



A Critical Hermeneutics Approach to Courses in Geography and Geography Education Departments

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ABSTRACT

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There are currently changes occurring in a number of domains on a theoretical, philosophical, and practical level. Universities, science, and the courses that are taught there all reflect this shift. This reflection is not always realized to the intended degree, though. Put differently, not every point in the world is affected by the planet's rapid changes at the same rate. Being at the epicenter of knowledge production, universities are expected to both lead development and change and keep up with these developments. It is imperative that comparable advances are included into university curricula in accordance with these changes. This study looks at the relationship between the changes and geography courses, as well as the applicability of the field knowledge courses in the departments of geography and geography teacher education. The data from postgraduate student focus group interviews were descriptively evaluated in the article utilizing interpretative and critical methods. The study's findings indicate that significant modifications to geography content understanding courses are required. Among the study's significant findings are the participants' opinions that the division between physical and human geography is meaningless, that the interdisciplinary approach used in geography classes is insufficient, and that more specialized courses are necessary. This is the reason the conclusion section includes a thorough examination of the topic.

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INTRODUCTION

The geographical field possesses a key trait of being very adaptable to the paradigm adjustments occurring in the contemporary world. In the past 70 years, the three components of geographical knowledge, namely ontology, epistemology, and methodology, have experienced significant modifications and alterations. These developments were primarily influenced by the quantitative revolution, as discussed by Li et al. (2022). Similar to other fields of study, the knowledge generated in the field of geography is applicable worldwide. The universality of geographical knowledge guarantees its relevance and validity in many contexts (Bird, 1993). Hence, the swift transformation of scientific outlook and the embrace of inventive methodologies are crucial in the progress of geographical understanding. Universities play a crucial role in advancing and preserving geographical knowledge by facilitating the use and analysis of current methods and approaches (Johnston, 2003). This viewpoint also influences the substance and approaches of the courses instructed in universities. Aligning the geographical courses offered at universities with modern geographical methodologies would lead to substantial advancements in both academic and applied geography (Johnston & Sidaway, 2015). The degree of this transition is indicative of the quality of the geographical knowledge that is generated.

While the functionality mentioned above is effective in universities in developed countries like the UK and the US, it has been noted that in other countries, there is a lack of alignment between the modern and innovative perspective and the courses taught in universities (Altbach, 2004; Kyvik, 2009). On the other hand, developing countries like Türkiye in the Geography and Geography Education departments, there have been some advancements in course selection in recent years to align with contemporary knowledge. However, it is observed that these changes have not reached the intended level. In addition, Tanrıkulu (2018) has highlighted that the distinct approach taken by Geography departments and Geography Education departments leads to notable issues. It is widely acknowledged that there is an inadequate quantity of academic staff in these departments, and the remaining academic staff's quality does not fully fulfill the expectations (Kayan, 2000). Due to these reasons, the majority of geography courses in higher education tend to favor a teaching technique that focuses on memorization rather than one that emphasizes research or projects (Yaşar & Şeremet, 2010).

Regrettably, many colleges persist in designing curricula and delivering courses using divergent methodologies that are not favored in the contemporary scientific realm for both professional opportunities and scholarly advancement, without sufficiently taking into account the present scientific outlook (Ata, 2010). Furthermore, these universities have the capability to obtain authorization to establish postgraduate programs. Due to the mismatch between supply and demand, there has been a significant rise in the establishment of new geography departments, which have now become a crucial component of academia. Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the number of geography departments at newly established universities. Consequently, it has become increasingly challenging to differentiate their quality from one another. It is important to have a comprehensive discussion on the detrimental impact that these colleges have on the field of geographical science. Furthermore, scholars at geography departments have voiced their apprehensions regarding the establishment of new departments, citing numerous structural issues (İlhan, Gülersoy & Gümüş, 2013; Kayan, 2000). The literature extensively discusses the shortcomings of geography courses in higher education from various viewpoints (Balcı, 2014; Özgen & Bindak, 2009; Sözen, 2019; Şahin, 2001; Şeremet, 2015; Tanrıkulu & Gümüşçü, 2021; Topal, 2011; Turoğlu, 2022; Uzunöz, 2011).

