

What Do Future Primary School Teachers Know about Conscious Consumption and How Do They Behave?

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Abstract

Unconscious consumption of resources by individuals leads to many economic, social and environmental problems. Therefore, conscious consumerism and consumer education are critically important to develop knowledge and skills to make informed and rational choices taking social values and goals into account. Based on that, the research was conducted as a descriptive case study to assess pre-service primary school teachers' awareness of 'conscious consumer'. The study was conducted with a cohort of 60 pre-service teachers enrolled as second-year students in primary education programs. The results showed that the participants had insufficient knowledge about the conscious consumer. Their conceptualisations were primarily manifested through limited and superficial patterns of behaviour. Their practical behaviour related to conscious consumer in everyday life appeared to be limited. In addition, the definitions and behaviours articulated by the participants were largely consistent with the principles of rational consumption. Importantly, almost all the pre-service teachers did not demonstrate behaviours associated with ethical and socially responsible consumption in their daily lives, highlighting a lack of prioritisation of these dimensions.

Keywords:

Conscious Consumer, Pre-Service Primary School Teacher, Rational Consumption, Consumerism

Introduction

In the modern world, people tend towards consumption frenzy under the influence of many factors such as media and environment. Both irresponsible consumption of natural resources and unconscious purchasing behaviors lead to serious problems on a global scale. According to Fromm (2002), after the 20th century, capitalism increases consumption by keeping the desire to spend at a high level in individuals. The fact that the economic order needs individuals who constantly consume and constantly demand (Insel, 1997) also fuels consumption. In consumer societies, consumption can become a tool and directs the individual to continuous purchasing. Beyond mere purchasing, it also leads to the unconscious consumption



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of resources. However, according to Bauman (2006), individuals leave aside a critical view of consumption and participate in the economic system by consuming.

There are 17 global goals for Sustainable Development (United Nations [UN], 2024). Goal 12 on sustainable development emphasizes the sustainability and effective use of natural resources (The Global Goals, 2024). Within the scope of responsible production and consumption, global goals such as sustainability of natural resources, reduction of global food waste, recycling, reduction of waste production can also raise awareness on conscious consumption. Situations such as unequal sharing of resources in the world, limited access to resources, global hunger problems, waste, deterioration of ecological balance, ozone depletion, radioactive wastes, pollution of clean water resources lead to various problems. The ecosystem and the sustainability of natural resources are endangered for these reasons. Unconscious consumption of resources by individuals leads to many economic, social and environmental problems. In order to solve these problems, new consumption habits need to be acquired and learned (Avalone et al., 2012). In this context, it is necessary to focus on the concept of conscious consumer. According to the Turkish Language Association Current Turkish Dictionary (2024), the concept of 'conscious' is defined, as 'one who is aware of his/her own actions; one who acts knowingly; conscious'. The concept of 'consumer' is defined as a person who makes a purchase in order to satisfy his/her personal desires, wishes and needs (Solomon et al., 2013). The concept of 'conscious consumer' is defined as a person who complies with the concepts of truth, honesty and equality in the choices he/she makes and considers the benefit and goodness of the whole world in the decisions he/she makes (Gogia, 2014). A conscious consumer is a person who is aware that when he/she consumes the product he/she needs, this consumption will have a direct impact primarily on himself/herself and then on the society and the world in which he/she lives (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). A conscious consumer is a sensitive person who provides a balance between personal satisfaction and environmental protection with the responsibility he undertakes and considers the effects of his actions on future generations and the environment (Cavalcante et al., 2017). Research has shown that whether consumers purchase products by taking into account environmental characteristics, they may pay more to purchase environmentally sensitive products (Davis, 1993; Crane, 2011; Menon & Menon, 1997). Many studies can be conducted to raise consumer awareness. Within the scope of Law No. 6502, which was announced in the Official Gazette in 2013 in Türkiye, it is stated that 'necessary additions will be made to the curricula of formal and non-formal education institutions on raising consumer awareness by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) by taking

the opinion of the Ministry' (Türkiye Official Gazette, 2013).

