analyses (see Appendix 1). The items included in the construct *citizenship preparation in social studies* were found to account for 60,1% of the variance, the items in *enjoying social studies* for 70,8%, the items in *discussing democracy and politics* for 83,4%, the items in *teacher contribution* for 58,4%, the items in *online political communication* for 64,5%, and, finally, the items in *political interest of family and friends* accounted for 63,1% of the variance.

The hypothesised model (Figure 1) was tested using two linear multiple regression analyses in SPSS. The assessment of the regression models is based on the adjusted R^2 . The adjusted R^2 is a modified version of the fraction of the sample variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the regressors.¹ The dependent variable is the variable to be explained in the regression analysis. We conducted two ordinary least squares regressions to analyse the relationships between the variables. The first analysis was based on a parsimonious model (Model 1), while the second analysis was based on an extended model (Model 2). The aim of the analyses was to confirm or reject the study's five hypotheses concerning the strength and significance of the relationships between the independent and the dependent variables.

5.5 Reliability and validity

We used Cronbach's alpha, which captures the breadth of the construct, to assess the indicators' measurement reliability for each of the scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The measures of alphas are satisfactory (see Appendix 1). Cronbach's alpha is influenced by the number of items in a test and satisfactory level of reliability depends on how a measure is used (Eisinga, Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2013). Our variable *discussing democracy and politics* consists of only two distinct items, and the high factor

loadings indicate that the items measure almost the same thing, i.e. that students seem to respond very similarly to the two items. However, because we believe they are substantially interesting, we have kept both items. Although we acknowledge the need to develop further the instrument *discussing democracy and politics*, we consider these two indicators' measurement reliability acceptable at this stage of research.

Internal validity concerns the issue of causation. Although the relationships within the theoretical models were theory-generated, suggesting that the estimated regression coefficients may reveal causal relationships, the identified causal directions may be ambiguous because this study offers only a snapshot of empirical associations. Longitudinal designs or experimental approaches are needed to enable researchers to draw strong causal inferences. Regarding external validity, we make no claims regarding generalisability. We do not suspect selectivity bias to be a clear validity threat because no students refused to participate in our investigation. However, we cannot be sure that the sample is representative of 16- to 17-year-old students in Norway. Except for a small group of four students, all the participants were recruited from the general study programme. A larger sample might improve the validity of the statistical conclusions (Cook & Campbell, 1979), and so might adding control variables such as gender and socio-economic status. In sum, we acknowledge these shortcomings and argue that they can serve as the foundation for future research.

6 Results

This section presents descriptive statistics for the variables and the results of the regression analyses.

6.1 Preliminary analyses

Distribution percentages show that the students in this sample to a large extent evaluated the role of social studies very positively when it came to preparing them for engagement and participation in society (see Appendix 2). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha for each construct, as well as the bivariate correlations between the variables.

Most notable is the high correlation between enjoying

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and bivariate correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Citizenship preparation						
2 Enjoying social studies	.558**					
3 Discussing democracy and politics	.348**	.348**				
4 Teacher contribution	.450**	.560**	.512**			
5 Online political communication	.264**	.276**	.117	.113		
6 Political interest of family, friends	.242**	.290**	.287**	.100	.512**	
Reliability	.852 ¹	.771 ¹	.801 ¹	.856 ¹	.720 ¹	.805 ¹
Means	5.23	4.69	5.04	4.91	2.90	4.01
Standard deviation	.998	1.28	1.16	1.12	1.42	1.42

Note: ** $p < .01$, ¹ Cronbach's α

social studies on the one hand and teacher contribution and citizenship preparation in social studies on the other. Second, Table 1 shows that students' online political

communication is highly correlated with their perception of the political interest of and discussions with family and friends, suggesting that the two variables may be associated and that there may be an underlying, mediating variable accounting for some of the correlation. Third, it is also worth noting that the variables not directly pertaining to social studies lessons (*online political communication* and *political interest of family and friends*) are only weakly to moderately related to the variables pertaining to social studies.

6.2 Results of hypothesis testing

Table 2 presents the unstandardized (B) and the standardised (β) beta coefficients, as well as the standard error for the B, from the ordinary least squares regressions of the parsimonious and the extended model with students' perceptions of *citizenship preparation in social studies* as a dependent variable. These estimators minimise the sum of squared residuals. The analyses indicate that enjoying social studies is the most important predictor of students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. We also found that discussing democracy and politics, teacher contribution, and online political communication are significantly associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. Table 2 presents the results of the regression analyses.

Table 2. Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting students' perceptions of 'citizenship preparation in social studies'.