Table 1. *Geography courses in Türkiye*

Geomorphology	Climatology	Biogeography
Soil Geography	Hydrography	Cartography
GIS	Population Geography	Settlement Geography
Urban Geography	Industrial Geography	Economic Geography
Transportation Geography	Cultural Geography	Political Geography
Agricultural Geography	Environmental Problems	Ecosystem Geography
Natural Disasters	Globalization	World Regional Geography
Geopolitics	Tourism Geography	Environmental Issues

Source: Turkish Higher Education, YÖK Dersleri Platformu, 2024

The courses displayed in Table 1 above are still frequently taught. Without a doubt, several departments in universities offer a greater variety of courses compared to the ones they really supply. However, to present a broader overview, we concentrated on the geography courses that are most frequently taught. These courses may not be offered in all geography and geography teaching departments. However, in addition to the mentioned courses, almost all departments provide at least two courses on the geography of Türkiye. Türkiye's geography is mostly divided into two categories: the coastal regions and the inland regions. Certain departments provide individual courses for each region. Despite a decline in the availability of regional geography courses, they are nevertheless offered in numerous departments at present.

Upon analyzing the geography curriculum offered by various colleges in Europe and the US, it becomes evident that there is a greater abundance of distinct and diverse courses. Furthermore, expanding the quantity of these instances is easily achievable given the extensive selection of geography courses accessible to students.

Table 2. *Geography courses in University of Berkeley and Oxford University*

University of Berkeley Department of Geography	
World and Cultural Environments	Global Environmental Change
Global Ecology and Development	Urban Experience: Race, Class, Gender and the American City
Waste Materials	Geographies of Energy: The Rise and Fall of the Fossil Fuel Economy
Art and Ecology	Peoples of the World and Cultural Environments
Critical Economic Geographies	Global Development: Theory, History, Geography
Thinking Globally	Acting Regionally: Geographies of Climate Change
Postcolonial Geographies	Urban Sites and City Life
Food and Environment	Geographic Film Production
Oxford University Department of Geography and Environment	
Childhood and Youth in the Global South	Current Issues in Cultural Geography
Critical Geographies of Development	Environmental Governance in Central Asia
Finance and Sustainability	Geographies of the Anthropocene
Geographies of Finance	Geopolitics of the Periphery
Transport and Mobility	Chinese Politics, Society and Culture
New Approaches in Urban Geography	Desert Landscapes and Dynamics

Source: University of Berkeley, 2024; Oxford University, 2024

The objective of this study is to evaluate the current relevance of the subject knowledge courses offered by the Geography and Geography Education departments in Türkiye, based on the perspectives of the participants. In order to accomplish this objective, this study employs a critical hermeneutics methodology. Consequently, the participants were asked open-ended questions regarding potential solutions to the existing issues. The study seeks to obtain comprehensive responses to the subsequent inquiries:

Are the contents of geography courses up-to-date?

What courses should be incorporated within the geography undergraduate curriculum?

Do geography courses offer an interdisciplinary approach?

What is the density of Geography of Türkiye courses in the programs?

What should be the optimal allocation of physical and human geography courses?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study's theoretical framework employs the hermeneutical method. The study adopts critical hermeneutics, a more critical variation of this approach. Furthermore, critical hermeneutics incorporates the aspects of the philosophical hermeneutic approach while also emphasizing a more inquisitive characteristic. The primary emphasis is on determining whether the thing being examined accurately represents reality, identifying the many characteristics of the phenomenon, and devising strategies to address the issues under investigation (Ricoeur, 1981, 1991). Put simply, critical hermeneutics combines methods of interpretation and critical analysis. This synthesis not only enhances comprehension of the phenomena under investigation but also takes into account potential remedies.

Hermeneutics is the discipline that encompasses the systematic study and analysis of knowledge and interpretation. Comprehending and analyzing, which is a primary goal of the social sciences, necessarily entails interpretation. These two occurrences are inseparable. Comprehension is regarded as one of the fundamental and essential requirements for human beings (Gadamer, 2002). Gadamer, the progenitor of the philosophical hermeneutic approach, asserts that theory and practice are intricately interconnected, and that every novel comprehension is a manifestation or implementation. Critical hermeneutics, however, focuses on the interpretation and application of knowledge, as well as the less apparent elements of occurrences.