Conscious consumption is also included in primary school programs. Considering that children are the consumers of the future, they need to gain awareness at primary school ages. said it is undeniable that the first stages of education are critical periods for children to acquire most of the gains and skills. Thus, it is of great importance that primary school teachers, whom children encounter first, gain such awareness during pre-service training. Considering that pre-service primary school teachers will be the teachers of the future, it is crucial for them to be role models for children at the primary school level to acquire conscious consumer habits. According to Ersoy and Sariabdullahoğlu (2010), the consumption habits that children acquire at an early age form the basis for the consumption behaviors that children will exhibit in later ages. The consumption habits of today's youth, who are the adults of the future, are vital for the sustainability of societies (Aydinler-Boylu et al., 2019).

A certain amount of research exists in the literature of sustainable consumption education (García-González et al., 2022; Rahmawati & Indartono, 2018). In a study examining consumption desire among children, it was emphasized that exposure to social media advertisements has an important role in shaping primary school children's desires (Methlouthi & Nefzi, 2023). Therefore, it is important for teachers and teacher candidates who raise children to be aware of the concept of conscious consumer. The concept of conscious consumer has an important place in the Ministry of Education Curriculum. Topics related to conscious consumerism (Güvenç, 2017) were also studied in the curriculum. The literature also includes studies on conscious consumerism education (Ersoy & Papatğa, 2015). They generally address the environmental awareness dimension of the concept of conscious consumer (Akdoğan & Durmaz, 2021) and examine the concept of conscious consumer holistically (Bozyiğit & Madran, 2018). Polat and Kır (2020) examined conscious consumerism in their research and found a statistically significant difference in conscious consumerism levels according to education levels, referring to a higher level of consciousness among participants with higher education than the ones with lower education levels.

In this context, is the current study aims to assess pre-service primary school teachers' awareness of the concept of 'conscious consumer'. The following research questions will be addressed throughout the study:

- RQ1: What are the cognitive structures of pre-service school teachers in relation to the concept of 'conscious consumer'?
- RQ2: How do pre-service school teachers

conceptualise the term 'conscious consumer'?

- RQ3: What behaviours do preservice teachers exhibit in relation to conscious consumption and what is their level of conscious consumption?

Conceptual framework

The concept of conscious consumption can be considered in five main dimensions: "socially responsible consumption", "rational consumption", "environmentalist consumption", "ethical consumption" and "voluntary simple consumption" (Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016a).

Socially responsible consumers are individuals who adopt communal living rather than individualism and prefer social ideals rather than selfishness (McCarty & Shrum, 2001). Due to the rapid increase in global consumption, many global problems such as resource depletion, pollution, global warming, poverty and species extinction are emerging. It is indispensable for individuals to take responsibility for solving such environmental and social problems. It plays a major role for individuals to have and practice socially responsible consumption behaviors by staying away from popular consumption logic, empathizing and having awareness.

Rational consumption encompasses consumption behaviors that are rational, measured, in accordance with the rules of reason, and logic. For example, before purchasing a product, a conscious consumer makes a logical decision according to the options, taking into account what is available. According to Buğday and Babaoğlu (2016a), a consumer in the context of rational consumption is a conscious consumer who makes plans and decisions by considering the resources at hand, taking the opinions of his/her relatives and social environment, and reviewing the options.

The ecosystem we live in has a tremendous diversity including a balance in it. However, many environmental problems arise with consumption. These environmental problems lead to the rapid consumption of resources. Therefore, society needs to have environmental awareness. The consumption and purchasing behaviors of individuals with this awareness are directly proportional to the responsibility they take towards the environment. As individuals assume responsibility towards the environment, their purchasing and consumption behaviors will be shaped according to their needs.

