Investigation of Social Studies Teacher Candidates' Experiences Regarding the Public Staff Selection Exam (KPSS) Made in the Pandemic Process

Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmen Adaylarının Pandemi Sürecinde Yapılan Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavına (KPSS) Yönelik Deneyimlerinin İncelenmesi

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ÖZET

Bu araştırma sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adaylarının küresel salgın döneminde gerçekleştirilen Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı'na (KPSS) yönelik deneyimlerini incelemek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı Türkiye Cumhuriyeti sınırları içindeki kamu kurum ve kuruluşlarında çalışacak insanları belirleyen bir sınavdır. Araştırma olgu bilimdesenine uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu pandemi sürecinde gerçekleştirilen Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı'na katılım gösteren 10 sosyal bilgiler öğretmen adayından oluşmaktadır. Araştırmanın verileri araştırmacının alanında uzman kişilerin görüşlerine başvurarak oluşturduğu açık uçlu soruları kapsayan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak gerçekleştirilen mülakatlar ile elde edilmiştir. Görüşme formunda katılımcılara pandemi sürecinde gerçekleştirilen Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı'nda yaşadıkları deneyimleri ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla sınav öncesi ve sınav esnasında öğrencilerin sınavla yönelik motivasyon ve kaygı ile sınav ortamına yönelik birtakım sorular yöneltilmiştir. Elde edilen verilerin analiz edilmesinde deneyimlerin özünü ortaya koyabilmek amacıyla parantezleme, imgesel çeşitleme basamakları takip edilmiştir. Katılımcılardan elde edilen deneyimlere dayanarak pandemi sürecinde gerçekleştirilen Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı'nın öğrencilerde eziyet, aşırı terleme, önlemlerin yetersizliği, klima sorunu ve odak kaybı yaşanması şeklinde etkilere neden olmuştur. Ayrıca sınav tarihinin değişiklik göstermesi, sınavın yaz ayında olması, sınav esnasında hava sıcaklığının fazla olması, resmi olarak klima kullanımının yasaklanması, sosyal mesafe kurallarına uyma durumunun göz ardı edilmesi katılımcılar tarafından vurgulanmıştır.

Keywords:

Social Studies,
Pandemic,
Public Personnel
Selection Exam

ABSTRACT

This research has been prepared to examine the experiences of social studies teacher candidates regarding the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) during the global epidemic. Public Personnel Selection Exam is a test that determines people to work in public institutions and organizations within the borders of the Republic of Turkey. The research has been prepared in accordance with the phenomenology pattern. The study group of the research consists of 10 social studies teacher candidates who participated in the Public Personnel Selection Exam held during the pandemic process. The data of the study were obtained through interviews conducted using a semi-structured interview form that includes open-ended questions that the researcher created by consulting the opinions of experts in the field. In the interview form, in order to reveal the experiences of the participants in the Public Personnel Selection Exam held during the pandemic process, some questions were asked about the motivation and anxiety of the students for the exam and the exam environment before and during the exam. Parenthesis and imaginary variation steps were followed in order to reveal the essence of the experiences in the analysis of the obtained data. Based on the experiences obtained from the participants, the Public Personnel Selection Exam conducted during the pandemic process has caused the effects of grind, excessive sweating, inadequacy of measures, air conditioning problem and loss of focus in students. In addition, it was emphasized by the participants that the exam date changed, the exam was in the summer, the air temperature was high during the exam, the use of air conditioning was officially banned, and the situation of obeying social distance rules was ignored.

1. INTRODUCTION

The general name of infectious and epidemic diseases that have negative effects as a result of spreading in many continents and countries worldwide is called pandemic (<http://www.medipol.com.tr>). In addition to the measures taken by people to avoid the disease during the epidemic period, the states imposing some restrictions in social life in order to protect their citizens have greatly affected societies. Social life has changed from the past and the distance between people has grown considerably. Sharp changes have occurred in human life in almost many areas, from family relationships to school, from work to meeting with friends. The mask has become an integral part of our lives, and the HES code application, where people check whether they are healthy or not, has become an integral part of our lives, just like our identity numbers. One of the changes that occurred in human life during the epidemic period was the field of education. With the decisions taken by the Ministry and YÖK, during the epidemic period, face-to-face education was interrupted and distance education was initiated. In addition, it is aimed to overcome this process by ensuring that certain measures are taken in the examinations held throughout the country in order to protect the students from the disease.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all educational institutions updated their programs during the pandemic process and brought regulations to their educational programs (Akgül and Oran, 2020: 18). The OSYM institution, which conducts the Public Personnel Selection Exam, is one of the institutions that make arrangements during the pandemic process. Public Personnel Selection Exam is a test that determines people to work in public institutions and organizations within the borders of the Republic of Turkey.