According to the hermeneutic approach, dialogue is regarded as the primary aspect, and it is highlighted that meaning is derived through dialogue (Davey, 2006). Dialogue encompasses not just the act of speaking, but also the cognitive process of comprehending the other person(s) and discovering aspects of oneself through this process of comprehension (Gadamer, 2002; 2007). Dialogue should elicit a transformation in both parties involved, since a new significance necessitates alterations in the attitudes of the persons engaged in dialogues. When one party in a debate attempts to forcefully assert their own perspective, the dialogue loses its essence and significance because it deviates from the principles of hermeneutics, as stated by Dostal (2002).

The concept of the part-whole relationship holds significant importance in hermeneutic philosophy. Two distinct methods of interpretation are utilized: the first involves analyzing individual components and then forming a comprehensive understanding, while the second involves examining the entire context and then breaking it down into its constituent parts. These strategies are employed to enhance comprehension of written texts or spoken communication. The objective is to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation. The technique relies heavily on context, as the entire text must be considered to comprehend its meaning. Examining the entirety of the text offers a more comprehensive understanding of the context (Caputo, 2018). Hermeneutics asserts that meaning does not originate spontaneously. Put simply, meaning lacks a distinct start and finish; comprehension and interpretation are ongoing and procedural. According to Gadamer (2002), tradition and language are the primary sources of hermeneutical thought that enable a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation. These two sources allow us to ascribe significance to events and phenomena. Undoubtedly, meaning extends beyond the realm of historical perspective and language. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these two phenomena are integral components of the processes involved in creating meaning (Ricoeur, 1991).

The study's sub-questions seek to thoroughly assess the extent to which geography education aligns with current scientific knowledge and the modernization of curricula. The study encompassed not only the perspectives of the participants but also included their evaluations in both the findings and conclusion sections. The perspectives of the participants were valuable and enhanced by the exchange of remarks and criticisms. The study adopts a critical hermeneutic approach as its theoretical framework, which highlights that meaning is enhanced by the combination and interplay of many perspectives. Understanding and comprehension are fostered when we are compelled to adapt our perspectives in response to differing viewpoints. Nevertheless, a solitary origin cannot serve as the focal point of significance; our ability to derive meaning expands as viewpoints and sources become more varied. Thus, the study's issue is approached from a more comprehensive standpoint.

Participants

The study included a cohort of 6 graduate students, consisting of 5 doctoral students and 1 master's student, who are now pursuing their graduate studies in the geography education department of a state university in Istanbul. The participants' ages spanned from 26 to 45. The study employed convenience sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, to pick participants. The purpose of this technique is to optimize efficiency and cost-effectiveness by choosing a readily available sample (Baltacı, 2018). Three of the participants are pursuing higher education at various universities, while the remaining three are employed as educators, with a minimum of 2 years of practical experience, and are also engaged in furthering their postgraduate education. Throughout the process of collecting data, every participant was assigned a pseudonym, and their actual names were not utilized. Participants were administered the questions from the prearranged semi-structured interview form.

Data Collection

The data for this study was obtained through the use of a focus group study. Focus group studies are a research technique that facilitates participant contact in order to gather information through these interactions (Creswell, 2013; Morgan, 1996). The objective of focus group work is to achieve a broader and more communal viewpoint, rather than focusing primarily on individual perspectives. Interactions during the focus group can influence the perspectives of participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010). The focus group is extensively utilized in qualitative research owing to its numerous benefits. The interviews were performed online to facilitate access to the participants. The interviews were carried out in two sessions, with each session lasting 40 minutes. During this procedure, precautions were taken to guarantee that the communication lines between the parties remained accessible. The queries presented to the participants in the focus group were utilized to tackle the study inquiries and were further supported with probing questions. Data was gathered on May 2024.