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
1 Enjoying social studies	0.396	0.063	0.395***	0.390	0.064	0.389***
2 Disc. democracy and politics	0.118	0.058	0.118*	0.109	0.060	0.109
3 Teacher contribution	0.156	0.066	0.156*	0.162	0.067	0.162*
4 Online political communication	0.121	0.052	0.120*	0.106	0.059	0.106
5 Political interest of family, friends				0.033	0.062	0.033
Adjusted R ²			.354			.352

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2 shows that hypotheses 1–4 are supported in Model 1. Adding the independent variable *political interest of family and friends* to the regression model (Model 2) slightly reduces the strength of the associations between variables 1, 2, and 4 and *citizenship preparation in social studies*, while the association between *teacher contribution* and the dependent variable is slightly strengthened. The variable *political interest of friends and family* is not found significantly associated with the dependent variable, and hypothesis 5 is consequently rejected.

The results of the regression analyses nuance the pattern found in the correlations between the variables, notably in support of hypothesis 4, indicating that there is a moderate association between students' political communication online and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. We tested the regression models for multicollinearity but found no indication of multicollinearity being a problem in the analyses (Variance Inflation Factor [VIF] values under 2). The

findings reported in Table 2 are discussed in light of previous research in the following section.

7 Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the antecedents of 16- to 17-year-old students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. This research purpose is important because social studies contributes to citizenship education.

First, as expected, we found a strong, positive relation between students' reported enjoyment of social studies lessons and their perception of the subject's contribution to citizenship preparation. It is not surprising that students who are able to work with and discuss issues that are perceived as relevant to them and who experience a classroom climate that allows for such discussions also see the value of the subject in helping them making sense of these issues and in preparing them to participate in society. Students who score lower on enjoying social studies to a lesser extent report seeing this value in the subject. In this case the subject may function to strengthen already existing motivations for civic participation but fail to reach out to students who for various reasons do not look forward to social studies lessons and discussions. We would, however, like to point out that this does not necessarily reflect a permanent situation: There are, arguably, steps that can be taken on policy,

school, and classroom levels to include and inspire students who dislike or feel left out of social studies. Between the elusiveness of the concept of citizenship education and the changing nature of the political landscape, it seems like students' interests in socially and politically topical issues can provide a footing for citizenship preparation in school. Because allowing space for different voices and experiences are essential

features of citizenship education (Leighton, 2012), future research could, for example, investigate the importance of student–teacher relations for students' sense of belonging in and contributing to the social studies classroom community.

The degree to which students reported discussing democracy and politics frequently in social studies was only modestly related to the dependent variable. Students' interpretation of the questions asked may influence their responses. And, as Wilen (2004) has pointed out, researchers might categorise social studies discussions differently than students (and many teachers) do. Since classroom opportunities with an explicitly civic dimension have been found to develop students' civic identity (Kahne & Sporte, 2008), a more comprehensive and valid measure might provide different results. If students perceive of democracy and politics in a narrow sense (Mathé, 2016; Munck, 2014), simply equating these concepts with government and elections, discussions of this sort may be perceived as less

inspirational and useful, and hence not be strongly associated with perceptions of citizenship preparation. Another interpretation could be that there simply are other factors that matter more, and that it is not the frequency of discussions, but rather the perceived quality and relevance of these that influence students' perception of the value of social studies in preparing for active membership in society (Wilén, 2004). We acknowledge that our instrument is not adequate for tapping into this latent variable. This shortcoming is surely an avenue for further research.

Third, we found that the *teacher contribution* was moderately and significantly associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. If this association reflects causal processes, this finding might underpin our beliefs in the importance of quality instruction in social studies. For example, presenting and discussing different perspectives are arguably the kinds of activities that contribute to critical thinking and analytical skills (Eurydice, 2017) and reflective thought (Olssen et al., 2004). Conversely, some previous research has found that more general academic support, such as perceived teacher support, did not appear to be an important factor in fostering civic outcomes (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). It seems key, therefore, to encourage teachers to incorporate civic practices in everyday instructional activities. The *teacher contribution* construct is quite broadly defined in this study, and the items tap into different aspects of quality teaching in social studies. A further development could be to discern distinct aspects of social studies teaching, such as teacher explanation, instructional presentation, and classroom management to involve all students in discussions better to understand the mechanisms of high-quality teaching and learning processes in the subject. This endeavour could go in tandem with qualitative approaches, such as observations of teaching sessions, to better understand the fine-grained mechanisms of teaching and learning. Therefore, the next phase of instrument development could tap into more nuanced aspects.

