

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Social studies student teachers' levels of understanding sociology concepts within social studies curriculum**

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**This study aims at investigating social studies student teachers' levels of understanding sociology concepts within social studies curriculum. Study group of the research consists of 266 teacher candidates attending the Department of Social Studies, Faculty of Education, Kastamonu University during 2012 to 2013 education year. A semi-structured concept scale consisting of 12 questions has been used with the student teachers. Student teachers' responses have been content-analyzed on categories of "understanding", "limited understanding", "not understanding", "being unable to respond", and "misunderstanding (misconception)". Analysis showed that social studies student teachers often express sociology concepts within social studies curriculum on the levels of "limited understanding" and "not understanding". Student teachers' the most encountered misconceptions among sociology concepts are "socialization" and "social institution".**

**Key words:** Social Studies, social studies student teacher, sociology, concept, misconception.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Concepts which are significant when making sense of the world are important factors in learning (Dündar, 2008). In general, the concept is a structure of information representing the variable common feature of things and facts making sense in human mind (Ülgen, 2004). This is a mental structure and it includes organizing individual's information on any object or topic, distinguishing this information from other information, and relating it to other information (Kılıçoğlu, 2011). Gagne categorized concepts into two groups as concrete and abstract ones. Concrete concepts may be learned through informal methods whereas abstract ones require instruction (Senemoğlu, 2009). Therefore, it is harder to learn abstract concepts than to learn concrete concepts. Children begin making sense of many concepts in their minds through daily experiences (Platten, 1995). However, concepts children form in their minds of things and facts may differ from scientifically accepted concepts. These differences have been called misconceptions (Büyükkasap et al., 1998). Such learner perceptions differing from the ones accepted in scientific circles are called the terms such as misperception, alternative

concepts, child science, pre-concepts, and self-forming information (Köse et al., 2003). There are many reasons for misconceptions. These can be listed as factors of students, teachers, and textbooks (Aşçı et al., 2001). Misconceptions are very significant obstacles for effective learning. In order to fight and remove these obstacles, first of all, it is required to determine how such misconceptions are structured in learners' minds (Bozkurt and Cansüngü, 2002). In addition, when teaching the concepts within curricula to students, the way these concepts are developed to form the same meaning in each student's mind must be considered (Doğanay, 2005).

Within curricula, the concept of social studies has a significant role in teaching concepts. This role is based on the multi-disciplinary structure it has. The first class where students learn fundamental concepts of many disciplines forming the social sciences is the social studies class. Thus, it is important to get the students to gain the knowledge of meaning of these concepts since the students are required to know the fundamental concepts very well in order to learn principles related to

social studies and to solve social problems (Erden, not dated). Social studies borrow some of these concepts from sociology which is a social science. Sociology is the study of human social life, groups, and societies (Giddens, 2000). It aims at investigating social rules and laws in this field (Tezcan, 2012). Sociology investigates the structure, functioning and the change in social institutions and groups such as family, school, government, and religion (Maxim, 2003). As the science of society, sociology is the science branch that investigates the social phenomena witnessed on different layers of society, social institutions, social relationships, social structural features, and the change tendency that could occur in this structure (Erkal, 1982). Only one of the social sciences alone is not enough to explain the human or societal reality. Social sciences are required to be in relation with one another since the sciences investigate human are a whole (Ergün, 2006). Therefore, the social studies class covering the individual and the society is a class designed by putting together the disciplines making up the social sciences. However, regarding the pre-2005 social studies curricula in Turkey, even though social studies class was considered formed by social science disciplines, this did not change the perception of social studies curriculum (Kaymakçı, 2009). As a result of misperception on the concept of social studies, curricula were designed by putting together the topics of history, geography, and citizenship education (Dönmez, 2003). New social studies curriculum, on the other hand, has put together many social science disciplines in order to deal with people's areas of activity in a holistic approach (Ata, 2006). The most significant contribution of sociology, as one of these disciplines, in social studies instruction is that it teaches students the knowledge of group behaviors, as a discipline (Turner, 2004). Besides, an individual educated well in sociology learns to think/question critically on social life. In addition, sociology education increases our awareness of social and cultural relationships (Bozkurt, 2011). As such, sociology should be regarded as a branch of science that contributes in inferences about past and future, driving from present within the dimension of societal past, present, and future in social studies, and that explains the environment and society the child lives in (Bilgili, 2009). Key concepts and ideas related to sociology take place in many units of social studies curriculum, however, learning areas directly related to the discipline of sociology are the ones such as "individual and the society, groups, institutions and social organizations, power, administration, and society" (Akhan, 2011). Instructional principles require that basic social institutions such as family and school should be taught with priority in the curriculum (Garcia and Michaelis, 2011). It is important for students to know how such institutions are formed and what they influence and control (NCSS, 1994). As can be seen, science of sociology contributes much in social studies class which uses the basic concepts of sociology. In order for the

