The Importance of Philosophy of Science in Social Sciences Researches: An analysis on Undergraduate Level in the field of International Relations in Turkey

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of having Philosophy of Science courses particularly during early periods of an undergraduate education and having a consciousness about questioning in Social Sciences specific to International Relations. In Social Sciences, researchers should think and read about philosophy and history of science before forming a research idea and learning research methods. Questioning and curiosity are the building blocks of a research and a researcher should improve questioning ability instead of doing a scientific study uncomprehendingly. This situation is important to examine competence of researches in the fields of Social Sciences. Research methods have been emphasizing and curiosity and questioning have less importance on courses of an undergraduate level at universities in Turkey. Therefore, researchers have difficulties and their studies have been unsatisfied mostly during this level and after it. This argument may be seen by analyzing the contents of “Research Methods” courses at universities in Turkey. At Eskişehir Osmangazi University, not having Philosophy of Science and History of Science courses during early periods affect researchers in a negative way. It may be also seen when performances and studies by secondary class students of undergraduate level are taken into consideration in two academic years on Research Methods in International Relations Course. Also in this study national research methods courses have been compared and considered. Findings as may be seen in this research are indicators of this analysis.

Key words: Philosophy of Science, Social Sciences, Research Methods, International Relations, Undergraduate Level

1 This is a draft; do not cite without permission.
1. Introduction

"The unexamined life is not worth living".
Socrates

A Research begins with curiosity and questioning in Social Sciences like every field of Science. It is important for a researcher to have curiosity and interest about a subject, have questions about it and start research with questioning. In scientific researches it is also important to realize that what science is, position of science in general and the meaning of its methods before learning methods. In this beginning which is the foundation of a research, to read about philosophy of science is a fundamental act which is very helpful. It is not about only philosophy of science and its context it is about the importance of curiosity and questioning that philosophy of science includes most.

Research methods have been emphasizing and curiosity and questioning have less importance on courses of an undergraduate level at universities. Also motivating young researchers about subjects which that they are curious about and have interest in, is not primary goal. This situation may be seen on undergraduate level courses which are named as only “research methods” and taken in the second, third or in the later semesters at universities in Turkey. Philosophy of science and history of science courses almost never take part in the programmes of universities in Turkey. In the same manner, in third semester this situation has been experienced at Eskişehir Osmangazi University.

2. Literature Review

As stated in the beginning of this study curiosity plays a fundamental role in development and education (Spektor-Levy, Baruch, & Mevarech, 2013, p. 2232). But as is known this concept has less importance from pre-school to university.

Philosophy of science puts emphasis on curiosity and questioning in the first step. First of all, it is important to define philosophy of science in this respect. In general, philosophy of science includes questions about what the limits of science are, how it does work, how it is supposed to work, what its methods are, where they are applicable and where not (Rosenberg, 2005, p.6). Above all, the most fundamental task for the philosophy of science is to answer the question, ‘what is science?’ (Ladyman, 2002, p. 4). To ask such questions is to assume a vantage-point one step removed from the practice of science itself. There is a distinction to be made between doing science and thinking about how science ought to be done (Losee, 2001, p. 2). In the philosophy of science, all technical details aside, the main subject of the discussion is the nature of scientific knowledge and its criterion (Demir, 1992, p. 109).

Answering questions about what is science and what its method are can help us to get excited for a research. Also, looking at science from a philosophical perspective allows us to probe deeper - to uncover assumptions that are implicit in scientific practice, but which
scientists do not explicitly discuss. Historically, many scientists have played an important role in the development of philosophy of science (Okasha, 2002, p. 12).

Having looked at the situation in social sciences, social scientists study the group behavior of human beings. Philosophers of social science study the methods of inquiry and patterns of explanation appropriate for the social sciences (Sarkar & Pfeifer, 2006, p. 780). Also it is needless to say that history of science is also important to answer all of these questions and know the nature of sciences. As Lakatos stated "Philosophy of science without history of science is empty; history of science without philosophy of science is blind" (Lakatos, 1970, p. 91).

