

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Misconceptions of high school students related to the conceptions of absolutism and constitutionalism in history courses

**Mehmet Suat Bal**

Department of History, KSU Faculty of Arts and Science, Kahramanmaraş/Turkey. E-mail: [suatbal@hotmail.com](mailto:suatbal@hotmail.com).  
Tel: 00905054173377.

Accepted 17th January, 2011

**The goal of this study is to analyze the 10th grade high school students' misconceptions related to the sense of ruling in the Ottoman State during the absolutist and constitutional periods and to investigate the causes of these misconceptions. The data were collected through eight open-ended questions related to the concepts of absolutism and constitutionalism in the Ottoman History lesson. Descriptive analysis was carried out through the written answers by students. The study was applied to two hundreds of 10th grade students (16 to 17 years old). Data analysis suggests several causes of students' misconceptions for the conceptions under consideration, due to the fact that students cannot understand the complicated structure of ruler ship depending on different periods. They use the contemporary moral and religious values when they interpret these concepts. They are affected by the exaggerated images of rulers in media. Also, they forget some of the concepts in the subjects while they remember some others. Based on all these observations, the paper makes following suggestions: the language of history courses should be simplified; plans for concept teaching should be carried out during the courses. Also, students should have frequent exercises of thinking over historical concepts.**

**Key words:** History teaching, misconception, Ottoman history concepts, absolutism, constitutionalism.

## INTRODUCTION

### Concept teaching and history concepts

Concept teaching can be regarded as the backbone of history teaching. People build up their knowledge of a particular subject onto the key concepts of that subject (Bruner, 1991: 87). For learning to take place in History courses, such concepts specific to history as main source, causes, effects and transformations need to be comprehended (Lee, 2005: 31). Students who learn historical concepts understand relations, events, institutions and altogether life during a specific period in history. The basic and historical thinking capabilities, students are expected to have, can be raised to a higher level via correct teaching of concepts (Dilek, 2002: 68; Akınoğlu and Diriöz, 2007: 21-23). The history curriculum prepared and put into practice in 2008 in Turkey share this common target and achievement: "The goal of curriculum of history course is to develop basic and historical thinking capabilities via its target achievements." (TTKB, 2008: 7).

The related studies carried out in England in 1960s and 1970s concentrated on the historical thinking capabilities of children. Charlton et al.(2002) have carried out studies on this matter (Lee, 1995: 50-52). In Turkey, Safran (2009), Dilek (2002), Şimşek (2005), Ata(2008), Demircioğlu (2007), Doğanay (2002) and Akınoğlu (2007) have carried out studies on the historical thinking capabilities of students.

Misconception is one of the main problems encountered during concept teaching which plays a big role in the achievement of historical thinking capabilities. Therefore, recent educational surveys investigating student development have focused on "misconception." From 1970s onwards, the followers of Piaget have listened to what students, thinking in a way different than adults, say and they have focused on the mistakes of students (Smith et al., 1993: 4). Students are expected to make mistakes and in this respect, Neshet says students

are experts of mistakes (Nesher, 1987:33). However, if the majority of students make mistakes in certain subjects, the roots of these mistakes should be investigated and the necessary measurements should be taken.

### **Difficulties encountered during concept teaching in history courses**

In history teaching, the first problem encountered by the student is to recall a historical event or concept. Then, the student is to go through the process of thinking over the recalled event or concept. However, in science teaching, the student is generally provided with the numbers and information and in this respect science teaching differs from history teaching (Lee, 1995: 50-52). The process of recalling historical events is a difficult one because historical memory is highly selective. While events that are remarkable and maintain their influence until today are not forgotten, others are not even remembered (Wineburg, 2000: 322).

The second difficulty encountered in history teaching is to understand and interpret historical concepts. Several studies point out that students either have difficulty understanding the concepts in history books or misunderstand them. For example, in 1953, Gal revealed the fact that students of 10 to 16 years in France have great difficulty in understanding concepts of coup, reform, provisional government and uprising. Coltham has determined that concepts of king, trade and invasion are either misunderstood or are not understood by students of 10 years or more in England (Berti, 1994: 50). In Turkish context, findings do not fare any better. Several studies repeatedly provide evidence that students have serious difficulties in understanding concepts included in history courses (Akinoğlu and Arslan, 2007: 150; Yazıcı and Samancı, 2003; Bektaş and Bilgili, 2004: 130-135; Kaldırım, 2005: 1; Bal, 2009: 7; Bal, 2010: 2068).

While history deals with events within a chronological time, it uses social, economic and political concepts in an unclear way not usual for daily life (Berti, 1994: 49). This leads students to have difficulties in understanding and interpreting concepts which are not used in daily life and which bear a different meaning in each period in history. Also, the age of students plays an important role in the comprehension of concepts. Especially younger students have a limited understanding of the social, economic and political concepts (Berti, 1994: 50).