Participants contributed by offering an abundance of comprehensive information to the extent they desired. Every participant actively engaged in the same session and attentively listened to one another's statements during a seamless chat. The interviewer posed additional inquiries in order to discern disparities in the participants' encounters or anticipations. Examples of such queries may include: 1. Could you provide any illustrations? 2. What were the circumstances that led to this situation? 3. What was your source of information? 4. Which elements proved to be less valuable or completely useless? and/or: 5. What measures can be taken to enhance this situation? The audio recordings, along with the accompanying written notes, were transcribed word for word into a transcript spanning 43 pages. The transcripts were meticulously generated, using a methodical and logical approach, to guarantee accurate documentation of both spoken and non-verbal expressions.

Data Analysis

Reflection and critical questioning in focus groups aim to rationalize the participants' lifeworld, encompassing the context of meaning, patterns of interpretation, the establishment of norms, and social interaction. This serves as a counterbalance to the rationalization enforced by the system. Every

communication process is influenced by a pre-existing understanding that has been created by culture. Hence, it is crucial to take into account the lifeworlds and preunderstandings of the author and participants, and how these factors influenced their comprehension of complexity (Habermas, Smith & Smith, 1999). The author of the study possessed a preexisting comprehension of complexity, which originated from her professional involvement in both the Ministry of National Education (MEB) and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). This prior awareness encompasses both the encounters of demanding instructional conditions and the knowledge of how these situations could be enhanced.

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis serves the objective of identifying themes and addressing research questions or drawing significant conclusions about a specific subject. This method involves not only summarizing the data but also interpreting and comprehending them (Çarıkçı et al., 2024). Following the interviews, the participants' statements were transcribed, and a duplicate was sent to them. This stage was conducted to verify the congruence between the acquired data and the participants' subjective perspectives, hence striving for enhanced data accuracy. The analysis and interpretation of the issues posed in the focus group study did not just center on the perspectives of the participants, as is typically done in phenomenologically oriented studies. The data resulting from the participants' interactions were analyzed using a critical hermeneutic method. In this interpretation, the perspectives of both the participants and the researcher converged to yield a more comprehensive viewpoint.

The interpretation was primarily based on the text obtained from the focus group interview. The interviews were thoroughly scrutinized multiple times in order to comprehend the entirety of their content. The objective of analysis is to enhance understanding and lay the foundation for proactive measures (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). During the study, the author examined the hidden meaning of the text in accordance with critical hermeneutical concepts. Latent content pertains to the aspect of relationship and encompasses the analysis of underlying and more significant meanings that go beyond the superficial meaning of the text (Lee & Kim, 2001). The transcribed text was condensed into meaning units, where the fundamental meaning was kept and compacted (see to Table 3). The condensed meaning units were further extracted and categorized into sub-themes and themes, following the study's objectives and using high-level titles. All participants confirmed the outcomes of the analysis and were encouraged to question assertions if they disagreed with them. The dependability of the results was established, hence no revisions were required.

Table 3. Themes and sub-themes obtained from focus group data

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotations
Geography undergraduate courses are outdated	Lack of philosophical and theoretical background of the courses	"...the philosophy and theory of the lessons are not sufficiently covered. Why a subject is learned and its understandings are not sufficiently presented"
	Lack of interdisciplinary approach	"...if we are talking about identity, identity concerns both sociology, psychology and geography. It is not possible for it not to be interdisciplinary. I need to know psychology, and sociology when studying migration."
Changes in undergraduate geography courses	Excess of the courses on Geography of Türkiye	"...I took courses like climatology 1-2-3 or geomorphology 1-2-3. Those courses could have been more specific"
	Providing more specialized courses	"Courses can be in modules. Specific courses can be planned in one semester and we can take more courses via modules. So we can focus on more specific topics."
Changes in undergraduate geography courses	Implementation of modular course system	"...it doesn't work to describe space, water, and place independently of people. I need to see people too. When describing wetlands, human activities should also be included. It should be in a way that encompasses physical and human activities."
	Making physical and human geography lessons more interactive	