Conscious consumers adopt ethical consumption habits. It can be said that the ethical rules expected to be followed within the scope of ethical consumption are important. There are documents and certificates expected to be in a purchased product together with

the approvals by the institutions that supervise this. Production should be carried out in accordance with the laws and rules, original and certified products should be preferred, and purchasing processes should be carried out in accordance with the rules. All these are indicators of consumption awareness. According to MacIntyre (2007), ethical consumers are individuals who fulfill their responsibilities to make the world more livable.

Today, with the influence of popular culture, social media and mass media, individuals are directed towards excessive consumption, and advertisements support this tendency. However, in order to use natural limited resources effectively and efficiently in terms of consumption, it may be necessary to turn to minimalism. From this point of view, it is necessary to stay away from consumption habits that include need-oriented, low consumption, a simple life, and expensive expenditures for vanity purposes.

Method

Research model

Case study is widely recognized as a predominant research strategy in the field of social research. The case study method is a preferable choice over other methods when: (1) the main research questions focus on "how" and "why," (2) the researcher has little or no control over behavioral events, and (3) the study examines a contemporary phenomenon. (Yin, 2014, p. 2),

This study aims to comprehensively elucidate the nuances of pre-service school teachers' awareness regarding the contemporary issue of conscious consumer, focusing on the "how" aspect. Yin categorizes case studies as explanatory, exploratory or descriptive according to epistemological status (Yin, 2014). In a descriptive case study, the purpose is to 'describe' a phenomenon in detail in its real-world context (Priya, 2021, p. 96), and in some respects, a descriptive case study tests whether and in what way a case may be described when approaching it from a certain perspective (Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 12). In this regard, the research was conducted as a descriptive case study.

Participants

The study was conducted with a cohort of 60 pre-service teachers enrolled as second-year students in primary education programs during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. All participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. Pertinent details concerning the study group are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Their perception of themselves as conscious consumers				
	Always	Never	Partially	Total
Female	15	7	28	50
Male	3	6	1	10
Total	18	13	29	60

According to Table 1, of the male participants who participated in the research, 6 do not consider themselves to be conscious consumers, while 3 consider themselves as conscious consumers. The male participant identified as PsST34 does not consider himself to be a conscious consumer, stating: 'I am not a conscious consumer because I lack knowledge about saving and what considerations are necessary when shopping'. Conversely, the male participant with code PsST12 justifies his identity as a conscious consumer by stating: 'Yes, I consider myself a conscious consumer because I do not buy unnecessary things.

Of the female participants, 15 consider themselves to be conscious consumers, while 28 indicate that they exhibit partially conscious consumer behaviour. The participant identified as PsST32 categorises herself as partially conscious, explaining: 'I do not consider myself to be fully conscious because there are instances where I buy items that I recognise as unnecessary'. In contrast, the participant with code PsST22 describes herself as a conscious consumer, articulating, "I am a conscious consumer because I consciously check product expiration dates, only purchase essential items and avoid waste."

Data collection and data analysis

Two primary data collection instruments were used in the current research to gather information: a structured form and a scale. The first instrument was a structured form, consisting of three sections developed by the researchers. The first section focused on demographic variables and aimed to capture essential characteristics of the participants. The second section of the form contained four open-ended questions designed to explore participants' cognitive frameworks and conceptual associations in relation to conscious consumer. a) The first question used a word association test centred on the stimulus concept 'conscious consumer'. Participants were instructed to list the first 10 concepts that came to mind in relation to this stimulus. b) The second question asked participants to provide their own definitions of the concept of 'conscious consumer' in their own words. This qualitative approach aimed to

elicit different perspectives and understandings of the term. c) The third question explored participants' daily practices and behaviours that were consistent with being a conscious consumer. This qualitative inquiry sought to uncover specific actions and choices that participants make in their daily lives reflecting conscious consumer behaviour. d) The fourth and final question asked participants to critically evaluate their self-perceived status as conscious consumers based on their consumption habits. Participants were asked to justify their answers, giving reasons and examples to support their judgements. In the third section of the data collection, participants were asked to design an informative poster on conscious consumption habits. The structured format of this task included a drawing area for visual representation on one side of the paper, while the reverse side provided space for participants to explain the rationale and intended messages of their poster designs.