To Berti (1994: 50), the main reason behind misconceptions is that students cannot work out a relation between a part and the whole. Students bind parts together in a linear way, but they cannot come up with a conclusion (Lee et al, 2001:113). In their works on political concepts, Connell et al. (1971, 1985) have shown that children under 10 to 11 cannot understand political concepts (Cited in Berti, 1994: 50). At the age of 11 to 12, students reach the abstract mental phase of

deduction merely through hypotheses (Piaget, 2004: 87). For instance, as students go through grade levels and as they become more mature, they come to understand political concepts related to the structure of the government in a better way (Berti, 1994: 71). Studies have also shown that differences between historical thinking capabilities of students of 16 to 17 years from different nations decrease as students get more mature (Lee et al., 2001:114). The very same concepts can take different meanings in different locations and at different times. These differences lead to profound historical misconceptions (Berti, 1994: 50). Lee (2005:31) asserts that it is easy to have misconceptions about history. He goes on to explain this tendency to have misconceptions as such: A farmer and a soldier in the past do not correspond to the farmer and the soldier today. Similarly, sense of freedom in the past is different from the sense of freedom today. Students use modern concepts to explain historical events (Lee et al., 2001: 113). Historical terms such as massacre, democracy and freedom might have different meanings than their contemporary use. On the other hand, strong feelings of recent past may attach different meanings to historical terms. The terms fascism, colonialism, dictatorship and racism can be examples to such terms. In such cases, students who are stuck between their own moral judgment and certain historical explanations have great difficulties in interpreting these concepts (Berti, 1994: 53).

All historical events have taken place at different times and under different conditions. They have bred different consequences. Students keep a historical event in their memory; however, they face a contradiction and have a difficulty when they have to explain a different historical event. A historian analyzes and assesses two different events within their unique circumstances; yet students often do not have such an assessment (Lee, 2005: 60). Students face obstacles in those situations which require them to think analytically with an eye to economic, religious, political and social facts adherent to an historical event.

It is of serious difficulty for students to separate political and religious causes of historical events (Lee et al., 2001: 113). This is because political and religious matters are mainly evaluated on the basis of personal values rather than formal reasoning. Therefore; students are influenced by their personal feelings, beliefs, manners and emotions when they make an evaluation. Another problem encountered is that students who have different personal traits and feelings have to explain the past in accordance with adults' thoughts (Husband and Pendry, 2002: 129). Some of the misconceptions by students arise from their confusion about the historical events. Even then, students try to understand and interpret historical events although it is beyond their level of knowledge (Husband and Pendry, 2002: 129).

To Berti (1994: 56), the main difficulties encountered in the learning of historical concepts include:

1. Students do not know the meaning of concepts used in the course books.
2. The explanations by students do not correspond to the ones as understood today and are based on wrong interpretations.
3. Students know the meaning of a concept peculiar to one particular era of history.
4. Students cannot understand the complicated structure of the hierarchical organizations.

### Misconception

Delusion is a state of considering the right as wrong, or the other way around. Misconception is a form of delusion which manifests an incorrect comprehension, a regular fault or a cognitive disorder a student has (Bingölbali and Özmantar, 2009:3). Students produce consistent errors as a result of a misconception (Zembar, 2008: 2). To Hammer (1996: 1319) in the eyes of the students, such answers are plausible and useful. Therefore, students who have misconceptions can justify their wrong answers and are certain about the correctness of their answers (Eryılmaz and Sürmeli, 2002: 110). This is because misconceptions are often sensible constructs to the students who are not even aware that they have misconceptions. Misconception is referred to in literature with the following terms: prejudice, alternative understanding, immature comprehension, immature thought, and immature theory (Smith et al., 1993: 9-10).

The causes of misconception can be classified under three main categories (Bingölbali and Özmantar, 2009:3).

1. Epistemology: Difficulties arising due to the distinctive nature of the concept itself.
2. Psychology: difficulties arising due to student's personal development, capacity and ability to understand the field. Bloom divides the pre-learning process required to learn a specific unit into two parts being cognitive and affective introductory behaviors. Cognitive introductory behaviors are defined as the knowledge, skill and capacity required in learning a new unit. Affective introductory behaviors are defined as the complicated combination of interests, approaches and opinions of the individuals (Bloom, 1998: 37, 39, 87). The past experiences of students have positive and negative effects on them, which in turn shape their frame of mind. Cognitive development takes place with information provided for the student in a planned way in the class; however, the capacity of the student makes a difference. Asubel (1968: 128-130) notes that the capacity of a student is shaped by such independent variables as his/her perceptions, desires and motivations which are among personal traits. Vygotsky (1985: 120) puts that purposive attention, logical memory, abstraction, comparison and differentiation are the preconditions required to learn concepts.

