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A Qualitative Research on Perception of Geography by Training Teachers of Geography: Sample of Turkey

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Abstract

The present study aims to determine how "geography" is perceived by training geography teachers (TGT) in Turkey. The method employed was the Content Analysis Method. All the necessary analyses were done based upon the answers given by the students to two open-ended questions "(a) I think the concept of geography denotes ---

(b) In my way of thinking, geography means ---". The population of the present study was made up of 433 TGT educated in all the Departments of Geography Teaching occurring in 8 different universities across Turkey. All the answers given by the trainings were scrutinized and then expressions and concepts similar to each other in meaning and content were designed in such a way that they all appear in the same column. As a result of this process was determined from 10 different "Geography Concepts Category".

Key words: Concept of geography; Qualitative study; Training Geography Teacher (TGT); Category of concepts; Content analysis

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INTRODUCTION

As geography is a multidisciplinary science, it is quite natural that students, teachers and academicians have a tendency to perceive and describe geography with different perspectives, which appears to have something to do with the fact that geography has a structure that can be positioned in accordance with academic field and various viewpoints. Due to their differing perceptions of and approaches to geography, many geographers have defined it in a different way. For instance, whilst Özgen (2011) perceives geography as man's effort to govern the environment, Lacoste (1976) took geography as strategic information required for political and military applications. Still, such other geographers as Gregg and Leinhardt (1994) may perceive geography as a combination of knowledge and opinions on the distribution of topographic features, their historical developments, and their formation in time.

Many geographers who have called attention to the interaction between man and environment have defined geography as a scientific field that explains the mutual interactions between man and natural environment as well as their spatial patterns (Stoddart, 1987; Johnston, 1991; Unwin, 1992; Livingstone, 1993; Doğanay, 1994; Tümertekin, 1994; Özçağlar, 2003; Acheson, 2003; Morgan & Lambert, 2005; CDÖP, 2005; Özgen, and Oban, 2009; Özgen, and Bindak, 2009; Lambert & Morgan, 2010). In fact, this kind of definition may well be considered as a reflection of the perceptions regarding this concept. Furthermore, as was mentioned by Bennetts in 2005, this approach has been adopted by a growing number of geographers. According to this approach, geography is essentially the discipline concerned with the study of: physical and human environments and processes; relationships between people and environments; the character of places and landscapes; the significance of location and of spatial patterns, interactions and interrelationships on the Earth's surface; and the relevance of place, space and environments for human welfare. This approach, describing geography in terms of a number of traditional perspectives, which was proposed by Pattison (1964), has been supported by other

academic geographers seeking to provide an overview of the discipline (e.g. Allen & Massey, 1995; Broek, 1965; Haggett, 1965; Smith, 1977; Taaffe, 1974).

It is a widely-held belief that defining the nature of geography is not an easy task, consedring the fact that it has been described as a "form of knowledge" (Walford, 1996), a "realm of meaning", or even a "dimension of experience" (Livingstone, 1993). Geography is an extensive "field of study" that can be fragmented into human and physical geography, and their respective sub-divisions. Geography is also known to have significant overlap with other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, history and science. Indeed, Rawling (1997, p.173) goes as far as describing a 'reticence to be absolutely clear about the definition and "heart" of the discipline' (Walshe, 2007, p.98).

Academic subjects are known as dynamic entities that are likely to be influenced by a range of factors. The popular image of geography differs greatly from the subject at school and university level (Bonnet, 2003). As noted by Unwin, these changes can be related to Habermas' categories of academic disciplines (Unwin, 1992). Unwin notes how the development of geography can be examined through these different categories. He also broadly defines these as empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and as a critical science. His relevant argument is that during geography's development as an academic subject, the way geography has been defined and studied has changed in ways that can be recognized through these differing approaches to "science" and "knowledge". He also notes that changes in academic geography are also influenced by societal pressure as well as influences from outside the discipline (Brooks, 2006, p.354). As has been mentioned in another study, «People's perception of places and regions is not uniform. Rather, their view of a particular place or region is their interpretation of its location, extent, characteristics, and significance as influenced by their own culture and experience. Sometimes it is argued that there is no reality; there is only perception. In geography there is always a mixture of both the objective and the subjective realms (Nigeria Background Information, 2012).»

