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Attitudes of technical vocational school students towards the course of history of Atatürk's principles and revolutions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of technical vocational school towards the Course of the History of Atatürk Principles and Revolutions (APR) that has been offered at Turkish Universities since 1933 when it was first offered by the Institute of the History of Revolution at Istanbul University. However, it took its root from the Course of Revolutions in 1925. To serve its purpose, an attitude survey that includes two sections: (a) demography of students and (b) their attitudes towards APR Course has been administered 252 students (179 males and 73 females) in these schools. The reliability of the survey is $r=.807$. At the end of the study it has been found that students almost often have positive attitudes towards this course in general.

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1. Introduction

In the higher education system in Turkey the curricula for all the disciplines at tertiary level consists of different compulsory courses, one which is the focus of this study: the History of Atatürk's Principles and Revolution (APR). This course has been offered in two parts APR I during the fall semester and APR II during the spring semester in the two-year technical vocational schools in which this study was carried out. The course objectives determined by the Council of Higher Education in Turkey are to introduce (a) Turkish Independent War, Atatürk's Revolutions and Atatürk's Thoughts, the History of Turkish Republic, (b) Turkey and Atatürk's Revolutions, His Principles, the Threats towards His Thoughts, to unite (c) the Turkish Youth for Atatürk's Revolutions, Principles, and Thoughts in Integrity for their Country, Nation, and State, and finally to bring up and strengthen (d) the Turkish Youth in line with the Thoughts of Atatürk. Additionally, this course basically aims to examine the Turkish Revolution as an expression of historical, political and juridical transformation that aims modernization.

Among the topics of this course are (a) Concepts and Ottoman Modernization, (b) Young Ottomans, I-II, Ottoman Constitutional Periods, (d) Developments in Europe; Industrial Revolution and French Revolution, (e) World War I and the Partition of the Ottoman Empire, (f) Events after Moudrose Armistice, (g) National Congress, (h) Ottoman Last Parliament and the National Pact, (i) Turkish National Assembly, (j) the National Struggle (1921-1922), (k) Turkish Foreign Policy in National Struggle, (l) Mudanya Armistice, and (m) Lousanne Peace Agreement during APR I and (a) Political Reforms (Abolition of The Sultanate, The Proclamation of The Turkish, (b) Republic, The Abolition of The Caliphate, (c) The Political Parties Established during Atatürk's Period and Those Represented in Turkish National Assembly and Political Events, (d) Reform Movement in the Turkish Law System during the Republican Era, (e) Reform Movement in Turkish Education System, (f) Reform Movement in Turkish Economy, (g) Atatürk's Foreign Policy, (h) Atatürk's Principles, and (i) Turkey after Atatürk (Internal and Foreign Policy) during APR II.

Within the framework of the topics under discussion in this course the ultimate aim of the study is to discuss the students' opinions (attitudes) on them. An attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities, ideas, or just about anything in your environment, but there is debate about precise definitions. Eagly and Chaiken (1998 as is cited in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attitude_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attitude_(psychology))), for example, define an attitude "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor." Though it is sometimes common to define an attitude as affect toward an object, affect (i.e., discrete emotions or overall arousal) is generally understood to be distinct from attitude as a measure of favorability (Icek, 2001).

There are several different components that make up attitudes as is stated by Hockenbury & Hockenbury (2007), Myers (1999), and Smith and Mackie (2007).

1. **An Emotional Component:** How the object, person, issue or event makes you feel.
2. **A Cognitive Component:** Your thoughts and beliefs about the subject.
3. **A Behavioral Component:** How the attitude influences your behavior.
(<http://www.blurtit.com/q720160.html>).

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The following research questions have been formulated to see the overall attitudes of the students towards APR course in their two-year program.

Research Questions

1. What are the overall attitudes of students in the two-year technical high schools at Hacettepe University towards APR Course I and II?
2. Do their attitudes towards APR Course I and II differ with specific reference to: (a) The Program, (b) The Educational Level of Their Fathers, (c) The Educational Level of Their Mothers, (d) The Income Levels of Their Parents, (e) Following Publications in Their Fields, and (f) The Number of Books They Have Read?