3. Pedagogy: difficulties arising due to the teaching method(s) and/or teaching materials including textbooks and tools. These are factors such as the teaching models selected, the implementation of these models, the metaphors, analogies and course books used by the teacher, the order and the way in which subjects and concepts are dealt with in course books and curricula. To Bruner (1991: 35), the three effective forces influencing the understanding capacity of the student are the manner of expression, the practical contextualization of the subject, and its effective power. It is generally known that text books are the basic sources of information and shape the knowledge of the student (Vansledright, 2008: 117). The correct use of materials and methods of a history course by teachers has a substantial influence on cognitive development (Dilek, 2009: 3). The perspective of the department and the school plays an important role in concept teaching (Bingölbali and Monaghan, 2008: 32).

### Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to analyze the 10th grade high school students' misconceptions related to the sense of ruling in the Ottoman State during the absolutist and constitutional periods and to investigate the causes of misconceptions if there is any. Within the history of most world states, a transition from absolutist regime to republican administration is encountered. In this respect, the study deals with a widespread case. As a result, it sets an example for other states to investigate the discussed concepts among their own students. In this study, students' conceptions regarding the following concepts are investigated: absolutism, custom-based and religion-based rules, *divan-ı humayun* (the Supreme Court), authority, the reforms of *Tanzimat* and *Islahat*, *Meclis-i Mebusan*, *Kanun-i Esasi* (The Ottoman First Basic Law)

### METHOD

A descriptive method was used for the study. This method was used because our intention was to describe the level of students' understanding of the concepts related to absolutism and constitutionalism in Ottoman history courses (Karasar, 2009: 77).

In the study, we had a diverse set of data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Also, it was our goal to reach concrete results. A descriptive analysis was carried out to introduce the findings obtained in an arranged and explicated way (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 89-224).

### Data collecting tools

The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect data. It included eight open-ended questions about the concepts of absolutism and constitutionalism in Ottoman history courses. These concepts were among those covered by History Curriculum Scripts for the 10<sup>th</sup> Graders (TTKB, 2008). Following the evaluation of the responses to

survey questions, some students who had misconceptions were selected for interview. The opinions of candidate teachers, teachers and educational specialists were taken into consideration to control the preparation process and validity of the questionnaire. Students gave their written answers to the questions in a classroom environment. The written responses of the students were divided into categories and then evaluated.

### Population and sample

Our population is the provinces of Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep, Turkey. Our sample composes of 200 students randomly selected from state schools of different economic and social environments. The age of students ranged between 16 and 17 years.

### FINDINGS

Students were given the open-ended questions below which are related to sense of ruling during the periods of absolutism and constitutionalism in Ottoman history courses. The responses of the students are divided into groups as shown in Table 1 and their frequency and percentage are calculated. The students in the first group had the expected correct response to the questions. The students in the other groups fell into different misconceptions.

The first group was composed of students (72.5%) who defined absolutism as rule by a single person and who correctly stated that the Ottoman Empire had an absolutist regime. To define how broad the authority of the sultan was, the 175<sup>th</sup> student had the expression "As a toy in the hands of the sultan." The 131<sup>st</sup> student's comment on the Ottoman Empire was limited with his knowledge about the ruler of a particular period he knew, and he put "Abdulhamit II forced them to do this, yet I cannot have a comment on the previous periods since I have no idea about them." The second group was composed of students (1.5%) who said that absolutism was partly existent. The 111<sup>th</sup> student who put that absolutism was partly existent presented such a reason: "The Ottoman partly has it because they have a divan (council)." This student fell into a misconception because he thought the divan imposed restrictions on the sultan. The third group was made up of students (26%) who left the question unanswered or gave irrelevant answers.

Students mostly had difficulties in remembering the meaning of the term absolutism. The 142<sup>nd</sup> student verified this idea saying "I would answer it if I knew the meaning of the term." The 194<sup>th</sup> student knew that the sultan held authority in his hand in the Ottoman Empire, yet he did not know that the name of this ruling system. Therefore, he said "the sultan held authority and there was not an absolutist regime." The 93<sup>rd</sup> student answered to this question saying "there is not absolutism, but theocracy." This student thought that the Ottoman Empire was governed by theocratic rules, yet he fell into a misconception incorrectly thinking that a theocratic state cannot be ruled by absolutism. In this question, the

