K 12 Students’ Attitudes towards Using Constructivism in History Lessons

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Abstract

This study aims to reach the K 12 students’ attitudes who are studying in Nicosia, Northern Cyprus attitudes about using of constructivist approach in the history lessons. For this purpose, a questionnaire was applied to 226 students. According to the results, participants’ general attitudes towards the subject were positive. The study aimed to achieve if there was any meaningful differences between the students according to their gender and nationality and there was not any meaningful differences between the participants. The research is the first study which includes students’ attitudes about history lessons in Northern Cyprus.

Keywords: Constructivism; History Lessons; Nicosia.

1. Introduction

1.1 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Constructivism is one of the essential theories of 20th century. The term has different definitions which have been developed by philosophers, educators or politicians. Also, constructivism has been formed with various terms such as; Piaget’s personal constructivism, Vygotsky’s social constructivism, von Glasersferd’s radical constructivism and...
Mathews’ educational constructivism (Jones & Brader-Arajte, 2002). According to Jadallah (2000), the description of Piaget’s cognitive constructivism is; firstly the individual is affected by environment and analyzes the environment, secondly constructs and gives meaning to his own knowledge hence students are more involved than teachers. On the other hand, according to Vygotsky’s social constructivism, learners have interaction with teachers and other learners. Sharing is an important part of social constructivism and teacher has a role that guides the students. Against social constructivism, as von Glaserferd (1995), mentioned the radical constructivism separates the individual and the social and all of the intelligences live their private process on their own (as cited in Raskin, 2008) however, the person is not insulated from the environment and constructs the knowledge with the help of personal environment and experiences (Sutinen, 2007; Meyer, 2008). Finally, it can be argued that the educational constructivism affected from all of the other types of constructivism and as Small (2003) discussed with the help of constructivism students became the central point of the process of learning and the perception of the student is the basement of learning.

Constructivism in education creates the theoretical framework of this study; therefore, the definitions of the word constructivism are discussed in terms of educational constructivism. Basically, the word carries the meaning in itself; “construct the knowledge”. According to Brooks and Brooks (1997), every student does not interest all of the topics which are a part of the curriculum such as, verb constructs or historical timelines; however, majority of the students can be construct the perception of the priority of these subjects. As mentioned above, the student is the active person in the constructivist systems and the teacher’s role is to guide the pupils. As, Davson-Galle (1999) argues, the “problem” is the basic important point in pedagogical constructivism; the teacher should chose the most suitable problem statement that creates interest of the students, the problem and the terms should be given to pupils together and teacher should wait until students analyze the problem and terms.

History which is one of the important subjects in the curricula had been taught with classical methods until 2000s in Turkey and in Northern Cyprus. In these systems, the teacher was the active person in the classrooms and the books of the history lessons were the main sources that determined the progress of the lessons (Dinç, 2011). With the evolution in the world about education systems affected the history education as well and in 2007 the history curricula started to change in Turkey. According to Öztürk (2009), constructivism became the main ideology in this changing; new curriculums intended more active students who are aware of their experiences and can be construct new knowledge with these experiences, however because of teachers were not educated with this new system, the results were not successful as expected. As Demircioğlu (2009) stated the teachers should be educated about constructivist approach before they started to use constructivist methods in the activities in history lessons. In Northern Cyprus the situation is the same with Turkey, because the same curriculums are accepted in 2007 (Latif & Karahasun, 2010); therefore, it can be argued that the teachers try to apply the new curricula which were formed with constructivism in the history lessons.

Some studies have been created about new history curricula which were created by constructivist approach in Turkey; however, there is not any research about the new curricula in Northern Cyprus. In 2008, a thesis was written about the activities which were created with constructivist ideology and the effects of these activities on students’ learning (Öşahin, 2008). After one year from this thesis, another research realised by Öztürk (2009) who criticised the new history curricula in Turkey and argued that the main two missing of the new programs were; firstly, the developing of the teacher autonomy was not adequate and secondly, the detailed content were still continued. Dinç (2011) made another research about new programs, he compared the old curricula with the new ones and discussed that the new program had differentiations however there were some conflicts between the content and the new educational approach; constructivism. On the other hand, another research which is about writing of history books was written by Demircioğlu (2013) and the new approaches about the writing of the books were discussed. The researcher argued that if constructivism was using for writing the books, the primary sources should be given and the students should examine these sources.

As mentioned above there are some studies about constructivist approach and history lessons; however, none of the researches argued the attitudes of the students about the new curricula. On the other hand, there are some
researches who discuss the attitudes of students about the history lessons in general. Demircioğlu (2006) mentioned the attitudes of high school students about the aims of history lessons. According to the study, students argued that the main aim of the course was to understand past. Another research was created by Kaya and Demirel (2008) which was about the interesting areas of the high school students in Erzurum, about history lessons. According to the results of this study, the students thought that traditional approaches still existed in the history lessons. Aktekin (2009) searched about high school students’ attitudes about learning local history in history lessons as well. As the researcher mentioned the students argued that they wanted to visit more museums and historical places in history lessons. Ulusoy’s (2009) research included students’ views about history lessons also. According to the results of this study, students stated that they wanted more interesting and attractive history lessons and to be more active in lessons. Finally, the newest research was created by Tokdemir and Artan (2012). Tokdemir and Artan’s study discussed the opinions of the high school students about the using of terms in history lessons and the results showed that the students were not successful in defining the terms in history lessons; however, they believed that there were enough discussions occurred in the lessons.