The Conscious Consumer Scale, developed by Buğday (2015), serves as the second data collection instrument in this study. It is designed to assess an individual's level of conscious consumer through a structured framework consisting of 25 items divided into four subdimensions: environmentally conscious consumption, ethical consumption, voluntary simple consumption, and socially responsible consumption. Each item in the scale is presented in a 5-point Likert format, with statements that address different consumer behaviours.

As for the analysis of the data collected from the first data collection instrument, content analysis was used as the methodological approach. This involved consolidating similar data under pre-defined concepts and themes, guided by both theoretical frameworks and insights gained from participants' responses, to create a comprehensive code list prior to data collection (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Responses from the word association test, which aimed to elucidate participants' cognitive structures regarding conscious consumption, were systematically categorised into different codes and thematic categories. In addition, common themes and frequencies across definitions provided by participants were subsequently tabulated for clarity. In addition, the posters created by the participants were carefully examined both individually and categorically based on their thematic content. Events, phenomena or circumstances depicted in the posters were systematically coded and reported. In cases where the visual representations were ambiguous or insufficient for coding purposes, supplementary written explanations provided by the participants were included. Finally, an attempt was made to contextualise participants' perceptions and insights through exemplary poster images and associated narratives.

Findings

The aim of the study was to assess pre-service primary school teachers' awareness of the concept of 'conscious consumer'. To this end, the cognitive structures of these pre-service teachers towards the concept were first explored using a word association test. A total of 60 students participated in the test, generating 468 unique concepts related to conscious consumer, with an average of 7.8 concepts per student.

Analysis of the data from the word association test revealed that these concepts could be categorised into 8 different thematic categories. During the categorisation process, synonymous terms were treated separately, irrelevant terms were excluded from consideration and concepts mentioned only once were grouped in a separate category. The concepts grouped in this category represented 13.2% of the total number of concepts identified. Table 2 provides detailed insights into the categorised concepts and thematic categories derived from the word association test on the cognitive structures related to the concept of 'conscious consumer' among participants.

The word association test yielded concepts associated with the "conscious consumer" term, categorized as: (1) behavioral actions towards consumption; (2) affective qualities towards the concept; (3) affected elements; (4) negative consequences; (5) consumed resources; (6) purchase priorities; (7) perception towards the concept; and (8) supportive practices. The distribution of these categories and their respective concepts is detailed as follows:

In the first category, 99 instances were linked to behaviors associated with the conscious consumer concept, encompassing 15 distinct concepts. Analysis revealed that participants associated conscious consumer with behaviors such as savings, production, avoidance of unnecessary expenses, list-making. Within the second category, 71 occurrences pertained to affective qualities associated with the conscious consumer concept, encompassing 12 unique concepts. Participants attributed qualities such as frugality, awareness, rationality, necessity, responsibility, and sensitivity to conscious consumer. The third category comprised 76 instances related to entities affected by the conscious consumer concept, encompassing 12 distinct concepts. Participants acknowledged that conscious consumers impact global and local elements such as the environment, economy, and future societal well-being. In the fourth category, concepts ($f = 31$) were delineated that relate to potential negative consequences arising from the absence of conscious consumer behaviors. Participants referenced adverse outcomes such as waste, scarcity, global warming, natural disasters,

and drought. The fifth category pertains to consumed resources. Participants associated the concept of conscious consumer with resources such as water, money, electricity, clothing, food, and energy. In the sixth category, participants linked the concept of conscious consumer with terms related to conscious consumption practices, including expiration dates, product quality, user manuals, and warranty documents. Within the supportive practices category, the concept of conscious consumer was correlated with practices such as recycling, eco-friendly products, and sustainability initiatives.

In addition, the word association test identified 62 concepts (e.g. analysis, opportunity, government, credit card, public transport, homemade, bargain, etc.) that were repeated once and categorised as 'other'.

Following the identification of participants' cognitive frameworks regarding the concept of conscious consumer, their definitions were subjected to content analysis. The components within these definitions were categorised and presented in tabular form. Table 3 shows the frequencies of the components found in the definitions of conscious consumer as articulated by the participants.

The analysis of the definitions revealed that the concept was articulated through specific behavioural dimensions. Participants articulated 12 different behaviours a total of 93 times to define the concept. For example, 23 participants characterised conscious consumers as individuals who "consume or use products only when necessary". For example, participant PsST12 defined the concept as "a person who consumes or uses products according to their needs". In addition, participants emphasised the environmental awareness of conscious consumers. Participant PsST19 explained the concept as "someone who takes environmental factors into account when making decisions", while PsST31 described it as "a person who has environmentally friendly shopping habits". Several participants chose to delineate several behaviours when defining the concept. For example, PsST5 characterised conscious consumers as "people who avoid waste, use products consciously and prioritise environmental protection". Similarly, PsST38 described the concept as "individuals who are knowledgeable about and assertive in exercising their consumer rights, while consistently demonstrating environmental awareness".

As part of the research, participants were asked about their day-to-day practices that are consistent with conscious consumption. Table 4 shows the specifics of these behaviours as reported by the participants.

An analysis of the conscious consumer behaviours exhibited by the participants in their daily lives

revealed 32 different behaviours, with a total of 201 occurrences. A review of the table suggests that these behaviours are predominantly in line with rational consumption practices and environmental awareness. Participants frequently highlighted behaviours such as separating recyclable materials, purchasing goods and services based on immediate needs, practicing resource conservation (e.g. water, electricity, natural gas), avoiding environmentally harmful products, minimising waste, checking expiry dates, comparing prices and keeping shopping lists. Conversely, behaviours such as keeping income-expenditure accounts and checking contracts were each reported by a single participant.

Posters created by participants to illustrate their conscious consumption habits were coded based on the events, facts and behaviours depicted, and these codes are detailed in Table 5.

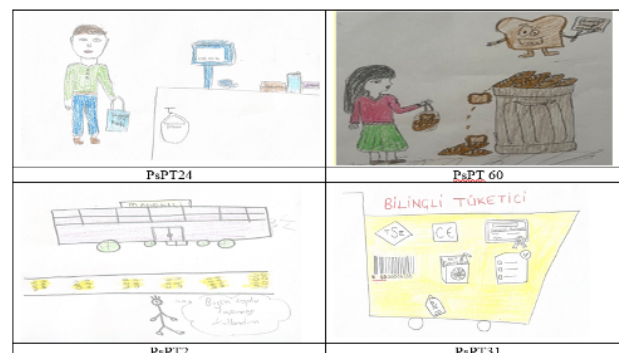
The data derived from the drawings on conscious consumption habits are categorised into five thematic areas: saving, recycling, purchasing priorities, consumer rights, environmental awareness. The participants mainly depicted behaviours such as saving water, preferring recyclable products, shopping consciously based on needs, checking product expiry dates, commitment to environmental protection, using renewable resources and a preference for sustainable products. Explanatory examples from their statements illustrate these behaviours. For example, respondent PsPT45, on the subject of saving, stated: "A conscious consumer saves energy and protects the environment by opting for solar-powered water heaters". PsPT44 emphasised the theme of recycling, stating: "A conscious consumer chooses recyclable products that do not harm nature or people". Regarding shopping behaviour, participant PsPT28 remarked: "A conscious consumer prepares a shopping list and buys only essential items, strictly sticking to the list to avoid unnecessary consumption". Furthermore, participant PsPT24 added: "Instead of using plastic bags, which are harmful to the environment, conscious consumers opt for reusable bags when shopping". In terms of consumer rights, participant PsPT5 stressed the importance of checking product expiry dates and making complaints when necessary: "A conscious consumer checks the expiration date of every purchase and files a complaint if a product is past its expiration date.". In terms of environmental awareness, participant PsPT2 demonstrated sensitivity by preferring public transport to private cars whenever possible: "A conscious consumer chooses public transport over private cars for travelling between destinations."