In Turkey, courses about social sciences and research are mostly about methods and given after first semester. The table below is prepared by analysing undergraduate syllabuses at some universities in Turkey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
<th>SEMESTER</th>
<th>COURSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abant Izzet Baysal University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Research Methods and Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adnan Menderes University</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akdeniz University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research and Methods in Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ankara University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Philosophy of Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atılım University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Research Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beykent University</td>
<td>1 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Introduction to Social Sciences &amp; Research Methods for Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilgi University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Research Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilkent University</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research Methods in International Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Çankırı Karatekin University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scientific Research Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Çukurova University</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research and Methods in Social Sciences</td>
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<td>Dicle University</td>
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<td>Doğuş University</td>
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<td>Research Methods</td>
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<td>Dokuz Eylül University</td>
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<td>Fatih University</td>
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<td>Research Methods</td>
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<td>Gazi University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scientific Research Methods</td>
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</tbody>
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See the references for the web sites of Universities.
3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Is it important to have Philosophy of Science courses particularly during early periods of an undergraduate education and having a consciousness about questioning in Social Sciences specific to International Relations?

Is it also important to think and read about philosophy and history of science before forming a research idea and learning research methods?

Do curiosity and questioning have less importance on courses of an undergraduate level at universities in Turkey?

Are there any courses about Philosophy of Science?

When/Which semester do “Research Methods” courses have been taken at universities in Turkey?

What are the findings about not having Philosophy of Science and History of Science courses during early periods and its negative effects on researchers?

In this study, it has been searched answers for such questions.
4. Results and Discussion

This research has been done with about 200 students who attended Research Methods in International Relations course in the third semester in two academic years at Osmangazi University. There has been discussions about what is science, differences between social and natural sciences, relation between science and philosophy, the enlightenment, positivism-postpositivism, qualitative and quantitative research, questions about qualitative research methods. In addition to this, it has been noticed that readings about such names like F.Bacon, Descartes, Galilei, Newton, Akşemseddin, Piri Reis, Katip Çelebi, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, August Comte, Max Weber, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn could help them for their studies. The subjects below have been discussed particularly:

- Immanuel Kant- The Enlightenment
- Auguste Comte- Positivism
- Karl Popper- Falsifiability
- Thomas Kuhn- Paradigm

Thereafter, researchers have began to form a research draft by considering Paradigm and Main Theory, Research Question and subject, Method, Theoretical Framework, Scope of research and limitations as part of scientific research basics. Within this period, they have been informed about subjects like the origin of scientific writing, citation, plagiarism. The aim of this practice is to form a research draft which is a preparation for a scientific study after doing library and internet research.

It has been very difficult for researchers to choose even a subject that they are curious about. The reason of this situation is that they have never taken such courses and made discussions about these subjects with their advisors or academicians at university. They mention of rote learning, and state that they study only for exams on courses. Also, they have difficulty in expressing themselves.

There is another significant point about library and internet research. Young researchers who attended to course do not know how to do a research in a library or on the internet, the main reason is they show no interest in research, they have no curiosity about searching something.

They almost addicted to internet but they have difficulties to do a research about a subject.

A lot of students have never been in a library (or in a library out of campus) or borrowed a book. They have heard the names that mentioned in the discussions for the first time, a lot
of them have not read anything about these topics. Because of the lack of groundwork they fail to perceiving research methods.³

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

“Learning without thought is naught, thought without learning is dangerous.”

Confucius⁴

It has been determined that researchers have difficulties and make many mistakes about determining research questions, expressing the research subject scientifically, making a literature review, citation when they form a research draft.

Researchers do not comprehend what science is, so they cannot do a social science research properly. Methods could have been taught but this is pointless like the situation of someone who knows how to go but does not know where to go.

As a conclusion, courses which lead to curiosity and questioning like philosophy of science should have been opened in the early semesters of an undergraduate programme in the field of international relations as it should be in every field of science.

References

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Ankara University:


Fatih University: http://ir.fatih.edu.edu/tr/?lisans.

³ From lecture notes.


www.globalbizresearch.org

Hacettepe University: http://www.ir.hacettepe.edu.tr/programlisans.html.

İnönü University: https://www.inonu.edu.tr/tr/cms/uluslararası/duyuru/6740.


Karadeniz Teknik University: http://www.ktu.edu.tr/int.


Middle East Technical University: http://ir.metu.edu.tr/tr/programlar/lisans.


Selçuk University:


Trakya University:
http://tueobs.trakya.edu.tr/PresentationLayer/root/program/prog_navigator.aspx?path=2_3&f
=02&s=3&b=64&l=TR.


Yalova University: