

## THE ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS TOWARDS SOCIAL SCIENCES IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES: A SAMPLE FOR THE COMMUNICATION THEORY COURSE

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### ABSTRACT

Education encapsulates two thirds of our life span. Thus we give direction to our futures according to the education we undergo. University students especially are equipped with theoretical and practical information during their undergraduate studies. However, students taking theoretical courses in social sciences have difficulties. In this study, I will examine how university students look at social science courses and according to these results I will offer some suggestions. I have chosen the Communication Theories course given at İstanbul Kültür University, Faculty of Arts and Design, Department of Communication Arts as a basis for this study. 120 students taking the course will serve as my research group. My research method will be interviews. In addition, by using differing teaching methods and seeing how students react to them during the class, I will obtain quantitative and qualitative data to examine.

**Keywords:** Education, social science, theory, applied education.

### INTRODUCTION

Today the majority of our society is familiar with the school institution. The individuals interact with the school concept especially starting from the ages like six or seven and this institution becomes a part of their lives. The purpose of the school is to provide individuals with knowledge about life, daily developments, culture, rules or laws in the society in a systematic way starting from early ages under the concept of education. The concept of education derived from the word “*educare*” in Latin which means “feeding” and “*educere*” (Tanilli, 1988) which means “raising” is defined as “training and raising” of the children by their families, relatives and the elderly according to the traditions until they reach adolescence in respect to their duties, tasks and modes of behavior they are going to fulfill and display in the future” (TDK, 2011). Therefore, education which plays a significant role in the development of individuals is a natural right of each individual.

Education covers almost one third of our life so we shape our future according to our educational background. Especially the university students are equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge through undergraduate study. However, the main problem at this point is caused by the students’ failure to establish a mutual relation between the theoretical knowledge acquired in a course and life itself. The students who go through an education system based on rote-learning from the primary –secondary level of education to the university level focus basically on either passing their classes or getting sufficient marks on their courses.

The education and training in Turkey differ from each other. The primary education and university education are supervised by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education respectively. In primary years education is based on general fields whereas it is offered on a specific field in the university. And a social science is one of these fields transferred to the students during the university education.

## THEORY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

The science which means the systematic group of information is defined as reaching generalizations as a result of analyzing the events which have been observed and efforts made through such generalizations to reach conclusions which should be tested based on the events over which judgments will be made (Sandıkçioğlu, 1988). Science is classified as axiomatic and positive. The social sciences which have a positivist characteristic - the social research which started to settle the daily problems- have introduced a new dimension with the theoretical studies which were first started to be conducted in the 18th century (Aziz, 2003). The social sciences which have a positivist, interpretative and critical nature, deal with the nature of the social reality, basic nature of mankind, relation between science and common sense, theory of social reality and the relation between the social values and science through qualitative and quantitative methods (İslamoğlu, 2009).

One of the most significant topics of social sciences is communication. The study of social events which started during the 1900s has given rise to the theories which are different from each other but at the same time interconnected. Therefore, the definition of the theory becomes important at this point. Theory is a system of hypothesis which is partly verified but which has not become definite as a whole (Aziz, 2003). The overall theories which serve as a general proposition leading to the generation of hypothesis bring out the science in the related field.

The university which may be defined as the place where knowledge is accumulated collectively is also an institution which takes knowledge further, spreads the newly generated knowledge, shapes the final mode of adulthood, offers vocational education and guides technological production (Menteş, 1999). However, the understanding of education at the universities has changed due to the students' concerns about finding a job which causes them to continue their education more on vocational fields. Hence, many problems arise in the functioning of theoretical courses. Especially the lack of a strong background in the primary and secondary education effects the functioning of the courses taken in the university.

Students especially during the theoretical courses focus more on memorizing than understanding the subject. Students' approach to the concept of memorization prevents them from understanding the subject or makes it more difficult. Therefore the applied teaching in the flow of theoretical courses becomes mandatory. Lecturing on a topic is not enough on its own while teaching a theory. Theories should be taught with applied descriptions and updated examples.

### Applied Education

Communication which is considered as a science in general sense, describes the transfer of message from the source to the target. Theories have been created in this field as a result of the studies conducted on the transfer of messages. The theory of communication helps us to understand the mass communication process better. In this study the transfer of the theoretical courses to the students is modeled by taking the models created in the field of communication as the starting point. Theories are shaped through linear and interactive methods in communication.