This study was prepared to examine the experiences of social studies teacher candidates regarding the public personnel selection examination (KPSS) during the pandemic process. Covid-19 virus, which has recently spread all over the world, has caused some changes in people's living standards. Individuals had to take some precautions to protect themselves from the effects of the virus. Situations such as not entering crowded environments, not entering communities without a protective mask, communicating at distances that minimize the risk of transmission of the virus called social distance, and paying attention to cleanliness are the most prominent measures. Although this process, which was experienced in the early days, was a situation that people were not used to, over time, all people paid attention to these measures in order to protect their health.

In addition to the measures taken by individuals against the epidemic, states have also taken some measures at the national level to protect their citizens. Restriction of international transportation, the obligation of national level transportation to be realized in some standards (HEPP code etc.), curfew restrictions, limited number of people in the venues, etc. can be listed as. In addition, interruption of education and initiation of distance education, and conducting exams with distance education are among the measures. Within the scope of the measures taken, it is also very important that some arrangements are made in the examinations carried out throughout the country. Among these exams, Public Personnel Selection Exam, Academic Postgraduate Education Exam (ALES) and Foreign Language Proficiency, etc. there are exams.

In the study, it is very important in terms of giving an idea to the authorities about the exams to be carried out in case the possible epidemic continues by revealing the experiences of the students in the exams carried out during the epidemic period. Considering that these exams attended by individuals are an integral part of educational life, some arrangements can be made in the process of conducting these exams, unlike normal periods. This study is important in terms of bringing suggestions to the mentioned problem and guiding future studies in this field. In this context, the answers to the following questions were sought in the study:

- What is your experience regarding the exam buildings where KPSS was held during the pandemic period?
- What are your experiences regarding the troubles caused by the uncertainty of KPSS dates due to the pandemic?
- What are your experiences regarding the KPSS duration before the pandemic and the KPSS duration of the pandemic period to remain constant?
- What are your experiences regarding KPSS day transportation during the pandemic period?

2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research and the problem situation are very important in determining the pattern to be used in the research. For this reason, phenomenology design was used among qualitative research designs in accordance with the purpose and problem of the study. It aims to reveal the experiences of the participants regarding the phenomenon addressed in phenomenology studies. For this reason, the analyzes of the data obtained in phenomenology studies differ from the analyzes made in other qualitative research designs (Yılmaz & Şahin, 2016). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) describe phenomenology studies as studies aiming to examine and interpret individual perceptions in order to reveal detailed opinions about a situation we are aware of.

Participants

This study was carried out through face-to-face interviews with 10 teacher candidates who graduated from the department of social studies teaching, who participated in the Public Personnel Selection Exam held in 2020. Appropriate and convenience sampling method was used while determining the study group. In the appropriate and convenience sampling method, the researcher chooses a situation that is easy to reach (Kılıç, 2013: 44). Because reachable people were selected considering the limitations in time, economic situation and conditions. Within the scope of the study, people who participated in the Public Personnel Selection Exam held during the epidemic period were selected from the close environment in terms of accessibility. Participants of the study were expressed as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10. 5 of the participants are women and 5 of them are men. 8 of the participants participated in the KPSS, which was also carried out in the pre-epidemic period, and this is important in terms of comparing the experiences of the pre-epidemic period and the examinations carried out during the epidemic period and revealing these experiences. Information of the participants is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Codes of Participants	Gender	Conduction Entering KPSS in the Pre-Epidemic Period
P1	Male	Yes
P2	Female	No
P3	Male	Yes
P4	Female	Yes
P5	Female	Yes
P6	Male	Yes
P7	Male	No
P8	Female	Yes
P9	Male	Yes
P10	Female	Yes

Data Collection Tools

Computer, voice recorder, pen, eraser and semi-structured interview form were used as data collection tools.

Data Collection

In the collection of data, the first literature review was made on the subject. Literature review is the collection of data by making use of various sources and documents in order to complete the deficiencies in the literature on the subject to be researched (Timmins and McCabe, 2005: 41-42). Later, within the scope of the research, research questions to be asked to social studies teacher candidates who entered KPSS during the pandemic period were prepared. The research questions were finalized by taking the opinions of 3 academicians who received their expertise in the field of social studies education. Within the scope of the study, the data were obtained through semi-structured interview forms. During the meeting, open-ended questions were asked to the participants in order to reveal their experiences regarding KPSS during the epidemic period. In order to reveal the essence of the experiences in the interviews, additional questions were asked in line with the responses of the participants. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The audio recordings obtained during the interviews with the participants were firstly transferred to the Microsoft Office Word file in computer environment and converted into text. It was tried to reveal the essence of the experiences by examining the recorded sound recordings with a holistic perspective. While analyzing the data, a process was followed such as stripping the researcher's own thoughts and value judgments about the phenomenon he wanted to reveal, determining semantic units based on the document obtained from the interviews, forming themes based on the determined semantic units and expressing them.

The answers given by the social studies teacher candidates to the questions in the interview form were collected in 46 codes in the first place. Later, these codes were associated with each other and this number was reduced to 18. These codes are: Waiting in a queue that looks like long queues, not operating air conditioners, pollution of toilets, the windows to were broken, table and chair excess, tired of waiting, fall in despair, increased anxiety, lose the excitement, inability to focus, be alarmed, pessimism, concern about not being able to complete the exam on time, fear of being late, tension, worry of getting an illness, crowded, traffic jam.

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data. It is necessary to examine the data obtained in the content analysis in detail and to clarify the data (Tedmem, Palancı, Kandemir, & Dündar, 2014: 433). The reliability of the study was calculated as 94.5% [Percentage of Agreement = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100] according to the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994).

4. FINDINGS

Similar questions were asked to all of the participants in the study. The variety of questions was increased in order to reveal the experiences of the participants in a meaningful way during the interview. It was seen that the participants talked about the existence of the following components while conveying their experiences regarding KPSS before and during the epidemic period. Accordingly, the components of the experiences for KPSS during the epidemic period are as follows:

1. Inadequacy of the exam buildings: One of the topics that the participants especially focus on is the thought that the exam buildings do not have enough equipment suitable for the epidemic period. The fact that the exam coincides with the summer months and the air temperature is quite high for this reason, and the prohibition of the use of coolers that have an effect on the temperature of the environment during the exam draw attention as the negative experience of the participants during the exam. In addition, it is another experience that the measures taken at the entrance to the exam buildings cause physical fatigue and stress for the participants.

2. Uncertainty of the exam dates: Participants stated that they felt the effects of the changes in the exam dates with the implementation of the measures taken during the epidemic period. They stated that the KPSS carried out during the epidemic period caused the stress and anxiety on students to reach the highest level.

3. Remain constant of exam durations: It has been observed that the measures taken during the epidemic period caused the teacher candidates who took the exam to have difficulties in terms of time. Participants stated that factors such as air temperature, use of masks during the exam, their anxiety in the exam environment (possibility of disease transmission, etc.) reduce the maximum exam duration under normal conditions. Therefore, they have demonstrated the experience that the exam period can be stretched a little differently from the normal period.

4. Difficulty of transportation: In the interviews, the participants stated in the entrance information to the KPSS during the epidemic period that the exam places are generally reached by vehicle. Apart from the participants who provide transportation by private vehicle, those who use public transportation (7 people) stated that they experienced anxiety due to the epidemic. They also stated that the occupancy of public transportation vehicles and waiting in line in public transportation caused them stress.

Findings regarding the experiences of social studies teacher candidates regarding the exam buildings where KPSS was held during the pandemic period

Table 2

Table of Theme and Codes Regarding the Insufficiency of Exam Buildings from the Participants' KPSS Experience

Themes	Cods	Participants
Inadequacy of exam buildings	Waiting in a queue that looks like long queues	P3,P7,P9,P10
	Not operating air conditioners	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
	Pollution of toilets	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
	The windows to were broken	P1, P8, P10
	Table and chair excess	P3, P7

When Table 2 is examined, all of the participants stated that the air conditioners that were not operated due to the measures taken in the KPSS during the epidemic period, within the scope of the insufficiency of the exam buildings, had a great impact on them. P3 of these participants: *“There was a very warm environment during the exam. I was so sweaty that twice the supervisor told me that my exam might be invalid in case of liquid contact with the exam booklet and the optic I marked, and I should be careful about it. We are not allowed to bring any objects from outside into the exam halls. The dress I was wearing was soaked when I got out of the exam hall. I am a person who normally sweats a lot. My encounter with something like this on the exam caused my exam to be terrible.”* his expressed opinion as.