Perception occurs when the outer physical energy captured by sensory cells is converted into neural energy, which is then processed in the brain, thus bringing about a perceptive product. This process is called perceiving and the ensuing product is called perception (Cüceloğlu, 1997, 98). According to another definition, perception is a significant, systematic, and total reaction of the organism to objects and phenomena. Perceptions result from senses. They take form in accordance with previous knowledge or experiences of the individual. Once somebody has formed perception of a thing, this person can be said to know and recognize it forever (C. Binbaşıoğlu & E. Binbaşıoğlu, 1992; Erdal, 2006: 5). This sense-making is based partly on objective realities and partly on the subjective knowledge of the individuals. Perception also tends to be influenced, to a large extent, by the expectations of the individual (Cüceloğlu, 1992, p.123). Perception is also defined as giving meaning to stimuli relating to various situations and events in a way influenced by previous experiences, as well accession, attainment and the ability to make sense (TDK, 2012). Thus, we can interpret perception in various ways and draw many different conclusions (Avant & Helson, 1990, 1).

It is possible to define "perception of geography" as the state of "comprehending" the interaction between man and environment in accordance with personal senses, opinions and needs. This kind of perception may exhibit variations depending on such factors as "man, environment, event and situation". All these may change depending on cognitive and sensual states (Özgen, 2011, p.2581-2). In other words, geography can be described as the ability to access various or almost countless perceptions and definitions with the help of a limited number of sense organs. That perceptive definitions regarding geography vary greatly from each other seems to account for the fact that geography is an extensive field of science with a large number of subfields. Such perception-based processes and interpretations may show variations depending on how people may perceive them. As was reported by Tunçel (2002), individuals have a tendency to perceive the world in which they live in dissimilar ways, thus forming distinctive cognitive structures in their minds. This dissimilarity appears to result from several distinct factors, such as age, spheres of interest, level of education, and mental capacity of individuals, as well as the stimuli occurring in their environment. There are known to be certain factors that affect perception. Therefore, the influence of the environment and past experiences play a vital role in tendency to classify and integrate the stimuli. In addition, it might be claimed that senses, attitudes and the situation or the way of being stimulated do have an effect upon how perception occurs (Baymur, 2004, p.140-5).

Bale and McPartland (1986) note that UK geography graduates who undertake PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education: a one-year teacher training course for postgraduate students run in the UK) courses have little in common with each other due to the wide diversity of courses they have studied. This has significant implications for geography teaching, because teachers are influenced by their experience, beliefs and image of geography as a subject (Walford, 1996).

Geographical perception studies have been categorized in a number of ways (Wood, 1970, p.131). Downs (1968) recognizes three classes of perception studies based upon the analysis of structure- what is the nature of the perceived world? The analysis of evaluation- what are the major features of the perceived world that have an influence upon decisions? The analysis of preference-

how are the objects evaluated with respect to each other? B. R. Goodey (1968) recognizes three foci for perception studies: Environmental perception-man's awareness of the features of the immediate environment, extra-environmental perception-man's awareness of the features outside the immediate environment, preferential perception-man's preferences for movement towards particular places. R. Bordessa identifies four 'related and over-lapping research channels' which are termed: Environmental perception, Attitudes and responses to environment, Environmental space preferences and Environmental perception and behaviour. These three classifications have the merit of terminologies conforming to the terminologies that are used to express the aims of perception studies. However, many individual works fit simultaneously in to two or more categories. For instance, within Downs's classification, spatial preferences of the perceived world may also involve evaluation of the structure of the perceived world. These could be named as Landscape studies, Hazard studies, Recreation studies, Urban studies, Movement studies and Space preference studies (Fliegel and Kivlin, 1966, cited; Wood, 1970, p.131).

The mission ascribed to concepts is closely related to the way in which these concepts are perceived. Hence, perceptual depth or diversity plays a key role in the innovations made in favour of enhancing human life and achieving a prosperous future. As a matter of fact, the perceptual differences held by geographers towards geography and their spheres of interest have resulted in many paradigms in geography. For instance, according to Harvey and Holly (1981), there are known to be five different paradigms effective in geography over the last century. These paradigms could be ordered as follows; Ratzel with the paradigm of Determinism, Vidal with the paradigm of Possibilism, Sauer with the paradigm of Landscape, Hartshorne with a chronologic paradigm, and Schaefer with the paradigm of Spatial organisation (Özgüç ve Tümertekin, 2000, p.11).

Such themes as *justice*, *sharing*, *spatial knowledge*, *political and cultural expansionism* in relation to space, situation, need and possible problems of man have come to be at the heart of the science of geography. Thus, paradigms like Humanist, Feminist, Postmodern, Ecological and Cyber Geography have exhibited improvement, thanks to which the science of geography has developed a profound identity. These different approaches to geography have taken the form of perceptual reflections in consideration of how humans perceive space and the relevant knowledge and experience that they have had due to approaching situations and events differently. In fact, as was suggested by Bradbeer, Healey and Kneale (2004, p.28), academic geographers would probably accept that the discipline has seen a plurality of approaches or paradigms over the last century.

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to reveal perceptions of Training Geography Teachers (TGT) on the concept of geography. With this purpose in mind, we sought answers to the following questions:

What is the perception of TGT on the concept of geography?

In what ways can the perceptions of TGT on geography be categorized?

Review of Related Literature

There exists a lot of literature on the perceptual concept of geography as a science For example, in a study by Walford (1996), 105 postgraduate students with honours degrees in geography who joined the specialist geography teacher-training group at the University of Cambridge, England, during 1990-1994 were asked to provide a short definition of "geography" at the start of their course. The definitions were analyzed and considered in the light of possible ways in which they could be categorized, and in relation to previous classifications of geography that have been suggested by scholars. Walford came up with a new four-fold classification as *Interactionists, Synthesisers, Spatialists and Placeists*.

Özgen (2011, p.2582), geography perceptions of the prospective geography teachers have been obtained through four (4) geography matrixes/factors as *Scientific, Global, Political, and National Geography*. Moreover; it has been determined that these matrixes, reflecting the "geography perceptions" of the prospective geography teachers differ meaningfully by gender, class level, university and regional distributions.

One of the studies into the perception of geography as a science, conducted by Walshe (2007, p.97), suggested four generalized concepts of geography defined as *planning*, *process*, *space* and *global citizenship*, which is a result of an interaction between the first three concepts. In 2003, in a study called "*Key concepts in Geography"* by Holloway et al, it was suggested that perceptual categories regarding geography could grouped as S*pace, Time, Place, Scale, Social formations, Physical systems, Landscape* and *Environment, while another study by* Jackson (2006) categorized the relevant key concepts on geography as S*pace and Place, Scale and Connection, Proximity and Distance*, and *Relational thinking.*

In a study by Gardner and Lambert, that is, *Futuring geographers: The role of the subject organizations*, conducted in 2006*,* the four guiding principles of geography were described as *Place and space, Scale, Physical and human connectedness, and Process,* whilst *a study by* Leat in 1997) categorized the perceptual concepts regarding geography into the following eight concepts: *Cause and effect, Systems, Classification, Location, Planning, Decision-making, Inequality and Development*.

A study conducted by Alkış (2009) used the following four categories issued for geography in a study by Catling in 2004 titled "An understanding of geography: the perspectives of English primary trainee teachers": *Interactionists, Earthists, Placeists, Globalists,* and *Environmentalists* for geography". In this recent study by Alkış, the perception of training teachers of geography regarding geography as a science was evaluated in accordance with the four categories issued by Catling within the concept of the program of teaching geography (CDOP, 2005) by means of the method of content analysis.