2. Method

The ultimate purpose of this present study is to evaluate the students' attitudes towards APR course offered in their programs.

2.1. The Participants

To serve the purpose of this study a total of 252 students, 179 of whom are males and 73 of whom are females, participated in the research. All of the participants were randomly selected from three different vocational schools at Hacettepe University, namely Bala Technical Vocational School (TVS) (n=85), Polatlı Technical Vocational School (TVS) (n=107), and Polatlı Vocational School of Health Sciences (VSH)(n=60). As to the educational level of their fathers, two are illiterate, 90 are graduates of primary school, 65 are graduates of middle school, 72 are graduates of high school, and the rest 23 hold a B.A. degree. 128 of their mothers graduated from primary schools, 65 are graduates of middle school, 39 hold a high school degree and the rest 10 hold their B.A. degrees. As to the incomes of their parents, 36 have 750 TL, 87 have between 751-1000 TL, 65 have 1001-1500 TL, 49 have 1501-2500 TL, 14 2501-5000 TL, and only one has 5001-over TL. Of those students, 20 never follow publications, 80 rarely, 121 sometimes, 19 often, and 12 always follows publications in general. Lastly, 153 of them have read between 1-5 books so far. This number is 72 for 6-10 books, 18 for 11-15 books, 4 for 16-20 books, and 5 for 21-over books.

2.2 The Instrument

2. The participants have been administered an attitude survey to serve the purpose of the study. The survey consists of two sections; one of which is about demographic information given above and the second section includes 20 questions (5-point Likert Type:1-2 for negative attitude; 3-5 positive attitude) on their attitudes towards APR course they are offered. The questionnaire has been adopted from Safran (2006) as was also used by Bakanlar, Özkan and Köksal (2012). The reliability level of the survey is $r=.807$. Besides, the researcher consulted the experts' opinions in this field whether they agree with the questions items or not.

3. Data analysis

As to the data analysis the order in the research questions are followed.

What are the overall attitudes of students in the two-year technical high schools at Hacettepe University towards APR Course I and II?

In order to observe the overall attitudes of the participants towards APR Course I and II, *Independent Samples Test* has been applied. Relying on the findings obtained in the study, it has been noted that there is a positive attitude towards this course ($m=3,53$). Therefore, the mean scores over 3,50 is considered to reflect the positive attitude towards APR Course I and II for this study findings. Relying on this the results of this study indicate that the participants view the role of history in a modern society (Item 20; $m=4,19$), the necessity of history to comprehend the events in the World (Item 9; $m=4,11$), its benefits since it interested in the past (Item 5; $m=4,06$), and its importance in daily life (Item 8; $m=4,06$). Next, they try to do their best in this course (Item 6; $m=3,86$), they believe that it is necessary to be a highly cultured man to understand history (Item 14; $m=3,86$), they like history (Item 7; $m=3,75$), history is not boring but enjoyable (Item 10; $m=3,71$), and finally they think that the history is an interesting subject (Item 1; $m=3,50$).

Do their attitudes towards APR Course I and II differ with specific reference to: (a) Gender (b) The Program, (c) The Educational Level of Their Fathers, (d) The Educational Level of Their Mothers, (e) The Income Levels of Their Parents, (f) Following Publications in Their Fields, and (g) The Number of Books They Have Read?

Independent Sample Test has been run to see if the participants' attitudes towards APR Course I and II differ with specific reference to gender.

(a) *Gender*: As for gender, a statistically significant difference exists between the attitudes of males and females towards APR Course I and II (sig.,013). This difference has been observed in Item 2 (Sig. (2-tailed):.003), Item 4 (Sig. (2-tailed):.034), Item 5 (Sig. (2-tailed):.016), and Item 17 (sig.,044). As for Item 2, males like this course more than females ($m=3,55$ for males; $m=3,06$ for females), for Item 4 males find this course easier than females ($m=3,16$ for males; $m=2,83$ for females), for Item 5 males and females think that this course is beneficial since it deals with the past ($m=3,96$ for males and $m=4,31$ for females), and for Item 17 males ($m=3,05$) outperformed females ($m=2,73$) in regularly reading at least a historical publication (source).