The fourth independent variable in the parsimonious model, *online political communication*, was also found to be moderately related to students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. This out-of-school construct is an indication of students' interest in using the Internet to communicate about political issues. The fact that this is only somewhat related to the perceived value of social studies could indicate that it is not the students' interest in politics that influences whether they consider social studies as valuable in preparing them for civic participation. One explanation for this may be that social media might strengthen the engagement of young people who are already interested, but are less apt to appeal to those who only consume the political news that pops up in their Facebook feed (Ekström & Shehata, 2016; Keating & Melis, 2017). If so, this could mean that social studies in this context is successful in reaching out to a broader student group. This is also interesting when compared to the stronger impact of *enjoying social studies* because it could give reason to believe that enjoying

the subject is more important than political interest, which we would argue could be seen as a positive finding. The students in this sample overall reported higher scores for enjoying the subject than for enjoying engaging with politics online. This could be an argument for the importance of social studies in including and engaging more students than those who report being interested in civic and political life, although the cross-sectional design of this study does not allow for causal inferences.

Finally, peer and parental influence is generally thought to be an important feature of young people's development of academic and political interests (Andolina et al., 2003; Jennings et al., 2009; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Interestingly, the association between the students' perceptions of the political interests of and discussions with friends and family and perceptions of citizenship preparation was not found substantial or significant. This unusual finding is, however, in line with Jennings et al.'s (2009) finding that youth political interest could not be predicted by the interest of their parents, even when parent attributes were important factors for other aspects of political socialisation. Although we recognise that this finding could to some extent be caused by weaknesses in the instrument, we believe it strengthens the above findings of the salience of variables pertaining to social studies in relation to the dependent variable. That is, there is reason to argue that the social and academic setting in the classroom can be important for the development of students' engagement.

A secondary purpose of this study was to develop adequate measures of citizenship preparation as well as perceptions of social studies, quality aspects of social studies teaching, and out-of-school factors. We acknowledge that we have a way to go to better measure these aspects. What stands out most from our results is the strong association between students' enjoyment of social studies and their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. Students' enjoyment of social studies lessons has the potential to affect their motivation and persistence to study social studies. This finding should be validated in contexts where students might not be as motivated to study social studies. The factor loadings of the enjoyment of social studies construct are quite satisfactory (see Appendix 1), but the measure should be developed further and explore broader aspects. An interesting question is: How is enjoyment of social studies lessons related to motivation constructs and volition constructs? This is surely an avenue for further research. As Rapoport (1959) suggested, 'if the fundamentals have been captured, the work has started and can go on. Variables can be added, relations modified, and results interpreted in other contexts' (p. 371). In the next phase of our research endeavour, we will add more nuances of students' preferences and beliefs relevant for social studies, as well as background variables such as gender and socio-economic status, into our research model. Including multi-stage analysis to address contextual factors is also an avenue for future research.

8 Implications for instructional practice

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 show that the students participating in this study to a large extent saw social studies as valuable in terms of preparing and motivating them for participation in society. To build on the importance of students' interests and enjoyment of social studies lessons, we consider some implications for instructional practice.

To various degrees, teaching is focused on and constrained by the curriculum. Therefore, the freedom teachers enjoy in choosing the aims and content of their instruction will vary from country to country. In this study, students' enjoyment of the subject was the most important antecedent of their perceptions of citizenship preparation. This could indicate that focusing on students' interests in civic and political issues, for example through incorporating big questions and current events, has positive implications for their perceived value of the subject when it comes to preparing them for civic and political engagement. Second, the importance of the teacher's contribution via quality explanations, incorporation of different perspectives, and passion for the subject suggests that quality teaching is associated with the success of the subject in preparing and engaging students. We argue that social studies or similar subjects, if incorporating explicitly civics-related activities (Kahne & Sporte, 2008), can play an important role in democratic citizenship education. Finally, while the students in this sample only moderately reported liking engaging in online political communication, the analyses indicate that using social media to allow students to communicate about politics could be one way to engage students in the political, for example through discussion groups or the opportunity to create groups and campaigns for issues they care about. We note, however, that not even social media can inspire all young people to engage in consuming political information or producing political content (Ekström & Shehata, 2016; Keating & Melis, 2017). According to Biesta (2011), engagement in democratic politics is 'a process in which new political identities and subjectivities come into existence' (p. 151). Although social studies and citizenship education concern more than democracy and politics, contributing to students' various 'modes of political engagement' (Ekström & Shehata, 2016) is certainly at the core of the subject.