FINDINGS

The Currency of Undergraduate Courses

The initial inquiry posed to the participants was, “Do the courses in geography and geography teaching undergraduate programs remain current and relevant?” None of the participants found the courses in these programs to be current. They provided justifications for their lack of up-to-date knowledge in various ways. Burak, a participant, expressed that the courses in Geography and Geography Teaching Undergraduate Programs are unable to keep up with technological advancements. In many academic departments, students are still required to manually create maps using their own hands. The proper utilization of GIS is hindered by overcrowding in certain departments. There exists a disparity in both the course material and geographical comprehension between MEB and YÖK. Merve highlights the insufficient technological advancements, expressing that “the university is unable to keep pace with the current era.” Recalling knowledge from memory lacks significance. Population numbers are readily available, yet establishing relationships is crucial. Ahmet, however, expressed that the philosophy of geography courses is inadequately addressed, stating that “the courses lack sufficient coverage of their philosophy and theory.” Why a subject is acquired but its understandings are inadequately conveyed. I believe that the study of anthropogenic geomorphology should receive greater emphasis in the curriculum of the geomorphology course. Güneş, who shares similar views with Ahmet, asserts that undergraduate courses lack enough coverage of the philosophy of geography and paradigm teaching. Celal argues that the course titles lack specificity and suggests the inclusion of more specialized courses. On the other hand, Emre contends that undergraduate courses are antiquated, as they predominantly adhere to classical geography principles. We must align our principles with the globalized world values and educational philosophy. For instance, it is seen that they use overarching narratives in their teachings without critically examining them and disregard information from many cultures and locations.

Ideal Curriculum Design for Geography Undergraduate Programs

The second inquiry of the focus group investigation pertained to the inclusion or exclusion of specific courses in geography and geography teaching curricula. The individuals were requested to provide a rationale for their responses. All participants advocate for the elimination of regional geography education. They argue that the current comprehension of geography is not consistent with the understanding of regional geography, and that an excessive amount of time is dedicated to regional geography courses. It is emphasized that these classes primarily focus on memorization, with little emphasis on synthesis. Merve expresses her dislike for the Introduction to Geography course. It would be more rational if there were courses specifically focused on the historical development of the philosophy of geography. Simultaneously, we consider both population and geomorphology. I fail to comprehend the purpose of the existence of this introductory course. Perhaps it would be better suitable to offer this course in a discipline that has a strong correlation with geography.

Participants emphasized the need to incorporate diverse courses within undergraduate geography curricula. Ahmet expressed the need for the inclusion of elective courses, as well as the opportunity to enroll in courses offered by other departments. Additional elective courses facilitate specialization. There ought to be an abundance of laboratory courses available in the field of physical geography. Modules may be used to structure courses. Individual lessons can be strategically designed and accomplished within a single semester, meaning that various modules can be integrated into a single course. Therefore, we can direct our attention towards more precise matters. Ahmet’s proposal for modularity is really innovative. It would be feasible to enroll in 2-3 distinct courses, each comprising various modules, within a single semester. These lessons might be far more precise. The participants stress the need for geography courses to have more specialized content, since they find the current courses and their names to be too vague. According to Ahmet’s assertion, it is possible to take three distinct courses by developing three separate modules inside a single semester. For instance, many courses like “Tourism in the Polar Regions” (as exemplified by Ahmet), “Environmental Problems in Central Asia,” and “Latin American Crime Geography” can be delivered over a period of 14

weeks, divided into 3 modules within a single semester. Naturally, the quantity and characteristics of these modules can be adjusted based on the course material. Ahmet's concept is significant and can be readily executed. Celal expressed that he considers the courses and course names too vague. He suggested that instead of courses like climatology 1-2-3 or geomorphology 1-2-3, the courses may be rearranged to have a more eye-catching name. Emre believes that it is important to provide courses that cover contemporary intellectual movements such as Feminist Geography, Postcolonial Geography, Non-representational Theory, and Marxist Geography. Emre, Merve, and Güneş emphasize that the artificial intelligence course should be moved to the geography department. Conversely, Ahmet and Burak argue that identical concepts are reiterated using several course titles. According to Ahmet, tourism, agricultural, and industrial geography should be included as sub-branches within the economic geography course. Burak, on the other hand, argues that the general themes covered in human and physical geography courses are redundant and decrease overall effectiveness. According to the participants' opinions, the majority of the subjects discussed in the Human Geography of Türkiye course can be revisited in subsequent courses such as Türkiye's Tourism Geography, Türkiye's Population, and Türkiye's Transportation Geography. Consequently, lessons may be needlessly repeated, resulting in inefficient use of time.