For the following analysis One-way Anova has been used to see if participants have different attitudes towards APR Course I and II referring:

(b) *The Program*: For this analysis Anova has been run to see if the students attitudes towards APR Course I and II differ with specific reference to their programs. It has been observed that there is no statistically significant difference on this issue (Sig.,214). However, the only difference has been observed in Item 19 and Item 20. For Item 19 the participants from Polatlı TVS (m=3,54) outperformed the ones from Polatlı VSH (m=3,31) and Bala TVS (m=3,22), stating that they like being invited to express their ideas and discuss the topics during instruction. For Item 20 the participants from Polatlı TVS (m=4,39) outperformed the ones from Polatlı TVS (m=4,18) and Bala TVS (m=3,96) and stating that history plays an important role in a modern society.

(c) *The Educational Level of Their Fathers*: The result of the Anova test shows that there is a statistically significant difference with reference to fathers' level of education among the participants of this study (sig.,455). This difference has only been noted in Item 12 (sig.,001) and Item 16 (sig.,016). For Item 12 the participants whose fathers hold a B.A. Degree (m=2,56) stated that they are almost willing to study history, those whose fathers hold a high school (m=3,62), middle (m=3,55), primary (m=3,54) degree have almost negative attitudes towards studying this course, whereas only two participants whose fathers are illiterate think that they totally agree that they never study history unless it is compulsory. For Item 16 they stated that they are never interested in history unless they are to do their assignment (Fathers holding a B.A. Degree (m=2,65), primary school (m=3,45), high school (m=3,38) and middle (m=3,26) school degree, with moderate positive attitudes, and only 2 illiterate fathers (m=5,00) being agree with this).

(d) *The Educational Level of Their Mothers*: Relying on the results of the Anova test it can be said that there is no statistically significant difference with reference to mothers' level of education among the participants of this study (sig.,567).

(e) *The Income Levels of Their Parents*: The analysis of Anova test implies that there is no statistically significant difference with reference to parents' income level among the participants of this study (sig.,591). However, there seems to be a difference in Item 8 (sig.,009) and Item 19 (sig.,028). For Item 8, those whose parents' income level is between (a) 2.501-5.000 TL (m=4,64), (b) 750 TL (m=4,19), 751-1.000 TL (m=4,09), 1.001-1.500 TL (m=4,06), 1.501-2.500 TL (m=3,83) think that history is important in daily life, whereas only one participant whose father income is over 5.000 think the opposite. For Item 19, those whose parents' income level is between (a) 2.501-5.000 TL (m=4,21), (b) 5.000-over (m=4,00), 751-1.000 TL (m=3,42), 750 TL (m=3,38), 1.001-1.500 TL (m=3,10), 1.501-2.500 TL (m=3,06) think that they like being invited to express their opinions and discuss the important events in history.

(f) *Following Publications in Their Fields*: The result of the Anova test shows that there is a statistically significant difference with reference to following publications in this field among the participants of this study (sig.,000). This difference is quite clear in Items 1 (sig.,032), 2 (sig.,000), 3 (sig.,023), 4 (sig.,000), 7 (sig.,015), 11 (sig.,002), 12 (sig.,000), 15 (sig.,000), 16 (sig.,001), 17 (sig.,000), and 18 (sig.,002). The participants who follow publications in this field have positive attitudes towards this course (m=3,53). They have reported that they like history (Item 7; m=3,75), history is an interesting subject (Item 1; m=3,50), they would study history let alone it is compulsory (Item 12; m=3,49), they like studying history (Item 15; m=3,43), they are proud of their efforts and success in this course (Item 18; m=3,42), history is the lesson they like best (Item 2; m=3,41), they never take interest in history unless they are to do their assignments (Item 16; m=3,32), they almost agree with that one can talk about creativity in history studies and all is not to memorize names, dates, places, and etc. (Item 3; m=3,27), they find this course easy (Item 4; m=3,04), whereas they sometimes follow and read publications in this field (Item 17; m=2,96), and they never read books but others (Item 11; m=2,65).