1.2. Research Questions

The aim of the study is to evaluate the attitudes of the K 12 students about the using of constructivism in history lessons. The research tries to find out the answers of following questions;

1- What is the general attitude of K 12 students about the using of constructivism in history lessons?
2- Is there a meaningful difference between the K 12 students who have different genders?
3- Is there a meaningful difference between the K 12 students who have different nationalities?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The study was taken place the 226, K 12 students from four different high schools in Nicosia, Northern Cyprus as participants. In the 2013-2014 academic year, the K 12 students who took history lessons, were occurred by (n: 86) 38.05% male and (n: 140) 61.95% female students.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments and Application

The questionnaire which was created by Selay Arkün and Petek Aşkar in 2010 to assess the constructivist learning environments was the instrument of data collection of study. With the permission of the Arkün and Aşkar, this questionnaire was chosen. The questionnaire divided into two sections; in the first section there were 3 questions about the personal information of the students; the questions were about the age, sex and nationality of the students and the second section was the questionnaire which aimed to determine the opinions of the students about using constructivism in history lessons and was formed by twenty eight articles. To realize the attitudes of the students the 5 point Likert type scale was used as the participants pointed out one of the articles which were “strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree”. The scales’ Cornbach Alpha value was 0.879. This value shows that the research was reliable.

2.3. Data Analysis

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to account the results of the articles. For analysing the data, percentage, mean, standard deviation, one way Anova and t-test were searched.
3. Results

3.1. General Attitude of K 12 Students

Results of the K 12 students’ attitudes towards history lessons were positive that the mean score is 3.61. The students stated the constructivist approach is used in the history lessons. They claimed that they have adequate chance to express their opinions and they feel like they are active in the history lessons. Apart from these participants mentioned that they can discuss with their friends about history. Overall, it can be argued that the changing in the curriculums in terms of using constructivist approach was implemented in the history lessons. At Table 1, the K 12 students’ general attitudes which were positive were shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes of K 12 Students</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>226</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. K 12 Students’ Attitudes According to their Genders

For reaching the results of whether or not there were any meaningful differences between the attitudes of K 12 male and female students about using constructivism in history lessons, the t-test was used. Table 2 is showing the comparison results according to the students’ genders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of K 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>1.380</td>
<td>.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.554</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it seems in Table 2, according to female students’ mean scores (M=3.58, SD=0.464) and male students’ mean scores (M=3.68, SD=0.554), it can be argued that there is not a meaningful difference in between the students’ attitudes about using constructivist approach in history lessons according to their genders.

3.3. K 12 Students’ Attitudes According to their Nationalities

As an answer to the second problem question, the results of the attitudes of K 12 students according to their nationalities are searched. The students specified their nationalities as Turkish Cypriots, Turkish and others. The numbers were (n: 57) 25.2% Turkish, (n: 131) 58% Turkish Cypriots and (n: 38) 16.8 % others. Descriptive statistics are shown on Table 3.
Table 3. K 12 Students’ Attitudes about Using Constructivism in History Lessons According to Their Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.406</td>
<td>P&gt;0.05 Insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish Cypriot</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it seems in Table 3, the mean scores are for Turkish (M= 3.65), for Turkish Cypriots (M=3.57) and other students (M=3.67); therefore, there is not a meaningful difference between the nationalities about the students’ attitudes toward using of constructivist approach in history lessons. Also, the one way Anova was used to determine the results and the results of this analyse is shown in the Table 4.

Table 4. The Results of One Way Anova According to the Nationalities of K 12 Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Sd</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of K 12 Students Between Groups</td>
<td>.450</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.898</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>P&gt;0.05 Insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>56.146</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>.251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56.596</td>
<td>226</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it seems in Table 4 there is not a meaningful difference between the groups. It can be argued that the reason, why there is not a meaningful difference, could be these students studied in Northern Cyprus and they affected from same education system.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the study is to search the attitudes of K 12 students who are studying in the high schools in Nicosia, North Cyprus, about the using of constructivist approach in history lessons. According to the results firstly, it can be argued that the students’ general attitude was positive; therefore, they believed that constructivist approach is used in the history lessons. Secondly, the differences towards their attitudes were searched as well and there were not any meaningful differences between genders and nationalities of students.

Compare to other researches which were discussed the high school students’ opinions or attitudes in Turkey, there are some differentiations. For instance; according to Kaya and Demirel’s (2008) study, the high school students believed that the traditional methods were using in the history lessons in Erzurum, in Turkey; however, the students who answer the questions in the scale were against to this view and the interesting point is the curriculums are same. Another example is, Ulusoy’s (2009) study which mentioned that the students’, in Ankara, in Turkey, opinions about history lessons were negative in terms of being active in the lessons; nonetheless, in Northern Cyprus the K 12 students’ attitudes were opposite and they stated that they were active in the history lessons. Finally, another research which was created by Tokdemir and Artan (2012) and mentioned above claimed that the students...
believed that they had adequate chance to make discussions in the history lessons and the results of the questionnaire are similar to this opinion.

The study was focused on the K 12 students' attitudes towards using constructivist approach in the history lessons in Northern Nicosia. It can be recommended for the further studies that to reach more detailed results, the attitudes of other students can be searched. Also, the attitudes of history teachers and the knowledge of these teachers about constructivism can be added. On the other hand, another recommendation is the attitudes of students who are studying in Southern Nicosia can be searched and comparison in between these students can be argued. Apart from these, this study can be applied to other fields as well and the results can be compared.

References