2. METHOD

2.1 Study Design

The present study conducted using one of the qualitative designs known as Phenomenology. The purpose of phenomenology is often to reveal and interpret individual perceptions or perspectives as regards a concept. The design of phenomenology focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but have failed to understand them in a detailed and comprehensive way. Even though we might confront phenomena often enough, this familiarity should not mean that they are immediately comprehensible to us. Therefore, phenomenology forms a firm basis for good scientific research into phenomena we are not unfamiliar with but have not understood sufficiently enough either (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2005).

2.2 The Universe and Sampling

The universe of the study consists of TGT in the department of geography in 8 different universities across Turkey. The present study was conducted in the Fall Semester in 2012. As to the sampling of the study, we included 433 training geography teachers studying in grades varying between 2 and 5 as respondents to the questionnaire prepared for the study. The name and location of the universities aforementioned and the number of participants are Gazi University/Ankara *(54)*, Selçuk University/*Konya (60),* Atatürk University/*Erzurum (56),* Karadeniz Technical University/*Trabzon (58)*, Dicle University*/Diyarbakır (60),* Marmara University/ İstanbul, *(55)* Çanakkale 18 Mart University/Çanakkale *(38) and* Dokuz Eylül University/İzmir*(52)* respectively.

2.3 Means of Collecting Data

A survey form consisting of two open-ended questions was prepared with a view to determining individual knowledge and opinions in consideration of how geography tends to be perceived by Training Geography Teachers (TGT). In addition, in order to make sure that the replies to the questions of the survey are detailed and sensible, students were asked to reply beginning with the conjunction "because". What is more, two experts were asked of their opinions on the validity of the survey once they had done the necessary analyses and then the survey was made ready in light of the advice and suggestions offered.

The questions occurring in the survey:

In my opinion, geography is... .

I believe the concept of geography means... .

The period given to the students in which they were supposed to answer the questions was only 10 minutes. The responses derived from these questions formed the essential source of data for our survey.

2.4 Analysis of Data

Within the scope of the research, responses written by TGT were analyzed with "*content* analysis" method. "Content analysis" is a scientific research method adopted in order to be able to create meaningful and valid deductions of texts and contexts the said texts use (Şimşir, 2010; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). A combination of a number of methodological tools and techniques applied on various discourses, content analysis can be evaluated as a "reading" tool based on a controlled effort of interpretation and generally deduction (Bilgin 2003, p.157). In this context, content analysis takes not only the merely obvious content but also the background of the material as the subject matter, in other words, while tackling the theme and content of a text with the primary reading, it examines the contextual fabric with the secondary reading (Mayring, 2009).

Replies reflected by TGT concerning their perceptions on the concept of geography and written on the questionnary were carefully analyzed by the researcher, and expressions and concepts that were deemed beneficial in the research were determined meticulously and objectively (Dowling, 2005). In this study, all the questionnaire forms were given a number and great care was taken to make sure that each form was evaluated at least twice with a view to avoiding possible ambiguities. The responses pertaining to the conceptual definition of geography that were provided by the participants were written in a Microsoft Excel Programme (e.g. Geography is a strategic kind of knowledge), in consideration of the numbers assigned in the questionnaire. Afterwards, all the conceptual definitions made and examples given by the participants were fed into a computer. Coherence and categorization of these definitions and examples were achieved depending on their situation. In the meantime, care was taken to achieve internal and external consistency between the conceptual categories adopted. The examples provided by the participants as regards the concept of geography were added to the text along with the number of the participants. All the necessary grammatical corrections were made while the examples were being fed into the computer. The responses provided by those having defined geography with more than one concept (71 altogether) were distributed to the groups as properly as possible. As a result, 10 conceptual categories

were obtained and these were enriched with the examples given by the participants, based upon the definitions and explanations provided by 433 participants pertaining to "how geography is perceived".