students in the first group (47%) defined customary and ecclesiastical rules and stated that the sultan had to obey the rules. The students in the second group (8.5%) only made a reference only to ecclesiastical rules and stated that the sultans had to obey these rules. These students who thought the sultans had to obey religious rules due to the theocratic structure of the Ottoman Empire fell into a misconception because they disregarded customary rules. The 1<sup>st</sup> student defined customary law, yet he exemplified it thinking in a folkloric way and saying "customary laws such as dancing the halay..." This student thought that customary laws were enforced within the state, yet he could not understand their influences in the real life. The students in the third group (8%) only made a reference merely to the customary rules and stated that the sultans had to obey these rules. As opposed to the second group, those in this group disregarded religious rules. What the students in the fourth group (7.5%) did was only to define customary and ecclesiastical rules. These students could not explain how customary and ecclesiastical rules could affect state government. The students in the fifth group (10%) put that the sultan did not have to obey these rules. The 68<sup>th</sup> student who had this misconception gave such an answer: "They did not obey for their own interests." The 167<sup>th</sup> student who was of the same opinion noted "sultans obeyed these rules voluntarily." He meant the sultans did not have to obey these rules, but they obeyed on their own freewill. The sultan imagined by the students of this group had absolute authority. Therefore, a sultan would obey rules only on their own freewill. In parallel, the 131<sup>st</sup> student stated that sultans could act arbitrarily saying "some sultans did not obey." The students in the sixth group (19%) left the question unanswered or gave irrelevant answers.

In the third question, the students of the first group (39%) put that divan was an advisory council and it did not restrict the sultan's authority. The second group of students (28.5) who noted that divan worked like a council and restricted the sultan's authority fell into a misconception. The 168<sup>th</sup> student said "in some cases, the sultan had to obey the decisions taken by the divan". Thus, he noted it was obligatory to obey the decisions of the divan, but he thought that the absolute authority of the sultan could sometimes get ahead of these rules. The students in this group perceived the divan as a council because the state affairs were discussed there. Another reason why the students perceived the divan as a council might be because teachers often made an analogy between the divan and the council to facilitate understanding. The students in the second group (13.5%) fell into misconception saying that the divan is a sign of democratization. Like the students of the second group, these students ascribed meaning to the divan as a democratic council more advanced than an advisory council. They saw it as democratic action when the sultan took decisions in consultation with the council. The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant

answers (18.5%) were gathered in the final group.

The first group was composed of students (13.5%) who answered this question correctly with the following remark: "Both states were governed by absolutism. There were religious and customary rules restricting the authority of the Byzantium emperor." The second group was composed of students (17.5%) whose response was "the Byzantium Empire had broader authority." To this question, the 132<sup>nd</sup> student answered "both governances were the same, yet the Byzantium was governed more tyrannically." The 131<sup>st</sup> student said "because the Byzantium was disordered, the emperor had unlimited authority." While the former student considered the tyranny by the emperor as the factor broadening the emperor's authority, the latter saw the disorder in the country as such a factor. Yet, both of them fell into misconception. The 114<sup>th</sup> student who noted "not the independent emperors of the Byzantium, but the Ottoman was fair and just" thought that the authority of the sultan was restricted with a sense of justice. The 169<sup>th</sup> student who answered "in Byzantium, there was less respect for customs; the Ottoman was devoted to customs and religion" thought the Byzantium emperor had broader authority because there was less respect for customs and religion. The third group was composed of students (13.5%) whose response was "the Ottoman emperor had broader authority." The 151<sup>st</sup> student put "the Byzantium had a pope and the emperor was connected to the church and thus had restricted authority." Taking the influence of the pope on Europe into consideration, this student thought the pope would restrict the emperor's authority. Noting "the Ottoman had broader authority because it was larger," the 129<sup>th</sup> student fell into misconception because he set the limits of political authority in accordance with the power of the empire. The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant answers (55.5%) were gathered in the final group.

The first group was composed of students (49%) whose response to this question was "with these reforms, the Ottoman took the first steps towards democratization. The sultan restricted his authority by his own freewill."

The second group was composed of students (3.5%) who fell into misconception and replied "only the minorities were given broad rights with the reforms of Tanzimat and Islahat." The 165<sup>th</sup> students whose response was "the sultan was afraid of the minorities since they tried to divide the country" thought that the sultan declared these reforms to protect the integrity of the country. Similarly, the 170<sup>th</sup> student exaggeratedly criticized the rights given to the minorities noting "the authority entitled to the minorities was more than necessary." Students thought that these reforms were made with only the minorities taken into consideration. The third group was made up of students (1.5%) who fell into misconception and replied "with these reforms, total democracy dominated." These students considered the

sultan restricting his authority by his own freewill. Noting "the sultan lost his power with the reform of Tanzimat," the 173<sup>rd</sup> student proposed that the authority by the sultan was totally abolished. The 189<sup>th</sup> student who noted "the rayah began to select the sultan" thought these reforms brought about partial democracy. Yet, this student did not know which improvements took place with these reforms and he expressed his lack of knowledge with the right to elect and be elected, which is today the first thing that comes to one's mind when democracy is a matter of question. The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant answers (46%) were gathered in the final group.