child to know his/her immediate social environment and the important institutions, these concepts should be worked on in social studies class (Erden, not dated). First of all, teachers should be equipped with concepts learning and teaching in order for children to gain concept systems and adapt to the environment (Özyürek, 1983) since a misconception experienced by teachers will directly pervade the students. Therefore, it is required for social studies educators who will implant basic concepts of sociology in students to master these concepts as much as a sociologist does (Duran, 2011). Looking into the literature, whereas there is more research on concepts used in geography and science instruction, no research investigating the students' levels of understanding the sociology concepts on any level of education was found. Considered as such, this study is significant as it attempts to determine the social studies student teachers' levels of understanding sociology concepts taking place within social studies curriculum.

## METHOD

### The purpose and the model of research

This research, which aims at investigating social studies student teachers' level of understanding sociology concepts within social studies curriculum, is a case study, a qualitative research method. According to Yin (2003) and Çepni (2009), this research design makes it possible to obtain deeper information in a short time for the purposes of the study.

### Study group

Study group of the research consists of 266 teacher candidates attending 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> year classes in the Department of Social Studies Teaching, Faculty of Education, Kastamonu University in Turkey during 2012 to 2013 education year. "Fundamentals of Social Studies, Sociology, Social Psychology, and Social Service Applications" are among the classes where social studies student teachers can learn fundamental concepts of sociology. In addition, "Social and Cultural Basics of Education", which student teachers can take as an elective class in Faculty of Education, Kastamonu University, presents opportunity for learning fundamental concepts of sociology.

### Data collection tool and data analysis

In this research, a semi-structured concept scale, prepared by the researcher, with 12 open-ended questions that require short answers was used in order to determine social studies student teachers' levels of understanding sociology concepts found within social studies curriculum and their misconceptions. These concepts are: "society, social change, socialization, social phenomenon, social fact, culture, social role, social status, social institution, social group, social value, and social structure". Questions on the concept scale have been designed in the following style: 1- What is society? Please explain. Students' responses to related concepts were content-analyzed in categories of "understanding", "limited understanding", "not understanding", "being unable to respond", and "misunderstanding". Classifications indicating these levels of understanding are explained below in relation to Akbaş (2002):

1. Understanding: includes answers with all aspects of the scientific response to the question.
2. Limited understanding: includes answers with one or a few but not all aspects of the valid scientific response.
3. Not understanding: includes answers with exact repetition of the question or answers that are not related or clear.
4. Being unable to respond: includes blank answers or answers such as "I do not know" or "I have forgotten".
5. Misunderstanding (Misconception): includes answers alternative to the valid scientific response. Student responses in this category may be very different and they often contain students' different ideas that are not compatible with scientific facts.

Scientific definitions of concepts included in the research are given in the findings. For the analysis purposes, distinguishing and common features of scientific definitions of given concepts are considered in the conducted analyses. Driving from these definitions, percentages and frequencies of students' responses were analyzed in relation to proper categories.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This study aims at determining social studies student teachers' levels of understanding concepts of "society, social change, socialization, social phenomenon, social fact, culture, social role, social status, social institution, social group, social value, and social structure". Table 1 shows findings related to the concepts selected.

### Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of society

Society is a sum, consisting of people cooperating to realize many basic interests in order to first of all protect and sustain themselves, of complicated, more or less institutionalized, relationships, with a relative continuation and common culture, often on certain geographical location (Ozankaya, 1976). Marshall (2009) describes society as a group consisting of people considering themselves as united and unique beings, sharing a common culture, and settling on a piece of land. İçli (2011) on the other hand defined society comprehensively, driving from the common features of many definitions of it, as follows: "society is a whole, consisting of people cooperating to self-protect, sustain, and realize many interests, with a relative continuation, of more or less institutionalized relationships, living longer than human life, self-sustaining, and occupying a physical location". According to the results of analysis conducted considering the distinguishing and common features of society definitions, student teachers responded to the question "What is society?" on the following levels: 11% on the level of understanding, 41% on the level of limited understanding, 41% on the level of not understanding, and 7% on the level of misunderstanding. No student teacher was unable to respond to this question. Majority of student teachers were found to have responded to this

question on the levels of understanding and not understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding produced inadequate responses such as "group with certain values and rules", "community of people belonging to a common culture on a common land", "community of people interacting with one another on the same geographic land", and "community of people who come together for certain needs". Student teachers who responded on the level of not understanding produced responses far from the scientific definition: "structure accommodating various people", "community consisting of individuals", and "association formed by nations coming together". Student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding explained the society through features of concept of nation in following responses: "whole of people forming a country", "whole formed by people with a religion, language, and flag", and "individuals who live on a piece of land and build a state are called society"; and through the features of concepts of a crowd and social mass: "ordinary group of people", and "community, mass formed by people".

### Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of social change

Social change is the change in the social network of relationships building the structure of society and institutions defining them (Tolan, 1978). In other words, it is the differentiation in settled relationships and behavior patterns of people (Bozkurt, 2011). Whereas Özkalp (2005) describes social change as differentiation in society's culture and social behaviors in time, Arvasi (1977-1978) describes it as new conditions occurring through internal or external impacts in social structure and functions of a group or units building that group. In relation to this, student teachers responded to the question "What is social change?" on the following levels: 3% on the level of understanding, 39% on the level of limited understanding, 29% on the level of not understanding, 2% on the level of being unable to respond, and 27% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers are found to have responded to this question on the categories of limited understanding, not understanding, and misunderstanding respectively. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding were observed to have provided inadequate responses emphasizing only one aspect of social change, such as: "it is the change in a society's behaviors", "changes occurring in society's structure", "the change a society's institutions present", and "the positive or negative change in a society's values (culture) in time". Student teachers who responded on the level of not understanding provided responses far from the scientific definition, such as: "configuration of a society in

**Table 1.** Social studies student teachers' levels of understanding sociology concepts within social studies curriculum

Questions	Understanding		Limited understanding		Not understanding		Being unable to respond		Misunderstanding	
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
Society	30	11	110	41	108	41	0	-	18	7
Social change	8	3	105	39	76	29	4	2	73	27
Socialization	10	4	71	27	59	22	-	-	126	47
Social phenomenon	17	6	162	61	73	28	14	5	-	-
Social fact	15	5	90	34	88	33	33	13	40	15
Culture	5	2	237	89	16	6	2	1	6	2
Social role	84	32	91	34	37	14	27	10	27	10
Social status	132	50	63	23	26	10	19	7	26	10
Social institution	2	1	53	20	68	25	23	9	120	45
Social group	3	1	165	62	73	27	20	8	5	2
Social value	7	3	79	30	131	49	11	4	38	14
Social structure	-	-	66	25	160	60	38	14	2	1

*accordance with contemporary conditions*", *"society's adoption of changes good or bad"*, and *"change in many people"*. Student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding are observed to have explained the social change through features of social development and social dissociation, as can be seen on their answers such as: *"a society's change in positive direction"*, *"permanent or short-term movements of renewal happening in a society"*, *"modernization of a society in time"*, *"to replace a condition adopted by the society with a more modern one"*, and *"degeneration of some values standing within the society"*.

#### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of socialization**

Socialization is our process of becoming members of society, by internalizing society's norms and values and by learning to act in accordance with our social roles (Marshall, 2009). Socialization presents to new members of the society what traditions, values, attitudes, and behaviors available and settled in the society are and how to adapt to and learn these (Özkalp, 2005). At the same time, socialization is individual's process of learning and internalizing society's culture (Bozkurt, 2011). Tolan (1978) on the other hand describes socialization as individual's process of forming personality and identity through transition between generations and individual's adaptation to forms and ways defined by the culture in an organized social life. Driving from these definitions, when we looked into the student teachers' level of understanding the concept of "socialization", we observe that 4% of them provide responses on the category of understanding, 27% on the category of limited understanding, 22% on the category of not understanding, and 47% on the category of misunderstanding. No student teacher

was unable to respond to that question. A significant number of student teachers responded to this question on the category of misunderstanding whereas also another significant number of student teachers responded on the categories of limited understanding and not understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding are observed to have provided inadequate answers such as: *"individual's process of adapting to the society and its rules"*, *"individual's conformity to social life"*, *"individual's adaptation to the society s/he belongs to"*, and *"individual's acting his/her role in the society"*. Student teachers who responded on the level of not understanding provided answers far from the scientific definition such as: *"being a knowledgeable person in the society"*, *"people living together"*, and *"mixing in the society"*. Student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding explained socialization through features of concept of social relationship: *"individual's interaction with the society s/he lives in"*, *"communicating and connecting with people"*, and *"getting active in the society; taking part in activities"*.

#### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of social phenomenon**

According to Durkheim (1895) (cited in Erkal et al., 1997), social phenomenon is a condition effecting individuals, out of individual consciousness, as a function of collective consciousness, with a forcing and directing character on the individual consciousness. Social phenomenon is an occurrence attracting multiple individuals and their interests, within the society, with known beginning and end (Erkal, 1982). Yılman (1996) on the other hand describes the social phenomenon as forms of common

feelings, thoughts, and behaviors stemming from people's living together, interacting, and building various social relationships with one another. In relation to these definitions, 6% of student teachers responded to the question "What is social phenomenon?" on the category of understanding, 61% on the category of limited understanding, and 28% on the category of not understanding. 5% were unable to respond to that question. No student teacher responded to that question on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers were observed to have responded to this question on the levels of limited understanding and not understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as: "*conditions, behaviors affecting the society*", "*phenomena, outside the individual, pressurizing him/her and affecting the society*", "*phenomena occurring outside of one's own*", and "*phenomena occurring within a certain period of time and causing change*". Student teachers who responded on the level of not understanding provided answers either far from the scientific definition or used with the concept itself such as: "*it means the social phenomena*", "*chaos stemming from the society itself*", and "*changing of culture and increase in socialization*".

#### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of social fact**

Social fact is the developments occurring in a certain process without known beginning and end (Erkal, 1982). It is any distinguishable unit of any material and spiritual social value, social relationship, and process. Social facts are changes that can occur in time, be observed, and be measured (Yılman, 1996). It is a universal social reality that is objective, depending on causality, with multi factors and continuation (Arvasi, 1977-1978). As a result of the analysis conducted considering common features of all these definitions, it was observed that 5% of social studies student teachers responded to the question of "what is social fact?" on the level of understanding, 34% on the level of limited understanding, 33% on the level of not understanding, 13% on the level of being unable to respond, and 15% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers responded to that question on the level of limited understanding and not understanding. Student teachers who responded to the question on the level of limited understanding were observed to provide inadequate answers to express features of social fact such as: "*phenomenon occurring within the society in time*", "*developments ongoing without a known location and date*", "*universal conditions*", and "*objective judgment and conditions that are occurring in the society*". Student teachers who responded on the level of understanding on the other hand provided answers far from the scientific definition such

as: "*fundamental changes occurring in the society*", "*reactions people show against social phenomena*", "*facts occurring in the society*", "*society's point of view towards phenomena*", "*whole of social phenomena*", "*social rules*", and "*social values*". Student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding provided answers which explained social fact through features of social phenomenon: "*short-term incidents*", "*social phenomena occurring in the society with known beginning and end dates*", and "*condition affecting the society*".

#### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers' levels of understanding the concept of culture**

One of the concepts mostly described in the sociology is the concept of "culture". Known and mostly-used definitions of culture are included in this research. According to Tylor (1973) (cited in Erkal, 1982) culture is "a complicated whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, justice, traditions and customs, and all other skills and habits a person gains as a member of the society". Culture is a concept which expresses the value and thinking systems related to a society's structure, with depending subsystems (Tolan, 1978). Sociologists define culture as the general lifestyle of a society. Therefore, it includes all that those living in a society learn and share (Özkalp, 1994). According to Ülken (1969), culture is a system of ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and technical products, types of behavior and attitudes that form a society's character. Acquisition of culture is a social process, not a biological one, therefore, it is called society's heritage. In general, culture is the learned human behaviors that distinguish one society from another, include values particular to a society, and provide social solidarity (Tezcan, 1999). Thus, culture is anything that is learned, protected, and transferred to newer generations through education (İçli, 2011). Within this research, the most emphasized dimensions of culture listed as follows are considered:

- All material and spiritual aspects
- Distinguishing one society from another,
- Providing social solidarity, and
- Being transferred from generation to generation.