Reliability and Validity

In the research, responses to the questionnaire provided by teacher canditates were accepted in the way as they reflected their actual situations. Also, responses to the questionnaire were evaluated in an unbiased and as is manner. The fact that the researcher observed the concept he or she does research on as is and as unbiased as possible means that validity is present (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). According to Hammersley, revealing a social event with all its authenticity defines validity in qualitative researchers (cited by Marvasti, 2004). In qualitative researches, rather than the reliability that may be defined as repeatability of results, the accuracy of the research results, or their validity, gains more importance (Topkaya, 2006).

Reliability means expressing the accuracy of measurement and approach in the research (Mayring, 2000). Presence of internal and external consistencies between the qualitative research design outcomes supports the reliability of a research. Inclusion of the entire geography education departments in the research, conducting the research during a period of time when the education and training was ongoing, the meticulous research ethics maintained throughout the research process (Secor, 2010), planned implementation, and unbiased analyses were taken into consideration with care in terms of the implementation strategies and reliability of the research.

3. FINDINGS

This part consists of 10 perceptual categories constructed based upon the written statements pertaining to how geography tends to be perceived by TGT. In order to reinforce the perceptions regarding these categories, we benefited from the samples taken from the statements and explanations provided by the participants (Figures 1 and 2). According to the classifications based upon the analyses undertaken, 108 of the students, that is, the majority of them, defined TGT as *the interaction between man and natural environment* whereas 7 of them, that is, the minority of them, defined it as *the field studying wonderful places and landscapes*.

Category 1: Geography deals with the interaction between man and the natural environment

According to this category, the way geography is defined by TGT has a lot to do with activities and developments including the interaction occurring between man and his natural environment. As such, there are known to be innumerable activities ranging from taking advantage of forests, making cultivable morphological areas available to agricultural activities to exploiting tourism and fishing activities across aquatic environments. Still, natural environment has virtually paradoxical effects upon human activities, such as a rise in erosion due to misuse of the soil, pollution of the atmosphere due to fossil fuels, and disappearance of marine life in aquatic environments due to contamination. On the other hand, natural environment may have many favourable effects upon human activities, such as building terraces across slopes, extending agricultural areas, and making the most of an array of bright colours occurring in nature. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography deals with the interaction between man and his environment.
- Geography is concerned with land forms and human relations.
- Geography studies causes and effects of physical and human evolution across the Earth.

Category 2: Geography is a description of space/map

The viewpoints emphasising the overall description of space in view of geography can be placed in this category. Such quantitative data as the immediate environment people live in or the name of the mountains and other high points in other parts of the world, length of streams, the amount of population, capital cities of countries, and various consumer goods can placed in this group too. However, some of the statements provided by the respondents are suggestive of the fact that geography, as a prominent discipline of science, could be described as introducing and recognising general knowledge and various morphological shapes. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is a discipline of general knowledge that describes the earth.
- Geography is the description of the natural environment.
- Geography is a science that introduces the formation and evolution of the earth.
- Geography is the description of the natural environment in which man lives.