The first group was composed of students (47.5%) who correctly answered "the constitutional regime is a semi-democratic regime in which the sultan and the council selected by the people had authority." The second group of students (7.5%) whose response was "Meclis-i Mebusan and Divan-ı Humayun were the same" fell into misconception. The third group of students (1.5%) also fell into misconception noting "the constitutional regime abolished the authority of the sultan." The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant answers (43.5%) were gathered in the fourth group. The 1<sup>st</sup> student's response to this question was "if it was the sultan who had the final word, there was absolutism." The students who could not comprehend the difference between absolutism and constitutionalism thought in this way.

The students (26.5%) who correctly answered "In the Ottoman regime, the authority of the sultan was restricted with laws" were gathered in the first group. Noting "the sultan had to obey the constitution," the 147<sup>th</sup> student expressed how much the authority by the sultan was restricted. The 165<sup>th</sup> student who was in the first group and thought the rights of the sultan were restricted proposed "it was dangerous to let minorities have rights in the council" and found it unfavorable to have the representatives of minorities in the council. The 135<sup>th</sup> student, who criticized Kanun-i Esasi in this respect, noted "Kanun-i Esasi raised difficulties for the Ottoman Empire."

The second group of students (3.5%) whose response was "the Ottoman Empire was totally democratized by Kanun-i Esasi" fell into misconception because they could not understand total democracy. The third group of students (24.5%) who replied "Kanun-i Esasi was the first step towards democratization" fell into misconception because they disregarded the concepts of the reforms of Tanzimat and Islahat. The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant answers (45.5%) were gathered in the fourth group.

The first group was composed of students (74.5%) who correctly replied "While the sultan had the final word in the Constitutional Regime, today in Turkey the general assembly of TGNA has the final word. Therefore, the latter is more democratic." The 140<sup>th</sup> student attributed the current state being more democratic to the selection

of the rulers by the people. The 151<sup>st</sup> student explained the reason why the Ottoman was less democratic with his statement “in constitutionalism, the sultan intervened in the council.” The 148<sup>th</sup> student responded “today, the country is more democratic because it has developed in the fields of education, health and military.” In this way, this student seemed to measure the level of democracy with progress and development, and built his correct answer onto misconceptions.

The second group was composed of one single student who replied “the authority by the council in the Constitutional Regime was broader.” The third group was composed of students (1.5%) whose response was “there is no difference between the two regimes.” The 165<sup>th</sup> student fell into misconception with his response “if the president of the Republic has the final word, it is not much different than the Ottoman.” The 132<sup>nd</sup> student saw the two regimes almost alike noting “the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey are almost the same; the Republic of Turkey is better.” This arises from the fact that this student did not know the hierarchical structures of the ruling systems within these two states. The students who left this question unanswered or gave totally irrelevant answers (23.5%) were gathered in the fourth group.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that students have important misconceptions related to the concepts of absolutism and constitutionalism and these misconceptions are based on different reasons. Of the answers students gave to the whole questions, approximately 46.1% were correct, 19.1% contained misconceptions and 34.6% were unanswered or irrelevant. It is interesting that the number of students who have learned the concepts correctly is less than the half.

Considering the findings obtained from the first question, it can be seen that a great majority of the students (72.5%) knew that the Ottoman had absolutism. The students (1.5%) who fell into misconception did not deliver certain opinions because they did not exactly know the boundaries of absolutism in the Ottoman. They fell into misconception because they thought there was a partial absolutism. It is certain students knew that the Ottoman Empire was ruled by a sultan. However, they fell into misconception because they did not know such a regime was called absolutism. Students have difficulty in understanding the uncommonly used concepts in historical texts. In this respect, it can be understood from the studies that students do not understand most of the historical concepts not used today (Akınoğlu and Arslan, 2007:150; Bal, 2010: 2068; Bektaş and Bilgili, 2004: 130-135, Berti, 1994: 50).

In the second question, nearly half of the students (47%) defined ecclesiastical and customary rules and

correctly noted that the sultan had to obey these rules. The students (8.5%) who fell into misconception saying that the sultan had to obey only the ecclesiastical rules considered religious rules as an obligation and thought the sultan had to obey these obligatory rules. The students in this group considered customary rules as certain moral rules in the society and thought it was not obligatory to obey these rules. The students in the third group (8%) thought the sultan had to obey customary rules and they fell into misconception disregarding ecclesiastical rules. The students in the fourth group (7.5%) knew the ecclesiastical and customary rules, yet they did not know whether these rules restricted the sultan or not. These three groups of students fell into misconception because they could not understand how a concept they knew was used or applied in a certain period in history. Lee (2005:60) puts that students have difficulty in using a concept in a different situation. The students in the fifth group (10%) stated that sultans had to obey neither ecclesiastical nor customary rules. They also fell into misconception. Considering the influence of religious or customary rules in their own lives, these three groups of students thought that one or both of these rules could be negligible. The proportion of answers to this question is high because religious and customary rules still direct lives of Turkish society even today. However, students have difficulty interpreting religious, customary and political issues in history. Lee et al. (2001: 113) point out that it is a great challenge for students to evaluate political and religious matters.