2% of the social studies student teachers responded to the question of "what is culture?" on the level of understanding, 89% on the level of limited understanding, 6% on the level of not understanding, 1% on the level of being unable to respond, and 2% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of the student teachers were observed to have answered this question on the level of limited understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as: "*whole of material and spiritual values*

*distinguishing one society from the other*, *“culture is the lifestyle of a nation”*, *“traditions, customs and habits transferred from the past to future”*, *“common values created by people living on a certain piece of land”*, and *“the nature of a nation”*. As can be observed in the responses on this category, teachers provided definitions emphasizing only one aspect of the concept of culture.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social role**

Role is the behavioral dimension of the status (Doğan, 2011). Behavior mentioned is the behavior expected from a person occupying a certain status (Tolan et al., 1991; Bozkurt, 2011). Social role is about achieving the tasks required by a certain status and making use of its privileges and rights (Doğan, 2011). In other words, social role is the behavior patterns found around a certain distinguishing social position (Tezcan, 2012). Considering the definitions of social role, status is used along with concept of position and it is emphasized as the behavior patterns required by this status. As such, 32% of the social studies student teachers responded to the question “what is social role?” on the level of understanding, 34% on the level of limited understanding, 14% on the level of not understanding, 10% on the level of being unable to respond, and 10% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers were observed to have responded to this question on the levels of limited understanding and not understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as: *“tasks an individual naturally has within the society”* and *“tasks individual undertakes within the society”*. Even though less, student teachers who responded to this question on the level of misunderstanding were observed to have expressed the concept of social role through features of concept of social status as can be seen in the following examples: *“individual’s condition within the society”*, *“position people gain within society”* and *“general position of a person within the society”*.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social status**

Social status is the individual’s position within the society (Özkalp, 1994). That is to say, status defines individual’s *position and rank* within the group (Tolan et al., 1991). Social status is a form of social layering where groups or layers are ranked and organized through legal, political, and cultural criteria (Marshall, 2009). In relation to these definitions, 50% of the social studies student teachers responded to the question “what is social status?” on the

level of understanding, 23% on the level of limited understanding, 10% on the level of not understanding, 7% on the level of being unable to understand, and 10% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of the student teachers were observed to have responded to this question on the levels of understanding and limited understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as: *“economic and social level”*, *“individuals’ values in the society in relation to their professions”*, *“a person’s prestige in the society”*, and *“individual’s title, gained later through his/her own efforts, increasing his/her prestige within the society”*. Student teachers who responded to this question on the level of misunderstanding explained the concept of social status through characteristics of social role as can be seen in the following examples: *“task the society imposes on the individual”*, *“a person’s roles within the society”*, and *“behaviors expected by the society from a person”*.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social institution**

Social institution means all structural components organizing a society’s basic concerns and activities and meeting social needs (order, belief, etc.) (Marshall, 2009). Özkalp (2005) on the other hand describes social institution as the group of relatively continuous rules regarded as required to protect society’s structure and basic values. In relation to these definitions, 1% of the social studies student teachers responded to the question “what is social institution?” on the level of understanding, 20% on the level of limited understanding, 25% on the level of not understanding, 9% on the level of being unable to respond, and 45% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers were observed to respond to this question on the levels of misunderstanding, not understanding, and limited understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as: *“a structure providing control in a society”*, *“structures providing social order”*, *“the system working in favor of society”*, and *“structures protecting society’s values and bonds”*. The fact that student teachers who responded to the concept of social change had not expressed the characters related to institutions meeting society’s needs prevented them from passing over to level of understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of not understanding provided answers far from the scientific definition, such as: *“institution that includes people in the society and socialize them”*, *“communities forming due to individuals’ social relations”*, and *“locations where people come together for certain purposes”*. Student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding provided answers such as *“unit*