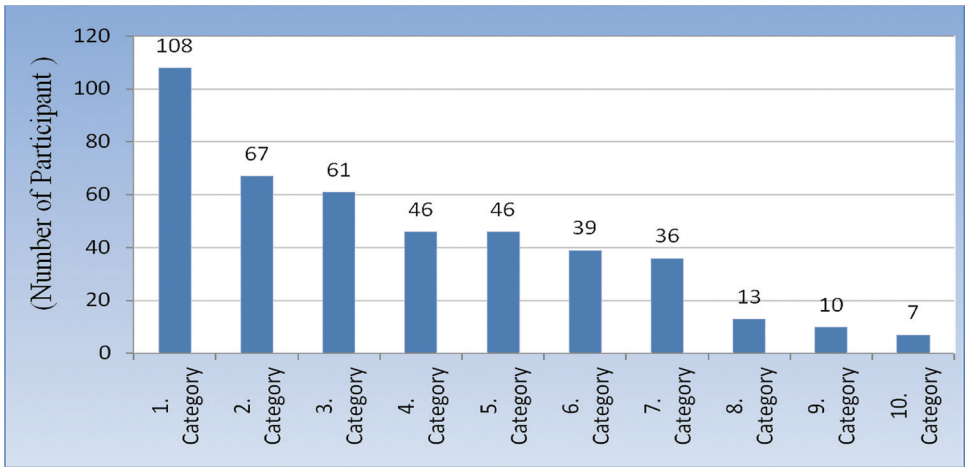

Figure 1
Distribution of the Categories (Only First Defines) in Relation to How Geography Is Perceived by Training Geography Teachers

Category 3: Geography deals with cultural and economic analyses

According to this category, geography is recognizing socioeconomic structure and presenting cultural diversities of different regions or countries the world over. In other words, geography is bringing forth how culture is influenced by the environmental setting, apart from its distribution and density across the world, the interaction between different cultures and their symbiotic features. Furthermore, geography could be defined as a science that seeks to explain the cause and effects of the difference in socioeconomic background and instabilities occurring across the world. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is the effort to comprehend the world in terms of social, cultural and economic aspects.
- Geography is a study into animate and inanimate settings apart from social differences.
- Geography is a discipline that looks into religion, language and others cultural structures and settings.
- Geography is what helps man to grasp the cultural setting around him.

Category 4: Geography is a kind of strategic knowledge

In the opinion of the participants in this category, people tend to develop a sense of independent and applicable national awareness. Thus, the destiny and future of a nation will depend a good deal upon its ability to analyse world geography sufficiently enough and become aware of underground and surface treasures. In keeping with this view, geography is regarded as an important science that could help determine the future of nations by the participants of this category. In other words, recognising and governing the world will be possible through geopolitical and geostrategic planning and applications. Also, geography, a field of strategic knowledge, can be considered as the strategic knowledge and living space of the powers that have been imposing sanctions on any region in the world through socioeconomic sanctions and military operations for ages. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography teaches methods of leading a conscious way of life.
- Geography is a science that studies underground and surface treasures.
- Geography is a kind of strategic knowledge.
- Geography is able to determine destiny nations/ states.

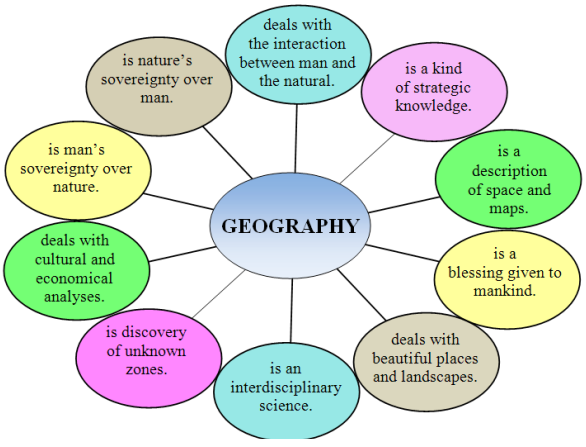

Figure 2
Categories of the Training Geography Teachers in Relation to How Geography Is Perceived by Them

Category 5: Geography is a blessing given to mankind

In the opinion of the participants in this group, geography is a space that man has been blessed with. This sacred space exists for or has been created for only man. According to these statements, which emphasize a religious viewpoint, what makes the world meaningful is mankind. Also, geography is thought as a science that is concerned with the world and the universe, which people learn about through the discipline of geography. In accordance with the statements making up this category, geography is a living space for the holy mankind and so man should recognize and appreciate it. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is a living space created for mankind.
- Geography is a way of life that mankind is blessed with.
- Geography is the knowledge of recognising magnificence of the world and the universe.