Undergraduate Geography Courses and Interdisciplinarity

Two interrelated inquiries were posed to the participants in this section. Are undergraduate courses designed with an interdisciplinary approach? Is this strategy necessary? "What are the justifications for your position?" Every speaker emphasized the absence of an integrative approach in undergraduate courses. Participants substantiated the pertinent issue by providing illustrations. Merve stated that while discussing identity, it encompasses the fields of sociology, psychology, and geography. This is undeniably multidisciplinary. When studying migration, it is necessary to have knowledge in both psychology and sociology. Burak emphasizes that a comprehensive understanding of the subject can only be achieved by incorporating these disciplines, as they are not typically included in undergraduate courses. Biogeography is a field of study that is also part of biology, although we are unable to establish any connection with that discipline. In addition to this, as Merve mentioned, the matter of migration encompasses economic and social aspects, however, our attention is solely directed onto the geographical component. Our primary attention is limited to the distribution of objects in geography. We do not have the capacity to explore other aspects or go into philosophical matters. Similarly, Ahmet stated that geography has connections with other disciplines and incorporates them as well. However, this scenario is never employed. "Interdisciplinarity is of utmost importance," Emre stated, emphasizing the need to incorporate sociology, city planning, and architecture into humanities courses, as well as biology and geology into physical courses. Knowledge is derived from our collective human experiences. He supports his argument by explaining that when we acquire information, we select options from a complex system of concepts and apply them to real-life situations. The network of ideas originates from multiple sources. It comprises numerous sources. Hence, the notions in the field of geography have their origins in various other scientific disciplines.

Courses on Geography of Türkiye

During this portion, the participants were queried with the question, "What are your thoughts regarding the Geography of Türkiye courses?" Participants expressed that the quantity and duration of Türkiye Geography courses exceeded their requirements. Burak suggested the implementation of a single course dedicated to the geography of Türkiye. However, there should not be a large number of classes." When discussing geographical concerns, it is unnecessary to specifically address the geography of Türkiye, as examples from Türkiye already encompass the subject," Merve suggests. Therefore, Türkiye should be examined in terms of its human and physical geography." On the contrary, Güneş asserts that the courses on Physical Geography and Human Geography offered in the departments are satisfactory for Türkiye. Celal, who holds a unique perspective, expressed the necessity of including courses on the Geography of Türkiye. He argued that it is insufficient to merely provide a few instances of our own country, as this fails to address broader human and physical difficulties. "By learning superficially, we are unable to gain a comprehensive

understanding of our country,” he asserts, expressing dissatisfaction with the limited availability of Geography of Türkiye courses.