The drawings by the pre-service primary school teachers also illustrated examples related to water and food waste, vigilance regarding expiry dates and

practices that promote the conservation of electricity, energy, nutrients and water, as well as examples related to consumer rights.

Figure 1

Examples from participants' drawings that illustrate conscious consumer behaviors.



In Figure 1, PsPT24 draws attention to environmental awareness by promoting the use of reusable cloth bags instead of single-use plastic bags when shopping. PsPT60 addresses the issue of food waste by depicting excess bread being thrown away, highlighting concerns about wasteful consumption practices. PsPT2 emphasises the importance of choosing public transport over private cars where possible, promoting sustainable mobility choices. PsPT31 focuses on various aspects of conscious consumption, including awareness of product expiry dates, the importance of certifications such as TSE (Turkish Standards Institution) and CE (European Conformity), the practice of making shopping lists and carefully checking product labels.

Table 6 presents the findings derived from the survey on conscious consumer administered to participants as part of the research study.

The analysis of the responses to the Conscious Consumption Survey (Buğday, 2015; Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016b), shows that almost all participants exhibit environmentally friendly behaviour and attitudes in the dimension of environmentally conscious consumption; their behaviour is in line with ethical standards in the dimension of ethical consumption; and they exhibit responsible behaviour and attitudes in the dimension of socially responsible consumption. In addition, a significant majority of participants do not endorse items such as buying expensive and luxurious products, living ostentatiously or emphasising wealth, as categorised under conspicuous consumption. Instead, they prioritise simplicity in consumption, do not emphasise conspicuousness, brand or luxury concepts, and tend towards simplicity in their consumption habits.

Table 2*Cognitive structures related to the concept of "conscious consumer" among pre-service teachers*

Category	Code	f	Category	Code	f
Behavioral Actions Towards Consumption (f=99)	Savings	33	Negative Consequences (f = 31)	Waste	15
	Consumption	11		Famine	5
	Avoiding unnecessary expences	10		Global warming	4
	Production	8		Natural disaster	3
	Shopping	7		Garbage	2
	Making lists	5		Drought	2
	Spending money	5	Resources Consumed (f = 61)	Water	12
	Being mindful	4		Product	8
	Protect	4		Money	6
	Questioning	2		Electricity	6
	Researching	2		Energy	6
	Saving money	2		Detergent	5
	Moderate sonsumption	2		Solar energy	3
	Behavior	2		Natural resources	3
	Planning	2		Air	3
Affective Qualities Towards the Concept (f = 71)	Needing	21		Outfit	3
	Responsibility	11		Salary	2
	Frugality	9		Faucet	2
	Consciousness	7		Food	2
	Sensitivity	5	Purchasing Priorities (f = 31)	Expiry date	6
	Knowledgeable	4		Product quality	5
	Be rational	3		Bill	4
	Awareness	3		Price	4
	Freedom	2		User manual	3
	Respect	2		Consumer rights	3
	Love	2		Guarantee certificate	2
	Willingness	2		Advertisement	2
Affected Elements (f = 76)	World	10	Perception Towards the Concept (f = 16)	Discount	2
	Nature	9		Useful	4
	Environment	8		Valuable	3
	Health	7		Limited	3
	Human	7		Basic	2
	Future	7	Supportive Practices (f = 21)	Balanced	2
	Economy	6		Harmless	2
	Consumer	6		Recycling	11
	Life	6		Eco-friendly product	8
	Society	4	Other	Sustainability	2
	Manufacturer	3			62
	Tree	3			

Table 3*Components identified in definitions of pre-service teachers regarding the concept of conscious consumer*