Category 6: Geography is man's sovereignty over nature

In the opinion of the participants in this category, human activities dominate the natural environment and man processes the natural environment for various economic activities. In other words, man makes most of the natural environment through his sovereignty over it. It can be observed that man, thanks to his ability to plan that is based upon knowledge, has developed a means of defence against nature by raising awareness of threats that pose an obstacle for his activities or restrict his way of life. For instance, man has constructed dams against floods, built structures resistant to earthquakes, and has launched greenhouse activities in optimum climates. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is man's knowledge of governing the natural environment.
- Geography is man's recognising natural and human settings and making plans accordingly.
- Geography is man's analysing the natural environment and raising relevant consciousness.

Category 7: Geography is an interdisciplinary science

In the opinion of the participants in this category, geography is regarded as an interdisciplinary field of science rather than a discipline in its own right. Thus, geography is acknowledged as an interdisciplinary science that studies not only animate but also inanimate settings on the earth. In other words, geography is thought to be a science that is a scientific community supported by nature sciences (e.g. geology, meteorology), science (e.g. biology, chemistry), and social sciences (e.g. archaeology, sociology, history). Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is a scientific community that combines various sciences.
- Geography is a discipline that has created a vast net of knowledge by benefitting from various sciences.
- Geography is the ability to view the world in physical, political and cultural aspects depending upon data derived from various sciences.

Category 8: Geography is discovery of unknown zones

In the opinion of the participants in this category, geography is more about discovery and unknown zones. In a way, this view of geography can be likened to the view held by primeval and medieval societies; that is, discovering and introducing distant places. Discovering distant places, travelling to different social and cultural riches and settings, and obtaining new data and findings about the geographical settings that man lives in can be given as examples for this kind of view of geography. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is discovering distant places and interpreting them afterwards.
- Geography is the discovery of the places/settings in which man lives.
- Geography is discovering different cultures and societies.

Category 9: Geography is nature's sovereignty over man

In the opinion of the participants in this category, man is weak and/or insufficient against natural evolutions and developments and so nature has a great impact upon man's life. Geography is regarded as "the address concept" that can account for such phenomena. That man is not capable enough of reducing or averting the impact of global warming, and that man cannot prevent such natural disasters as earthquakes and avalanches, and that man has little or no potential to avoid drought or keep precipitation under control are some good examples of the view of Category 9. In fact, man complies with natural conditions (e.g. wearing seasonal clothes), and is able to survive only by conforming to nature and often imitate it. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is nature's sovereignty over man.
- Geography is man's effort to imitate nature and conform to it.
- Geography is a science that analyses climate, setting and space.

Category 10: Geography deals with beautiful palaces and landscapes

In the opinion of the participants in this category, which is associated more with "landscape", geography is a science that studies beautiful sceneries. In other words, geography is defined as a field of science that studies high mountains and rich biodiversity, nice beaches (e.g. summer resorts and sea tourism), as well as highly attractive natural and historical sites. Here are some of the statements provided by the participants regarding how geography is viewed in this category:

- Geography is a science of landscapes.
- Geography is a science that introduces nice places, mountains and historical sites.
- Geography is a science that teaches all natural (e.g. Niagara Falls) and manly (e.g. Egyptian Pyramids) beauties.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teaching of geography has been carried out actively in 8 different universities across Turkey. The present study, which aims to determine "the concept of geography" held by training geography teachers in the Department of Geography, has divided the participants into 10 categories. The fact that there exist different concepts as to what geography is demonstrates that this discipline does not have a narrow, single field of interest, but that it is a multidisciplinary field of science with a wide-ranging scope of study. Furthermore, the fact that perceptual categories derived from our study results are dissimilar to those in the literature appears to confirm the definition of geography made by our study. A study by Bradbeer et al. also confirms our study results (2004).

Thanks to the fact that geography has a wide sphere of interests and several subfields, and to the fact that professors of geography express the limits of definition and perception within their area of expertise have resulted in the development of different categories of definition regarding geography. For instance, human geographers have put mankind in the centre of "the science of geography" and thus brought cultural geography to the fore. This, in turn, has resulted in geography's being perceived as and defined to be closer to social sciences (possibilist). In sharp contrast, physical geographers place the natural environment in the centre of geography with a deterministic approach, which appears to reinforce closeness of geography to nature and science. All these taken into account, we can see how broadly and in how many different ways geography could actually be defined.