Proportion of Physical and Human Geography Courses

The final inquiry of the focus group investigation was “What should be the ratio of weightage between physical and human geography courses, and what are your rationales?” Participants commonly assert that human geography courses should receive greater priority. Güneş stated, “...The focus should be on individuals, specifically human geography. Greater emphasis should be made on human geography. People are central to geography. Physical geography lessons inevitably intersect with human populations at some juncture. Merve suggested that physical geography education should involve more interpersonal contact. According to Merve, these lectures primarily cover the spatial distribution of various phenomena and provide introductory-level knowledge. Nowadays, this information may be readily accessed with great speed, even from mobile devices. Describing a landscape or place without considering the presence and impact of people is futile. I also require social interaction. When discussing wetlands, it is important to incorporate human activity into the description. The physical and human aspects should be mutually inclusive. Similarly, Emre stated that in the context of globalization, human geography has gained significant prominence. Physical geography encompasses our current understanding of the Earth’s natural features and processes. Given the continuous updates and diversification of elements in human geography, it is necessary for the significance of human geography to be increased. Some other individuals have concerns about the clear difference between physical and human geography. Celal asserts that physical and human geography are interrelated disciplines that have a constant mutual influence and interaction. This factor should also be given due consideration during the process of teaching the course. I would argue that one should not be considered more important than the other. Incomplete learning may occur on one side if there is an imbalance in emphasis. “Therefore, both should be approximately equal to 50%,” Ahmet stated, emphasizing that human and physical geography are inseparable. The connection between flesh and nail is indissoluble. These two fields are interdependent. It is connected. “According to him, it is essential to teach all lessons by considering both their human and physical dimensions,” he states. Similarly, Burak emphasized the necessity for writing to encompass both physical geography and human geography. The visibility of human impact in physical geography should be increased. He considers the divide between physical and human to be insignificant, stating that they should be closely connected.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the focus group study, it was concluded that the geography undergraduate courses lack sufficient timeliness. The proposed method to address this issue is to broaden the range of elective courses and streamline the process of selecting courses from different departments. This suggestion is seen as highly viable. Specifically, the assistance provided by the relevant departments in allowing students to enroll in courses from other disciplines enables them to customize their education by offering a diverse range of course options. This model, commonly used by institutions in Europe and the US, provides students with a diverse selection of elective courses based on their own interests. Permitting students to select these courses, regardless of their direct relevance to the discipline of geography, enhances their educational experience and facilitates their acquisition of multidisciplinary viewpoints. To address contemporary educational needs, it would be suitable and efficient to expand the range of courses offered in geography and geography education programs.

The participants particularly emphasized the absence of technology and philosophy instruction in geography sessions, highlighting its relevance and importance. While providing distinct illustrations, the prevailing consensus is that these two domains are subject to greater neglect. Specifically, the participants express that they inquire about the purpose for their enrollment in these courses. The answer to this issue can only be determined by considering the underlying philosophy of the course in question. Thus, it is imperative to present a compelling rationale for why the pertinent courses are being pursued. Furthermore, education that relies heavily on rote learning is specifically subject to criticism. Amidst an era of abundant information

accessibility, there is a growing inquiry as to why rote-based education continues to be widely embraced. While the constructivist method is considered more beneficial in contemporary geography education, it is believed that this approach is not adequately represented in course titles and content.

Participants assert that regional geography courses in Türkiye are not aligned with the contemporary geographical perspective. Balcı (2018), Bilgili (2016), and Özey (2016) provide a critical analysis of this perspective in the existing literature. The statement highlights that classical regional geography is no longer a contemporary paradigm and does not align with the current notion of space (Bilgili, 2016). Nevertheless, numerous colleges continue to offer courses on regional geography. Despite a declining trend, these courses continue to be offered in several disciplines. Participants not only question the presence of these courses but also express dissatisfaction with their content. As per the participants' feedback, regional geography courses mostly focus on rote memory and descriptive methods, resulting in a constrained learning experience for students that revolves around remembering regional boundaries. This circumstance hinders the development of advanced cognitive abilities like analysis and synthesis, as described in Bloom's taxonomy. Within this particular framework, there is a strong emphasis on the necessity to reconfigure and modernize regional geography courses. It is recommended that the course content be structured to foster the development of students' critical thinking abilities, with a particular focus on conducting thorough analyses of geographical concerns.

The survey findings indicate that the participants commonly highlighted the absence of an interdisciplinary approach in geography courses. Nevertheless, it is crucial to comprehend that the multidisciplinary approach extends beyond merely enrolling in courses from other departments. Geography encompasses various sub-disciplines and courses, such as geomorphology, climatology, biogeography, economic geography, population geography, and political geography. These fields allow for an interdisciplinary approach to be taken. These courses have the potential to be restructured in order to provide a more complete geographical outlook. In order to rectify the deficiencies identified by the participants, it is advisable to promote greater interdisciplinary integration in geography education. This integration would provide students with the chance to synthesize viewpoints from many disciplines and comprehend geographical phenomena within a wider framework. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to comprehend the interaction between climate change, geomorphological processes, and economic elements in global issues.