(g) *The Number of Books They Have Read*: A careful analysis of the results of One-way Anova test shows that there is a statistically significant difference with reference to the number of books read by the participants (sig.,000). Since the researcher aims to highlight the importance of reading, he has only tried to analyze the number of books over 10. Those that almost often read 11-15 books (m=4,22), 16-20 books (m=3,50), and 21-over books (m=4,20) have reported that history is the lesson they like best (Item 2; sig.,000). Those who often read 11-15 books (m=4,05), 16-20 books (m=4,25), and 21-over books (m=4,00) have stated that studying history leads creativity and all is not only to memorize names, dates, places, and etc. (Item 3; sig.,001). Those who almost often read 11-15 books (m=3,72) and 21-over books (m=4,20) have stated that history is easy for them (Item 4; sig.,004). The participants who almost often read 11-15 books (m=4,44), 16-20 books (m=3,75) and 21-over books (m=3,60) have stated that history is not a boring but enjoyable subject (Item 10; sig.,002). The students who participated in this study almost often reading 11-15 books (m=2,05), 16-20 books (m=2,50) and 21-over books (m=2,60) have stated that they rarely read other books but history ones (Item 11; sig.,001). Those who often read 11-15 books (m=4,27), 16-20 books (m=3,50), and 21-over books (m=3,60) have stated that they like studying history even though it is compulsory (Item 12; sig.,000). The participants who almost often read 11-15 books (m=4,22), 16-20 books (m=3,50) and 21-over books (m=3,80) have stated that they enjoy history (Item 15; sig.,000). Those students almost often reading 11-15 books (m=4,05), and 21-over books (m=4,20) have stated that they take interest in history whether or not they are to do their assignment (Item 16; sig.,000). Those that almost often read 11-15 books (m=3,66), 16-20 books (m=3,25), and 21-over books (m=3,60) have reported that they regularly read a historical publication (Item 17; sig.,000), and The participants who almost often read 11-15 books (m=4,00), 16-20 books (m=3,25) and 21-over books (m=4,00) have stated that they are proud of their efforts and success in this course (Item 18; sig.,017).

4. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the attitudes of technical vocational school students towards APR Course I and II offered in their program. It has been observed that those students who participated in the study have displayed almost positive

attitudes towards this course. They reported that APR is an important course in their program that provides them with creativity for their both academic and daily lives, they like studying history, in a modern society this course plays an important role in understanding the events that happened in the past and are happening at present and may shed light on the event likely to happen in the future in the world. Therefore, they find it interesting, enjoyable, worth studying, etc. In order to become a highly cultured person in life they think that one has to follow historical publications, as well. They are proud of their efforts and success in this course. Moreover, the most striking finding is that this course is the only one they like best in their programs.

As to gender differences it is generally in favor of males since they more like, find it easier than their counterparts. Males are in the front to follow a historical publication. Lastly, both of these groups find this course useful, thinking that it not only deals with the past, the present, but also brings insights for the future.

Another variety was about the difference in terms of the programs they are enrolled in. Although there is, overall, no significant difference in this respect, Polatlı TVS students more like being motivated to express their ideas and discuss the topics during instruction than Polatlı VHS and Bala TVS students. The same group also outperforms Polatlı VHS and Bala TVS students in that they believe that history plays an important role in a modern society. Additionally, the participants whose fathers hold a B.A. Degree are almost willing to study history, while those whose fathers hold a high school, middle school, and primary school degree have almost negative attitudes towards studying this course. Only two participants whose fathers are illiterate think that they totally agree that they never study history unless it is compulsory. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher the educational level of one's father, the more positive attitudes he has towards APR Course. However, no significant difference exists in terms of the education level of mothers. When income level is taken into account, those with a bit over than the average range (2.501 TL) view history important in one's daily life. As to the last variable (following historical publications and/or books), those who follow more publications in history find it interesting, attractive, worth studying. Moreover, they like it the best among other subjects in their programs.

Relying on these results one can easily assert that this course is crucial for students in these schools and therefore at tertiary level as well. One cannot underestimate its role in understanding one's past, present and future. Therefore, it should be reminded that to remove this course at tertiary level should be avoided. On the contrary we should search for ways how to construct this course more effectively and efficiently. We should, then, revise its syllabus and support the instruction with visual elements to make it much more attractive and interesting for our students at any level.

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