*“serving people in the society”, “official or unofficial developments people create”, “organizations working for and serving society”, and “organizations serving in various fields that benefit the society”* to express the concept of social institution through characteristics of social organization.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social group**

Social group is a unification formed by regular interactions of at least two persons with similar values and expectations (Özkalp, 2005). It is a mass defined by formal or informal membership criteria and built by many people sharing a feeling of togetherness through a model of relatively consistent mutual relationships or feeling dependent on one another (Marshall, 2009). Erkal (1982) on the other hand describes social group as follows: it is a community including multiple individuals with certain mutual roles, statuses, value judgments, and beliefs. These individuals are in an order of mutual relationships with awareness of their characteristics and distinguishing features. In short, a social group is a unity with a certain structure and organization, consisting of more than one individual with certain relationships and feeling of belonging. When the responses to the question “what is social group?” in relation to these definitions were analyzed, 1% of the student teachers were observed to have responded on the level of understanding, 62% on the level of limited understanding, 27% on the level of not understanding, 8% on the level of being unable to respond, and 2% on the level of misunderstanding. Majority of student teachers are observed to have responded to this question on the levels of limited understanding and not understanding. *“Group consisting of persons coming together for a certain purpose”, “certain number of people coming together”, “community people build in relation to their own lifestyle”, “private or formal associations people form”, “community of people with certain rules and values”, and “unity multiple people in communication with one another form”* are the examples of responses on the level of limited understanding whereas responses on the level of not understanding included answers such as *“it is where individual participates in for socialization”, “groups working in favor of the society”, “communities people form”, and “environment where the individual is included”*.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social value**

Social value indicates the people’s ideas on what is ethical or proper; what is desired or not (Marshall, 2009).

Values are certain standards or criteria on individuals’ thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in a given society, providing order in individual or group life (Tolan, 1978). Each society has a system of beliefs, ideas, and norms forming the culture it has or belongs to. Each of these is a value (Ülken, 1969). Value in the social studies curriculum, on the other hand, is described as the shared idea, purpose, basic moral principle or beliefs regarded by majority of members of a social group or society as correct and necessary in order to provide and sustain its existence, unity, functioning and continuation (Özgüven, 1999). In relation to these definitions, 3% of social studies student teachers have been observed to respond to the question “what is social value?” on the level of understanding, 30% on the level of limited understanding, 49% on the level of not understanding, 4% on the level of being unable to understand, and 14% on the level of misunderstanding. Responses to this question on the level of limited understanding include answers such as: *“existing rules society makes”, “characteristics all society like and value”, “whole of rules individuals belong to”, “things accepted or denied in the society”, “behaviors and facts the society embrace”, and “rules defined by our traditions and customs”* whereas responses on the level of not understanding included answers such as: *“common values of society”, “characteristics the society has”, “respect shown to a person by individuals in the society”, and “everything that belongs to society”*. Student teachers explained the concept of social value through characteristics of the concept of culture in answers they provided on the level of misunderstanding as can be seen in the following examples: *“everything material and spiritual a society has”, “traditions, customs, and folkways making up a society”, and “characteristics distinguishing one society from the other”*.

### **Findings and interpretation related to social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of social structure**

Social structure means all relationships that connect people to one another (Ergün, 1994). Fundament of the social structure is the social relationships directing behaviors of the members of society. Social structure is a concept to talk about main elements building the society, positions of these elements within the society, the relationships among them, and society’s organization of functioning (İçli, 2011). 25% of student teachers responded to the 12<sup>th</sup> question, asked in order to determine the level of understanding “social structure”, on the level of limited understanding, 60% on the level of not understanding, 14% on the level of being unable to respond, 1% on the level of misunderstanding. No student teachers responded to this question on the level of understanding. Student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding provided answers such as