9 Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of factors influencing students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. However, the study showed that it was somewhat difficult to measure adequately the antecedents of citizenship preparation in social studies. Previous studies have provided an empirical basis for suggesting that both school-inherent factors and external factors are important for young peoples' political competencies. However, citizenship preparation in schools can be considered a precondition for involvement in politics (Galston, 2001). Therefore, students' attitudes towards social studies are of the

utmost importance. Enjoyment in social studies lessons, as studied in this investigation, is only one aspect of favourable conditions for school learning. More research is needed on students' motivation, volitional processes, and experiences of the teaching of social studies. We have also shown that teachers' instruction is associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. In other words, we conclude that the school subject social studies can have valuable contributions to citizenship education.

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Endnote

¹ Adjusted r2 is a better measure than R2 because adjusted R2 does not necessarily increase when a new regressor is included.

Appendix 1

Factors		
Constructs	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Citizenship preparation in social studies		,852
54. I think social studies is important because I can use what I learn in everyday life	,741	
55. I think social studies is important because it challenges me to think	,771	
57. Social studies helps me understand the world around me	,794	
58. Social studies makes me curious about the world around me	,804	
59. Social studies prepares students to participate actively in society	,727	
60. Social studies makes me want to get engaged in society	,770	
Enjoying social studies		,771
48. I very much look forward to every social studies lesson	,809	
50. I very much enjoy participating in discussions in social studies	,746	
52. I enjoy most of the work in social studies lessons	,871	
Discussing democracy and politics		,801
40. We often discuss the topic <i>democracy</i> in social studies	,913	
41. We often discuss the topic <i>politics</i> in social studies	,913	
Teacher contribution		,856
34. My social studies teacher usually shows a lot of passion for the subject	,749	
37. My social studies teacher presents several views on an issue in his/her explanations	,775	
39. When the social studies teacher has gone through the teaching materials, I understand much more than I did before	,781	
42. The social studies teacher is very good at explaining complex concepts	,847	
46. The social studies teacher is very concerned with students really understanding the concepts	,719	
47. In social studies we often discuss different ways of understanding a concept	,673	
Online political communication		,720
91. I like reading blogs with political content	,807	
92. I like participating in political discussions online	,785	
93. I like reading political discussions online	,817	
Political interest of family and friends		,805
87. I often discuss political issues with my family	,813	
88. My parents encourage me to pay attention to politics	,789	
89. I have several friends who are very interested in politics	,763	
90. I often discuss political issues with my friends	,814	



Appendix 2

Constructs

Constructs	Mean values	Std.dev	Skewness/kurtosis
Citizenship preparation in social studies			
54. I think social studies is important because I can use what I learn in everyday life	5,27	1,287	-,480/,338
55. I think social studies is important because it challenges me to think	5,26	1,165	-,232/-,113
57. Social studies helps me understand the world around me	5,61	1,184	-,645/,078
58. Social studies makes me curious about the world around me	5,35	1,333	-,652/,235
59. Social studies prepares students to participate actively in society	5,23	1,320	-,745/,736
60. Social studies makes me want to get engaged in society	4,66	1,479	-,335/-,102
Enjoying social studies			
48. I very much look forward to every social studies lesson	4,22	1,450	-,245/,099
50. I very much enjoy participating in discussions in social studies	5,08	1,783	-,662/-,510
52. I enjoy most of the work in social studies lessons	4,79	1,384	-,463/,230
Discussing democracy and politics			
40. We often discuss the topic <i>democracy</i> in social studies	5,08	1,258	-,170/-,558
41. We often discuss the topic <i>politics</i> in social studies	5,01	1,288	-,240/-,289
Teacher contribution			
34. My social studies teacher usually shows a lot of passion for the subject	5,42	1,393	-,835/,664
37. My social studies teacher presents several views on an issue in his/her explanations	5,06	1,433	-,577/,171
39. When the social studies teacher has gone through the teaching materials, I understand much more than I did before	4,97	1,515	-,656/,110
42. The social studies teacher is very good at explaining complex concepts	4,79	1,558	-,403/-,270
46. The social studies teacher is very concerned with students really understanding the concepts	5,34	1,375	-,579/,092
47. In social studies we often discuss different ways of understanding a concept	3,90	1,582	-,051/-,591
Online political communication			
91. I like reading blogs with political content	2,63	1,641	,898/,157
92. I like participating in political discussions online	2,39	1,623	1,149/,565
93. I like reading political discussions online	3,69	2,053	,106/-1,242
Political interest of family and friends			
87. I often discuss political issues with my family	4,27	1,807	-,280/-,763
88. My parents encourage me to pay attention to politics	4,20	1,860	-,189/-,846
89. I have several friends who are very interested in politics	3,93	1,662	,034/-,535
90. I often discuss political issues with my friends	3,65	1,834	,060/-,992