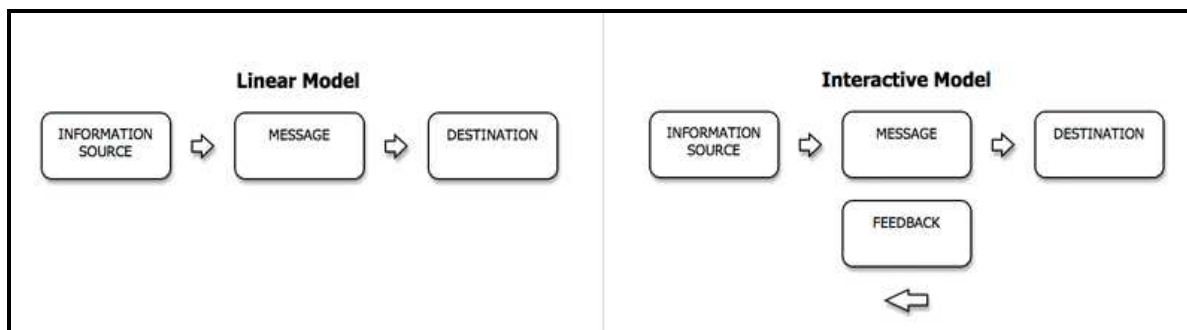


Figure 1: Linear & Interactive Model

Both linear and interactive models are given systematically in Figure 1. Information source represents the lecturer, message stands for information and destination is the students. The education in theoretical courses is usually offered through linear model system. Linear does not help the theoretical courses to be learned in an effective manner in unidirectional process. Interactive model, the other model, is realized through a bi-directional process. The only difference from the linear model is that it includes feedback. Here, feedback is defined as application. The theoretical knowledge transferred from the lecturer to the students in a bi-directional flow motivates the students through practices and reduces the duration of learning process. Students' approach to theoretical courses changes through the practices applied with the healthy establishment of the relation between theory and daily life. Thus, the concept of memorization which has been adopted by the students from the early ages is replaced by the theoretical courses which are more clearly understood with practices. The study is supported through the practices in "Communication Theories" course, which is picked as a sample, and thus the necessity of applied education is shown.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study students' approach to the social sciences courses in undergraduate education is handled both quantitatively and qualitatively. The understanding of education is interpreted with a literature study conducted on this topic. In addition to these interpretations, the thoughts of the students on education in social sciences courses are evaluated with the survey questions addressed to the students who take these courses in undergraduate education.

The survey method is applied. Data is collected in the social sciences classes through the survey questions asked on education. The Communication Theory course offered to the students of Communication Arts Dept., School of Art and Design, İstanbul Kültür University is picked as a sample during the academic year 2010-2011 is picked. 120 students taking this course constitute the basis of the study. The data gathered at the end of the survey is transferred to SPSS program (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences). The data coded in an appropriate way is made ready for analysis and then studied.

## FINDINGS

In the study the data has been collected through the survey method. Both the information provided by the students, who constitute the basis of the study, on Communication Theory course and the data gathered through the survey have been brought together.

120 students have been asked survey questions via the survey portal of Marmara University (<http://anket.marmara.edu.tr/v2/survey.php?sid=284>). The survey consists of 13 closed ended questions.

Three of these questions comprise questions on demographic qualities and the other ten comprise the questions concerning the outlook on social sciences courses in undergraduate education. The ordinal scale is applied especially with the questions prepared concerning the outlook on social sciences courses in undergraduate education.

Data from 120 students has been collected through the survey held via internet. Survey questions have been addressed to 66 male students (55%) and 54 female students (45%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution according to gender

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Female</b>	54	45
<b>Male</b>	66	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants have been asked distribution questions comprising 4 scales according to their ages. Distribution is measured according to the groups between 13-18, 19-24, 25-30 and 31-36. It is found that the number of the members of the group between 19 and 24 is higher than the others in age distribution with a rate of 65%.

Other questions aim to learn students' approach to the social sciences courses in undergraduate education. The five point Likert scale is used in the following definitions. Table 2 shows the distribution of assessment on the social science courses in undergraduate education.

Table 2: Distribution of assessment on the social sciences courses in undergraduate education

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Social sciences courses should definitely take place in undergraduate education</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7,5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16,6</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33,3</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>36,6</b>
I am more successful on social sciences courses	9	7,5	10	8,5	21	17,5	41	34	39	32,5
<b>I am most interested in the theoretical courses among the social sciences courses</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8,5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6,5</b>
Social sciences courses should not only include theoretical courses	10	8,5	17	14	16	13,4	56	46,6	21	17,5
<b>I have difficulties in understanding theoretical courses</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8,5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32,5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>25,5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8,5</b>
Applied studies should be conducted in social sciences courses	3	2,5	7	6	14	12	44	36,5	52	43
<b>Theoretical courses lead students to rote learning</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6,5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17,5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>
Theoretical courses should be taught by transferring them to the applied up-to-date information	3	2,5	3	2,5	8	6,5	51	42,5	55	46
<b>Visual sources should be used when teaching subjects in theoretical courses</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6,5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2,5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>43</b>
Theoretical courses should be more elucidative and comprehensible	3	2,5	4	3	4	3	56	47,5	53	44

In order to test the reliability of the scales, Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient has been calculated. The low value of the Cronbach ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient (close to 0), which is the most common reliability method, shows that the variants are not reliable. The alpha coefficient is found 0,740 if 10 questions addressed to the users according to the five point Likert scale is studied mainly according to the Cronbach alpha values. The alpha coefficient close to 1 shows that the scale is highly reliable.

The survey data collected through the reliability test plays a guiding role in the assessment of the social sciences courses in the undergraduate education. The unconditional involvement of social sciences courses in the undergraduate education is considered positive by 70% of the students. Students have expressed a positive opinion about their success on the social sciences courses. 66,5% of the students are successful on the social sciences courses. There is no specific data about the interest of the students in the theoretical courses of the social sciences courses. 25% of the students have presented negative 29% have presented ambivalent and 31% have presented positive opinions. The majority of the students (64,1%) believe that social sciences courses should not only include theoretical courses. The students have expressed ambivalent opinion about the difficulties in understanding the theoretical courses. %79,5 of the students have expressed positive opinion in favor of the presence of the applied studies in theoretical courses. The students mainly believe that the theoretical courses lead students to rote learning. 45% of the students believe in it whereas 16% definitely stand against it. 88.5% of the students (106 students) believe that the theoretical courses should be offered with up-to-date information. Students want to take the theoretical courses with applied studies. The use of visual aids in the theoretical courses is considered positive by 85% of the students. 91.5% of the students (109 students) believe that the theoretical courses should be more elucidative and comprehensible.

Important data is collected through the survey conducted to learn about the students' opinion about the social science courses in undergraduate education. The students who are successful on the social science courses wish to take these courses during their undergraduate study. However, it is found that they have problems with especially the theoretical courses. Not only the courses focusing mainly on theories but also those focusing on applied courses should be offered. The students who have difficulties in understanding the theoretical courses think that the theoretical courses should definitely be supported with applied studies. The students believe education should be offered by transferring the theoretical courses based on rote learning to the applied up-to-date information and supported with visual sources, and thus the theoretical courses in social sciences will be more elucidative and comprehensible with applied studies.

## CONCLUSION

Today the skeleton of social sciences is made up of theoretical courses. Therefore, the understandability of theoretical courses gains more importance. However, the students have difficulties in understanding theoretical courses. This study which handles students' opinions about the social sciences courses in undergraduate education has proved that theoretical courses are expected to be supported with the applied studies and visual sources. Applied descriptions are brought together with the up-to-date topics and thus the theoretical courses become more elucidative and comprehensible. 90% of the students wish to take theoretical courses with applied and visual representations.

A mutual relation is established between the courses and lessons through applied studies. As a result of the applied studies in the theoretical courses the linear model in figure 1 is replaced by interactive model. With the support of applied and visual sources, the unidirectional flow of theoretical courses turn into bi-directional interactive flow. At this point the students are equipped with a stronger infrastructure within a bi-directional communication process.

The students who constitute the basis of the study define the concept of theory as a rule or law. Students are not interested in theoretical courses which are a set of processed knowledge. It is observed that the university

students lack a strong primary and secondary education. The main problem here is the failure to establish a connection between a subject learned in a class and life itself. The majority of the students prefer to take applied courses rather than theoretical courses. At this point the transfer of courses and examples in theoretical courses become more important. The knowledge provided through theory should be activated through practices. Learning process will be faster and more efficient with the combination of theoretical knowledge and applied studies. It is discovered through this study that theoretical courses should not only be given by theories like its name, but also by practices prepared through up-to-date information. As a result of such transfer, the acquired theoretical knowledge become more permanent and students learn more quickly. Consequently, an interactive education is provided with the combination of theoretical knowledge and applied studies and a mutual relation is established between the theory and life. The subjects learned in theoretical courses help the students to establish a link with life though the applied practices.

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