One outcome of the focus group talks is that the participants generally perceived the quantity of Geography of Türkiye courses to be excessively high. The validity of this approach by the participants should be acknowledged, as numerous prestigious geography departments worldwide, including Oxford, Cambridge, and Berkeley, provide limited courses on the nation of residence. Furthermore, a significant number of these courses consist of redundant subjects. This issue results in substantial depletion of energy and time in the field of geography education. Specifically, modifying the subdivisions of geography to align with the needs of Türkiye and incorporating them into the curriculum greatly diminishes scientific output.

Another finding of the study suggests that students should be provided with a wider range of course options that align with their individual interests. In addition, Bilgili and Kocalar (2020) highlight the imperative of adopting an interdisciplinary approach in today's scientific understanding. This is because the phenomena we encounter are not limited to a single dimension, but encompass various dimensions such as geography, history, society, culture, economy, and politics. Hence, when taking into account the geographical aspect, it is imperative not to exclude other dimensions, as doing so may result in an inadequate geographical perspective. The significance of spatial skills and spatial competence in geography education is often emphasized (Akgün & Yıldırım, 2023; Artvinli, et al., 2022; Gönülaçar & Öztürk, 2020; Kocalar & Demirkaya, 2015; Sezer, Üztemur & Sağlam, 2021; Şanlı, 2019; 2021; Ünlü & Yıldırım, 2017). Nevertheless, the lack of complete attainment of the spatial perspective that would merge physical and human geography remains a significant issue.

Participants perceive the dichotomy between physical and human geography as excessively inflexible and contend that these two subdisciplines can be readily amalgamated. They emphasize that human impacts are often disregarded, particularly in physical geography courses. Assessing physical events in isolation from human impacts is subject to criticism. They stress that physical events such as global warming, climate changes, ecological disruptions, and earthquakes have human dimensions and impacts. Consequently, proponents assert that greater emphasis should be placed on the human aspect when examining physical phenomena, and conversely, on the physical aspect when examining human phenomena. Environmental education is a significant field of education that encompasses both the physical and human aspects. This condition is highlighted by Alım (2006), Dere and Çinikaya (2023a; 2023b), Kocalar (2012), Kocalar and Balcı (2013), and Ünlü, Sever, and Akpınar (2011). An understanding of the interplay between physical and human aspects is crucial in geography education focused on environmental challenges. According to the critical hermeneutic approach, the many elements within the studied phenomena interact with each other, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of diverse aspects of the phenomenon. Hence, it would be fitting to embrace a methodology that takes into account both the physical and human geography components collectively. Participants highlight that both physical and human geography lack an interdisciplinary aspect, and suggest that the courses should be reevaluated with this in mind. Indeed, upon reviewing undergraduate geography courses, it becomes evident that there is a narrow selection of courses available, and geography is taught in a very separate manner from other academic subjects. Interaction and information exchange with different disciplines are necessary, depending on the course's name and content. Participants frequently emphasize the need of engaging with many academic fields. Without a doubt, this suggestion holds significant importance. However, it is much more crucial to acknowledge that geography already encompasses the data from several other disciplines. The crucial aspect is to portray these statistics in a manner that incorporates a spatial dimension. Within the discipline of economic geography, concepts such as globalization, uneven development, and neoliberal policies are covered. However, the spatial aspect is not given much emphasis and the related issues are usually discussed in a descriptive manner. Economic geography encompasses information derived from disciplines such as economics, political science, and sociology. It is crucial to interpret these facts from a geographical standpoint.

The overall findings of the study indicate that the currency of the courses in geography and geography teaching programs in Türkiye is inadequate. The course titles are somewhat broad, and there is a limited selection of courses on specific subjects. Given the circumstances, it is advisable to augment the quantity of specialized courses and provide them as distinct modules. Furthermore, the curriculum is burdened by a large number of courses and lengthy durations specifically focused on Regional Geography and Geography Türkiye, thus diminishing its overall effectiveness. Geography courses have not adequately developed the interdisciplinary approach and have had limited interaction with other disciplines. The current situation necessitates a reassessment in order to offer a more all-encompassing viewpoint in the field of geography education. The study's conclusions indicate a necessity to reassess and reorganize geography curricula. During this revision process, it is crucial to consider the viewpoints of teachers, students, and other stakeholders in order to produce a more streamlined educational environment.

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