In the third question, while the first group of students (39%) gave correct answers, the second group of students (29%) who had misconceptions mistook the divan with the council and thought the divan restricted the authority by the sultan. The fact that Turkish teachers tend to associate the institute of the divan with the council of ministers to facilitate understanding might be the reason why students constantly considered the divan as the council (Ata, 2008:312). The third group of students (13.5%) fell into misconception regarding the organization of the divan as a sign of democratization. The reason why the students fell into this misconception is that the divan was considered as a council restricting the authority of the sultan. As Berti (1994:56) has remarked, students have difficulty in understanding the complicated structure of political organizations in history courses.

In the fourth question, while 13.5% of the students gave correct answers, the second (17.5%) and the third (13.5%) group of the students fell into misconception comparing the authority by the Byzantium emperors and the Ottoman sultans. The students who marked that the Byzantium emperor held too much authority attributed this to the emperor being oppressive, ignorant of traditions and unjust. These commentaries which drove the students into misconception could arise from the general description of the oppressive Byzantium emperor in movies and stories. In parallel, the students regarded

the Ottoman sultans as just and tolerant and therefore having restricted their authorities. These incorrect commentaries might arise from the fact that students cannot understand the relationship between moral rules and the governance of the state. We can see that a great majority of the students (55.5%) left the questions unanswered or gave irrelevant answers due to the same reason. As Lee (2005:60) has indicated, although students learn a concept during a subject in history courses, they have difficulty in interpreting the same concept within a different subject. Though the students mostly knew the concept of absolutism in the first question, they could not express that the Byzantium ruled by imperialism was an absolutist regime.

In the fifth question, while 49% of the students gave correct answers, the second group of students (3.5%) fell into misconception thinking that only the minorities were given rights with these reforms. The cause of this misconception could be the notion that these reforms were made under the pressure of European states to give right to the minorities. The third group of students (1.5%) thought democracy dominated in the country exaggerating the influence of the reforms. This misconception arises from the fact that students could not understand the transitional periods between absolutism and democracy (Berti, 1994:56). Nearly half of the students (46%) left this question unanswered or gave irrelevant answers because they had difficulty in understanding the concepts related to governance of the state. As indicated by Wineburgh (2000:322), historical memory is selective; that is, those events drawing attention and maintaining their presence until today can be remembered.

In the sixth question, while 47.5% of the students gave correct answers, the second group of students (7.5%) who fell into misconception considered *meclis-i mebusan* and *divan-ı humayun* as the same. The third group of students (1.5%) who fell into misconception noted that the sultan was dispossessed of his authority in the constitutional regime. The proportion of students who left this question unanswered or gave irrelevant answers was 43.5%. In this question, the students had difficulty in understanding constitutionalism which is an interfacing regime between republicanism and absolutism. Actually, it is required to have a good knowledge about the types of ruling systems in order to differentiate between these concepts. The students who could not make such differentiation tended to equate all types of regimes in which there was an emperor or a sultan leading. It can be seen that questions related to the concepts such as the reform of *Tanzimat*, the reform of *Islahat* and Absolutism were mostly left unanswered or known only with their mostly known aspects because these concepts contained too much information and the students had lowered interest in them (Wineburg, 2000:322). The subject of minorities which brought about the interference of foreign states into the Ottoman Empire and led to the dismemberment

of the Empire was highly remembered by the students.

In the seventh question, the first group of the students (26.5%) marked that the authority of the sultan was restricted by *Kanun-i Esas-i*, the first constitution of the empire. As in the sixth question, the second group of students (3.5%) who fell into misconception thought that the Ottoman Empire was totally democratized through this constitution. These students could not understand the transitions during democratization periods. The third group of students (24.5%) fell into misconception considering *Kanun-i Esas-i* as the first movement towards democratization. In this question, nearly half of the students (45.5%) left the questions unanswered or gave irrelevant answers. The reason why the students left the question unanswered might be because they could not understand the term *Kanun-i Esas-i* or the innovations introduced by this constitution (Akınoğlu and Arslan, 2007: 150; Bal, 2010: 2068; Bektaş and Bilgili, 2004: 130-135, Berti, 1994: 50).