Findings regarding the experiences of social studies teacher candidates regarding the troubles caused by the uncertainty of KPSS dates due to the pandemic

Table 3

Theme and Codes Table for the Uncertainty of Exam Dates from Participants' KPSS Experience

Themes	Cods	Participants
Uncertainty of Exam Dates	Tired of waiting	P1, P4,P5, P8, P9,
	Fall in despair	P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10
	Increased anxiety	P2, P4, P5, P6, P7
	Lose the excitement	P1, P3, P4, P5 P8, P10

Inability to focus

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10

According to Table 3, the participants stated that they could not focus on the exam due to the changes in the exam dates and the date of the exam was not specified, they were tired of waiting for the exam, they lost the excitement of the exam, their anxiety about the exam increased and they fell into despair. The uncertainty in the exam dates also caused a decrease in the confidence of the participants about the exam. P10 of the participants: *"While waiting for the exam, I was almost depressed. On the one hand, I cannot focus on the lesson, on the other hand, is there any continuous improvement? I followed the news sites. Actually, I prepared very well for the exam, but when I heard that the exam was postponed, my concentration deteriorated. This ruined my enthusiasm for the exam."* her expressed opinion as.

Another participant P5: *"The exam date was determined before starting to prepare for the exam. I made all my plans according to that date. As for the epidemic process and restrictions, there was a delay in the exam date. I had to change my plans. Inevitably, a comfort arose in me at first. I started to constantly hinder my study plan. However, the speculation that emerged in the public opinion about the dates of the exams in the future made me nervous. It was a very mentally exhausting process. Will the test date change? What will I do if the exam is done earlier? I wish I stuck to my plan! I was constantly talking to myself in my mind. This made me very nervous. As time progressed, my excitement for the exam was ending because I thought I would fail the exam. I was not motivated for the exam and was having a problem of not being able to focus on the subjects. It was a difficult process and I was very worn out."* her expressed opinion as.

Findings regarding the experiences of pre-service social studies teachers regarding the KPSS duration before the pandemic and the KPSS duration of the pandemic period

Table 4

Theme and Codes Table of the Participants' KPSS Experiences to Keep Exam Duration

Themes	Cods	Participants
Exam durations remain constant	Be alarmed	P1, P4, P5, P8, P9,
	Pessimism	P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10
	Concern about not being able to complete the exam on time	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10

Considering Table 4, the participants' negative opinions about the duration of the exam emerged in the KPSS, which they had entered during the epidemic period. It has been stated that the exam conducted in the pre-epidemic period and the exam conducted during the epidemic period did not take place under the same conditions. Prolonged understanding of the questions due to the measures taken during the exam and the ambient temperature are the situations expressed by the participants. In this context, P2, one of the participants: *"During the exam, the weather was very hot and everyone was wearing a mask. I did not take off my mask to avoid any reaction. The difficulty in my breath control with the mask caused me to think twice about solving the questions. I attended most of the exams held in the normal period. While the previous exams were mostly affected by the noise coming from outside, I cannot say the same things in this exam held during the epidemic period. Everyone was staring at him when one of the candidates coughed. Therefore, I was afraid of coughing even if my throat was irritated during the exam. For such reasons, I could not focus on the exam. I am sure other candidates faced a similar problem. By the time I got to the middle of the exam, my time was very short. After the exam was over, I was angry with myself for not being able to complete the exam."* her expressed opinion as.

Findings regarding the experiences of social studies teacher candidates regarding KPSS day transportation during the pandemic period

Table 5

Theme and Codes Table of Participants Regarding Transportation Difficulties from KPSS Experience

Themes	Cods	Participants
Transportation difficulty	Fear of being late	P1, P4,K5, P8, P9
	Tension	P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10
	Worry of getting an illness	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10
	Crowded	P1, P3, P4, P5 P8, P10
	Traffic jam	P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10

When Table 5 is examined, the situations encountered by the participants during their entrance to the KPSS are included in codes. Participants stated that the necessity of taking a certain number of citizens to public transportation vehicles within the scope of the measures, creates a problem for the individuals who use public transportation at the entrance to KPSS. Among the findings of this study are the high risk of disease transmission in public transportation and the tension caused by traveling with other people in a closed environment in hot weather despite the attention to social distance. Participants who do not use public transportation and reach the exam building by private vehicles are observed to complain about the traffic density. However, citizens who want to minimize the risk of transmission of the disease during the epidemic period are thought to cause traffic density as they mostly use their private vehicles in transportation. The main reason for the participants to think that they will be late for the exam is due to the limited number of public transportation available. Among the participants who support these thoughts, P5: *"I have to use public transportation to reach the exam building. My father does not have a car. Our relatives do not want to go out much during this process. I constantly received excuses and negative answers from people I asked to take me to the exam. In order not to be dependent on anyone, I set out 2.5 hours before the exam with double masks and the cologne I took with me. It was crowded when I got to the bus stop. The majority were people who took the exam. I saw that the buses continued their services without paying much attention to social distance and limited number of passengers. This made me very nervous. So I decided to wait for municipal public transportation. However, the municipality's public transportation vehicles had certain durations. They did not travel outside of those times. I was very worried while waiting for the city buses, if I could not get on the bus, I would have to go to the exam with the minibus and I could get sick. I was able to arrive at the exam building 25 minutes before the exam on the way I left 2.5 hours before the exam time. While I was on the bus, I was constantly angry with myself and those who caused me to use public transportation in this process for fear of not being able to catch the exam. If the epidemic continues, I will do my best not to go to the exams I will take by public transport."* her expressed opinion as.