*“whole of culture and values building the society”, “whole of some values, rules, and norms”, and “social institutions formed by the society”* to define social structure by giving examples of elements building the society. Other definitions of social structure provided by the student teachers on the level of limited understanding are as follows: *“whole of rules and values providing the functioning of social order”, “it means the elements building the society”, and “structure forming the relations among society’s individuals”*. The majority of answers provided to the question “what is social structure?” are on the level of not understanding. When looking into the definitions of social structure by student teachers, we see that they are far from the scientific definition and describe social structure very differently as can be seen in the following examples: *“it means the general characteristics of social groups”, “it is the structure society builds”, “the fact of being social within the society”, and “the way the society is governed”*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims at determining social studies student teachers’ levels of understanding sociology concepts included in social studies curriculum. For this purpose, following results have been obtained in relation to responses provided by student teachers to 12 questions:

In order for the teaching of social studies class, where basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values related to social life are given (Erden, not dated), to be effective, basic concepts of sociology which studies social life should be known well by the social studies student teachers who will teach this class. Concept of “society”, which is in the center of both sociology and the social studies class, is the leading one among these concepts. However, this study revealed that student teachers know the concept of “society” on the levels of limited understanding and not understanding and that very few student teachers know this concept on the level of understanding. It is worth paying attention that student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding did not particularly emphasize the society’s characteristics of sustainability, self-protection, and continuity. The fact that a few student teachers explained the concept of society through features of concepts of nation and crowd shows that student teachers have misconceptions.

According to results of the study, social studies student teachers responded to the question about social change mostly on the categories of understanding, not understanding, and misunderstanding. The student teachers who responded to the question about this concept on the level of limited understanding were observed to ignore the significant characteristic of the concept expressed as “change in social relationships defined by social institutions (Özkalp, 2012)”. The fact that student teachers who responded on the level of misunderstanding tended to

define change with only one (positive or negative) aspect of it shows that they have misconceptions. That is because social change may be not only in a positive style but also in a negative way (Erkal et al., 1997). Doğan (2011) states that, since the value judgment in the concept of social change do not include any differentiation towards better or poorer, it differs from the concept of development and progress that points at a conscious effort. This study shows that majority of student teachers who responded on this level of misunderstanding are confused about social change and exchange it with the concept of development which is used to distinguish between industrialized societies and societies of agriculture or to point at modernization, as Bottomore stated (Tezcan, 2012). Some student teachers described social change through characteristics of Tezcan’s (2012) definition of concept of social dissociation – “the system of beliefs and values, unable to keep up with new norms and values”-. This shows that these student teachers have misconceptions.

Social studies course is an elementary level class aiming at helping students as citizens embracing democratic values adapt to the society and helping realize individual’s social existence (MEB, 2005). As can be seen, social studies class aims to work for individual’s socialization. We see reflections of concept of socialization in the content of social studies class trying to reach that target. Therefore, it is significant that social studies teachers who will teach this class should know the concept of socialization with all its aspects. However, when we look in the research results, we see that only 4% of social studies student teachers know this concept on the level of understanding and 27% know it on the level of limited understanding. That is a very low rate for student teachers who will teach social studies. It attracts attention that student teachers who know this concept on the level of limited understanding never mentioned the societal aspects such as culture, value, attitude, and behavior determining the social order and the transfer of these aspects to new generations and also the role of socialization in saving self and personality (Tezcan, 2012). They described socialization only as the process of adapting to the society. It was observed that most of the student teachers responded to this question on the level of misunderstanding. Student teachers described “socialization” through the characteristics of concept of social relationship defined as “all connections formed by common, material and spiritual activities of society members (Ozankaya, 1976: İçli, 2011)”.

Social phenomenon and social fact are basic concepts within the interests of both sociology and social studies. Confusion between phenomenon and fact leads to misconceptions (Erkal et al., 1997). In this research, it is observed that social studies student teachers do not have misconceptions but only a few student teachers (15%) confuse social fact with social phenomenon. Research results show that very few student teachers know this



concept on the level of understanding; however, they know the concept of social phenomenon better than they know the concept of social fact. As such, whereas the rate of student teachers who respond to the question about social phenomenon is 61%, the rate of student teachers who responded to the question about the concept of social fact on the level of limited understanding is 34%.