In the eighth question, the first group of the students (74.5%) compared the absolutist regime in the Ottoman with today's Turkey. They noted that today's Turkey is more democratic because the general assembly of TGNA has the final word in the administration. The second group of students (0.5%) had a misconception that the council had wider authority in absolutist regime. It can be inferred that the second and third groups of the students could not understand the difference between absolutism and republicanism. The students thought that there was no difference between the two systems now that they both had a constitution and a council. Those students could not understand that a particular historical concept can have different meanings in different periods (Lee et al., 2001:113). In addition, these students could not come up with a comparison because they could not understand the functions of the constitution and the parliament in today's Turkey. Noting "today, the country is more democratic because it has developed in the fields of education, health and military," the 148<sup>th</sup> student showed he measured the level of democracy with progress and development, and built his correct answer onto misconceptions. As Piaget (2007:143), indicated this student cannot integrate the part of his knowledge into a meaningful whole. Lee et al. (2001:113) point that in such cases; the student sets the parts along a linear line but could not derive a meaning.

On the basis of these considerations, the following conclusions as to the causes of misconceptions can be drawn:

1. The concepts included in the events may not be remembered (*Kanun-i Esas-i* was not remembered).
2. The lexical meaning of the concept may not be known (The meaning of absolutism was not known).
3. The information about a concept may not be transferred into different events (The sense of ruling in the Byzantium could not be explained).

4. The concept may include different political meanings (Constitutionalism as the joint administration by the council and the sultan, and conflict in authority)
5. The concept may not be used today (Ecclesiastical and customary rules).
6. The concept may be explained through modern value judgments (The notion that the sultan's authority will be restricted due to tolerance by him).
7. The concept may be known merely with its one aspect and only this aspect may be concentrated on (The reforms of Tanzimat and Islahat only for the minorities).

### Educational Implications

The language of history is complicated and difficult for students of secondary education. When taught, historical concepts should be associated with daily language so that they can be easily understood. Unless teachers know how students think about historical events and concepts, they have a limited chance to offer a solution to misconceptions. Teachers should take students' misconceptions into consideration during concept teaching. Students should be taught the process of expressing an opinion. If students are punished due to their views, this can severely limit their learning. (Bruner, 2009: 50). Even if incorrect, the opinions by students should be discussed in class environment. Taking the basic philosophy of constructivist philosophy into consideration, teachers should teach concepts in a planned way. In concept teaching, they should avoid description which may lead to misconceptions. With more space for concept maps, concept puzzles and concept networks, course books should be prepared with concept teaching methods. Academics should investigate the causes of misconceptions in their field on a more detailed and a larger scale, and they should announce their findings to help teachers and educators gain awareness. Media should avoid exaggerated descriptions which would introduce historical concepts and phenomena in a distorted way. On the other hand, students should be taught to evaluate historical information included in media. Students should learn to differentiate between a historical piece of information and the commentary by the newscaster. Students should improve their skills at reading, understanding, critically evaluating and expressing their judgments both orally and in writing.