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many researchers have produced works related to the Public Personnel Selection Exam. What makes this study different from other studies is that it is one of the rare studies that reveal the experiences of teacher candidates who have entered KPSS during the pandemic process. As it is known, KPSS was carried out for the first time in the pandemic process in 2020 and the subject is up-to-date. In this respect, this study differs from many studies conducted under the topic of KPSS.

Considering the studies in which teacher candidates' opinions or experiences about KPSS are examined, it is seen that the same results are obtained in most of the studies. Gündoğdu, Çimen, and Turan (2008) emphasized in their article "Opinions of Teacher Candidates Regarding the Public Personnel Selection

Examination (KPSS)" that the KPSS economically, socially and psychologically worn out the pre-service teachers who took the exam and negatively affected the anxiety levels of the pre-service teachers who took the exam. Sezgin and Duran (2011) stated in their article titled "Reflections of Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) on Academic and Social Lives of Teacher Candidates", that KPSS is not suitable for qualified teacher appointments and KPSS negatively affects social, cultural and sports activities. On the other hand, Atav and Sönmez (2013) revealed in their article "Opinions of Teacher Candidates on Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS)" that KPSS negatively affected the undergraduate education and social lives of prospective teachers.

Similarly, Karataş and Güleş (2013) stated in their article "Assessment of the Central Exam Based on Teacher Appointments (KPSS) According to the Opinions of Pre-service Teachers" KPSS does not fully measure the knowledge of pre-service teachers and causes anxiety in pre-service teachers. Güven and Dak (2017) stated in their article titled "Visual Metaphors Created by Teacher Candidates for the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS)", they stated that KPSS was necessary, but the exam created an unnecessary competition environment among pre-service teachers and caused stress and anxiety.

As we mentioned above, similar results have emerged in the works of Gündoğdu, Çimen and Turan (2008), Sezgin and Duran (2011), Atav and Sönmez (2013), Güven and Dak (2017), Karataş and Güleş (2013). In this study, the problems faced by the social studies teacher candidates entering the KPSS during the pandemic process were emphasized and the experiences of the teacher candidates were revealed.

In our study, it has been revealed that KPSS, which was carried out during the epidemic period, has become a very difficult process for the candidates. The possibility of changing the exam dates, the deficiencies encountered in the exam buildings, the transportation problem and the fact that the exam period remains the same as if it was in the normal period are some of the important problems expressed by the candidates. The fact that the measures taken in these exams, which are carried out all over the country, by looking only at the window of the authorities, can be considered as one of the reasons for the difficulties experienced by the candidates taking the exam. Due to the fact that the exam date coincides with the summer months, high air temperatures in places geographically close to arid regions have been ignored. Beyond that, the prohibition of the use of cooling devices during the exam caused the teacher candidates to cope not only with the exam but also with the weather conditions. Candidates expressed the opinion that masks and disinfectants distributed for use in exam environments are a very good experience for candidates, but the use of masks during the exam affects the individual biologically (breathing, depression, etc.), and the candidates have expressed the opinion that the exam time is insufficient.

Based on the findings and results, the following suggestions can be made:

- On the days of the Public Personnel Selection Exam, necessary facilities can be provided under state control (free transportation, additional expedition, etc.) to ensure that teacher candidates who will take the exam can reach the exam halls in a healthier and faster way.
- By increasing the number of buildings where the Public Personnel Selection Exam is held, the number of teacher candidates who will take the exams in the buildings can be reduced and a healthier examination environment can be created.
- The temperatures in the halls of the buildings where the Public Personnel Selection Exam is held can be arranged in a way that will not disturb students (classrooms where the sun does not cause disturbance may be preferred).
- Flexibility can be made in the examination time of the Public Personnel Selection Exam held during the pandemic period. Thus, the problems of teacher candidates who are suffering from this issue can be eliminated.
- Alternative exam dates can also be determined while determining the dates of the Public Personnel Selection Exam. Thus, alternative solutions to unexpected problems are developed on exam dates.
- ALES, DGS, YKS, YÖKDİL, TUS etc. Studies similar to this study on exams can also be done.

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