In addition to all these varying viewpoints and definitions, perception of geography has changed to a large extent with respect to the interaction between man and space and in consideration of the socio-cultural structure. As teachers in the future, those training in the Department of Geography Teaching have a profound and different conceptual perception of geography, which is a vital step that could help achieve desirable levels in the teaching of geography. If aided by a healthy and constructive understanding of teaching, geography could be proven to have a scientific profundity and a broad social capacity. However, it currently seems difficult to achieve this purpose considering the fact that there are some flaws in the existing education system adopted in secondary schools and universities in Turkey. What is more, a significant number of students fail to actively participate in geography lessons due to a system based upon memorization and a descriptive system of teaching of geography that does not contribute much to the individual's daily life (Özgen, 2009, p.1856). Therefore, the main purpose of geography is to help teachers of geography or those involved in geography as a science to acquire a sound, operable view of geography through which they can question natural space and social environment with no trouble. Therefore, efforts should be made with a view to abolishing the existing perception of geography, which is very narrow and almost useless for society. This way, we could get rid of a view of descriptive geography that is operable in view of general knowledge based upon "a route learning of the names of mountains and rivers". All these taken into account, we suggest that a new, applied geography approach compatible with a serious scientific structuring and understanding should be adopted. Hence, we could help students and teachers develop new concepts of geography and contribute to educating teachers of geography who can perceive space with broad and deep projections in the 21st century. As stated by Reinfried in 2004, teaching of geography should point out field studies that could contribute to the development of the individual and his living conditions. The key of teaching should be to include global issues that could adopt a new paradigm and assume a central role, such as globalization, sustainability, relations of power, social conflicts, identity and changing.

We should bear in mind that current training teacher of geography will be professional teachers in the future. These are the ones that will explain and help spread a perception of geography which is not only deep but also rich in content. The success of geography within schools can be said to largely rely on the success of geography teachers to engage students in the process of learning (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004). The wide scope of geography and its multidisciplinary identity have prepared a ground for the variation of perceptions and definitions regarding the concept of geography. These perceptual differences are important in that active participation of students should not only be provided and but also be made public so that perceptual richness regarding geography could be revealed.

In study, cultural geographical themes in geography course curriculum reflected in a broader sense and developed this way (for instance, the addition of the theme of "*socio-political, ethnic, and faith wealth*" to the curriculum) bears importance in terms of the main objectives of geography education since geography education is an important and a popular discipline in our daily lives, and also a more confortable and sustainable life would be possible in the event that different perceptions and definitions of the concept of geography are put into practice.

In order for the differences regarding the concept of geography to come out,

- It should not be forgotten that every single student may perceive geography in a different way depending upon his or her socioeconomic, cultural and belief, and so we make sure that students take this as nothing but richness.
- Students should be taught that tools and devices used in the lesson of geography not only contributes to the conceptual perception of the world but also may cause some restrictions on perception; therefore, it should be remembered that technological devices serve only as tools not as purposes.
- It should be remembered that conceptual perceptions are/could be different just as every single student has a different socio-cultural environment, so that a student-fronted curriculum could be prepared for and that care should be taken to help students discover conceptual richness.

In conclusion, geography is gaining more and more importance in the world of science just like other disciplines of science. It may be true that there are no new continents, regions or mountains to be discovered on the surface of the Earth but people could be helped to perceive and define the existing geographical settings with new purposes and duties by means of new perceptual design and spatial adjustments. This is why it could be claimed that geography is a timeless science that gains, rather than loses, its importance as the world ages. We should bear in mind that it geography is one of the most essential fields of science that encompasses different perceptions and definitions and that has directed the world history. In other words, geography is the environment in which life itself occurs.

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