### REFERENCES

- Akinoğlu O, Arslan Y (2007). Turkish Secondary School Students' Attainment Of History Concepts And Its Evaluation. *Kirgizistan Türkiye Manas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*. 18: 139-154.
- Akinoğlu O, Diriöz U (2007). *History Teaching and Creative Düşluncenin Geliştirilmesi Eleştirel*. New York: PegemA Publishing.
- Akkoç H (2006). Multiple representations of images suggests the concept of the Concept of Function. *Hacettepe University J. Educ.*, 30: 1-10.
- Akış S (2009). Concept Teaching in Social Studies. In: Safran M (eds) *Teaching Social Studies*. New York: PegemA Publishing. 67-90.
- Ausubel D P (1968). *Educational Psychology, A Cognitive View*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Ata B (2008). The Turkish Prospective History Teachers' Understanding of Analogy in History Education. In: Safran M, Dilek D (eds) 21. *Century Identity Citizenship and History Education*, New York: New Human Publishing House Publishing. 302-315.
- Bal MS (2009). A Research Amongst 6th and 7th Graders On The Concept Images of Democracy In Turkey. *The International Symposium on Democracy and Democracy Education in Europe*. Çanakkale: 187-195.
- Bal MS, Akiş A (2010). Misconceptions Faced In The Section About "Humans And Governance" In Social Science Lessons. *e-Journal of New World Sciences Academy*. 5 (4): 2061-2072.
- Bektaş Ö, Bilgili A (2004). Primary 7 Social Studies Grade Students, "The Culture of the Ottoman Civilization " Unit Misconceptions Related to the past history terms. *Karabekir J. Educ.*, 9: 119-136.
- Berti AE (1994). Children's Understanding The of Concept of The State. In: Carretero M, James F V (eds) *Cognitive And Instructional Processes In History And The Social Sciences*, Madrid. 49-77.
- Bingölbali E, Monaghan J (2008). Concept Image Revisited. *Educ. Stud. Math*. 68: 19-35.
- Bingölbali E, Özmantar M F (2009). Mathematical Misconceptions: Causes and Solutions Opportunities. In: Bingölbali M, Özmantar MF (eds) *Primary Mathematical Challenges Encountered and Solutions*, New York: PegemA Publishing. 1-30
- Bloom B S (1998). *Human Characteristics and School Learning*. (trans. by Ozcelik DA), Istanbul: Ministry of Education Publishing.
- Bruner J (2009). *Eğitim Süreci*. (trans. by Öztürk DA) Ankara: Pegem Publishing.
- Bruner J (1991). *Towards a Theory of Instruction*. (trans. by Arrival F, Gurkan T), Ankara University Publishing. Ankara, Turkey.
- Demircioğlu İ H (2007). *Student-Centered Approaches in History Teaching*. New York: Memorial Publishing.
- Dilek D (2009). The Reconstruction of the Past through Images: An Iconographic Analysis on the Historical Imagination Usage Skills of Primary School Pupils. *Educ. Sci.: Theory & Practice*. 9 (2): 3-58.
- Dilek D (2002). *History Lessons Learning and Intellectual Development*. New York: PegemA Publishing.
- Doğanay A (2002). Extension of the concepts and generalizations in teaching. In: Ozturk C, Dilek D (eds) in *The Book of Life Science and Social Studies*, New York: PegemA Publishing.
- Eryılmaz A, Sürmeli E (2002). Questions on Three-Phase Measurement of Students' Misconceptions of Heat and Temperature to areas. V. *National Science Congress*.
- Hammer D (1996). More Than Misconceptions: Multiple perspectives on student knowledge and reasoning, and an appropriate role for education research. *American Association of Physics Teacher*. 64 (10): 1316-1325.
- Husband C, Pendry A (2002). Thinking and Feeling Pupils' Preconceptions About The Past and Historical Understanding. In: Arthur J, Phillip R (eds) *Issues In History Teaching*. New York. 125- 129.
- Karasar N (2009). *Scientific Research Methods*. Ankara, Turkey. Nobel Publishing Publishing.
- Lee P, Ashby R, Dickinson A (1995). Progression in Children's Ideas About History. In: Hughes M (eds). *Progression in Learning*. Frankfurt. 50-82.
- Lee P (2005). Putting Principles into Practice: National Research Council Staff How Students Learn: History, Mathematics, and Science in the Classroom. In: Donovan M S, Bransford J D (eds) *Washington DC. National Academies Press*.
- Lee P, Dickinsonson A, Ashby R (2001). Children's Ideas About Historical Explanation. In: Dickinsonson A, Gardon P, Lee P (eds) *Raising Standards in History Education*. London: Woburn Press. 97-15.
- Piaget J (2004). *Child Mental Development*. (trans. by Orange H), Istanbul: Cem Publishing.
- Piaget J (2007). *Decision Making and Reasoning in Children*. (trans. by Siyavuşgil SE), New York: Saunders College Publishing.
- Safran M, Şimşek A (2009). Time to Write a Problem: Date and Time Relationship. *Int. J. History Soc. Stus*.1: 9-26.
- Smith JP, Disessa AA, Roschelle J (1993). *Misconceptions reconceiv-*



- ed: A constructivist analysis of knowledge in transition. *J. Learning Sci.*, 3(2): 115-163.
- Şimşek A (2005). Development And Teaching Elementary Students the Concept of Historical Time. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Gazi University Institute of Education Sciences Ankara.
- TTKB (2008). Secondary 10 Grade History Course Program. Ankara: Ministry of Education.
- Vansledright B (2008). Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge and School History Education. *R. Res. Educ.*, 2 (32): 109–146.
- Vygotsky L S (1985). *Thought and Language*. (trans. by Holly S). Istanbul: Social Transformation Publishing.
- Wineburg S (2000). Making Historical Sense, In: Peter N S, Peter S, Wineburg S (eds) *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*. New York: 306-326.
- Yazici H, Samanci O (2003). Elementary School Students Related to Social Studies Course Topics Understanding the Levels of Some Concepts. *J. Educ.*, 158: <<http://yayim.meb.gov.tr/dergiler/158/yazici.htm>>.
- Yildirim A, Şimşek H (2008). *Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences*. New York: Exclusive Publications.
- Zembat O. (2008). Misconceptions What is it? In: Özmantar MF, Bingölbalı M, Akkoc H (eds) *Mathematical Misconceptions and Solutions*, New York: PegemA Publishing. 1-8.