Concept of culture has a distinguished place and importance within the fact of education since education is a process of purposeful acculturation (Fidan, 1996). Each society introduces its own culture to younger members and would like it transferred to future generations (Tay, 2011). Considering the curricula, task of acculturation is found to be achieved mostly through social studies class (Safran, 2008). Many gains about culture within social studies curriculum point to that. This makes the concept of culture one of the fundamental concepts to be learned within social studies. However, this research shows that social studies student teachers, soon to be implementers of social studies curriculum, know the concept of culture mostly on the level of limited understanding (89%). According to the results, it is observed that student teachers who respond on the level of limited understanding consider just one dimension of culture and ignore others. The aspect of culture student teachers emphasize most is "traditions, customs, and habits distinguishing one society from the other" and the least emphasized is the fact that "culture is product of learning transferred from generation to generation". It is thought that among the reasons why the concept of culture is difficult to be defined by teachers lies the aspect of multi-meaningfulness of the word culture (Güvenç, 2003).

The study shows that the concepts of sociology most responded to on the category of understanding by social studies student teachers were social role and social status concepts. The fact that student teachers responding on the level of limited understanding did not use concepts of status or position when describing the concept of social role prevented them from reaching the category of understanding. In the daily talk, concept of status means respect or prestige. However, status as a sociology concept is described as individual's position within society (Özkalp, 2005). When responses by student teachers participating in the study on the category of limited understanding are reviewed, it is noticed that they used statements emphasizing mostly an individual's notability and prestige within society. Another result of the research shows that 10% of the student teachers describe the concept of social role through characteristics of social status and the concept of social status through the characteristics of social role, thus, falling into misconceptions.

Following "socialization", the concept of social institution is the sociology concept where student teachers have the most misconceptions within this research. 45% of the student teachers participating in the study

described this concept through characteristics of social organization. It is thought that this mistake stems from the fact that in everyday language concept of institution is used to mean organizations (such as the Society for the Protection of Children) which achieve an institutional task (İçli, 2011). Similar mistake reflects in learning area of "Groups, Institutions, and Social Organizations" in social studies textbooks. Yet, social institutions in sociology are considered universal social units (family, religion, law, education). A social studies educator is required to understand and know these conceptual differences (Duran, 2011).

The concept of social group, one of the most basic concepts of sociology, is attributed to a learning area (Groups, Institutions, and Social Organizations) within social studies curriculum. This concept, so important for social studies classes, is unfortunately known mostly on the level of limited understanding by social studies student teachers. Student teachers could not reach the level of understanding due to many definitions such as "the least required for a community to be a group is more than one person interacting" (Kagıtçıbaşı, 2010). "Association built by people with similar values" is among the definitions most referred to.

One of the three dimensions (knowledge, value, skill) building the fundament of social studies education is value (Doğanay, 2006). Social values are also significant research topics within sociology. Leading statement in definitions of social value is "standards put forward in order to provide organization in individual and social lives". These standards are noticed to be beliefs, ideas, and norms building the culture in definitions of social value. While in this study social studies student teachers are expected to respond to these leading aspects of concept of social value, only 3% of student teachers participating in the study were able to respond on the level of understanding and 30% on the other hand responded on the level of limited understanding. Student teachers responding on the level of limited understanding stated the concept of value was mostly the rules and norms determined, embraced, and accepted by the society. Values include norms; too, however, they differ from norms with a quality more general and abstract (MEB, 2005). A significant inadequacy by the student teachers who responded to this concept on the level of limited understanding is exclusion of characteristics of values providing society's existence, unity, and functioning and organizing the social life, in statements. Another result of the research is that some student teachers have misconceptions in their description of the concept of social value through characteristics of concept of culture.

Among the concepts of sociology included in the research, the most responded concept on the level of not understanding is social structure. Student teachers are observed to respond to this concept with answers far from its scientific definition. It attracts attention that

student teachers who responded on the level of limited understanding, on the other hand, tended to describe this concept by exemplifying only with elements building the society.

This research concludes that social studies student teachers know the sociology concepts found within social studies curriculum mostly on the levels of limited understanding and not understanding and that they mostly have misconceptions of socialization and social institution. In order for social studies student teachers' levels of understanding abstract sociology concepts to be raised, concepts teaching should be prioritized in sociology classes and other classes including sociology topics on undergraduate level. When teaching sociology concepts, common and distinguishing characteristics of these concepts should be deduced from their scientific definitions. Driving from these common and distinguishing characteristics, student teachers themselves should reach the scientific definition of the concept. During the undergraduate level instruction, student teachers may be asked to arrive at the sociology concepts through example cases and situations related to the concepts.

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