Definition Components	Frequency
Individuals who consume/use only what is necessary	23
Individuals who exhibit environmentally conscious behavior	16
Individuals who refrain from wasteful practices	9
Individuals who use products carefully and correctly	9
Individuals capable of distinguishing between desires and needs	7
Individuals who prioritize the health and safety aspects of products	6
Individuals who are knowledgeable about and exercise their consumer rights	6
Individuals who conduct cost-benefit analyses when making purchases	5
Individuals who scrutinize product contents	4
Individuals who have knowledge about consumers	4
Individuals who possess knowledge of product manufacturing processes	2
Individuals who shop according to their budget	2

Table 4
Behaviors demonstrated by participants in the context of conscious consumer

Consumer type	Behaviors	f
Rational consumption (f=123)	I practice thriftiness by adhering to a disciplined approach to consumption.	25
	I exercise prudence by purchasing only what is necessary.	24
	I am conscious about minimizing waste.	15
	I prioritize checking expiration dates on products.	9
	I conduct thorough price comparisons before making purchases.	8
	I meticulously inspect product contents to ensure suitability.	7
	I compile shopping lists based on identified needs	6
	I am well-informed about my rights as a consumer	6
	I scrutinize the credibility of manufacturers	5
	I diligently retain receipts, invoices, and warranty documents	4
	I refrain from acquiring products lacking proper labeling	3
	I abstain from engaging in door-to-door transactions	2
	I tailor my shopping habits to align with my budgetary constraints	1
	I maintain detailed financial records through income-expenditure statements	1
	I meticulously cross-reference invoices with product labels	1
	I assertively pursue the return of defective merchandise	1
	I exclusively patronize authorized service providers	1
	I consciously review contractual agreements	1
	I vigilantly identify and avoid allergens in products	1
	I investigate the ethical and environmental impacts of production processes	1
	I patiently await opportune moments to capitalize on discounts	1
Environmentally Conscious Consumption (f=67)	I actively segregate recyclable materials from general waste	26
	I adopt conservation practices, including prudent use of water and electricity	22
	I prioritize environmental responsibility by abstaining from purchasing harmful products	14
	I opt for energy-efficient lighting solutions such as LED bulbs	3
	I utilize public transportation as a sustainable commuting option	2
Simple Consumption (f=9)	I prioritize product utility over brand prestige	4
	I resist impulsive purchases driven solely by fleeting trends	2
	I participate in sharing economies by donating surplus possessions	2
	I extend the lifespan of clothing items through careful maintenance and use	1
Socially Responsible Consumption (f=1)	I consciously avoid supporting products or industries that harm animals	1
Ethical Consumption (f=1)	I abstain from purchasing counterfeit or imitation goods	1

Table 5*Drawings by Pre-service Teachers on Conscious Consumer Habits*

Category	Codes	f
Savings	Efficient utilization of water resources	13
	Practicing water conservation measures	10
	Optimal use of electricity to minimize consumption	10
	Preventing food wastage, including bread and other perishables	8
	Reducing reliance on artificial lighting	1
Recycling	Prioritizing the purchase of recyclable products	1
	Observing proper recycling practices	1
Purchasing Priorities	Adopting a needs-based approach to shopping	10
	Creating shopping lists based on essential needs	7
	Engaging in cost-effective shopping practices	5
	Preferring sustainable and environmentally friendly products	2
	Choosing products that promote personal and environmental health	2
	Selecting items with recognized quality and safety certifications	2
	Supporting local producers and businesses	1
	Advocating for and purchasing organic goods	1
Consumer rights	Checking product expiration dates before purchase	3
	Reading and understanding product ingredients and labels	3
	Collecting receipts and invoices for consumer protection	3
	Familiarity with consumer rights and responsibilities	2
	Scrutinizing utility bills and expenses for accuracy	2
	Making informed purchasing decisions based on value and performance	1
Environmental awareness	Securing warranty documentation for purchased items	1
	Engaging in activities that contribute to environmental conservation	9
	Proper disposal practices and avoiding littering	5
	Promoting the use of renewable energy sources	2
	Preferring solar-powered systems for heating water	1
	Maximizing natural light and minimizing artificial lighting	1
	Utilizing exhaust systems with effective filtration mechanisms	1
	Choosing products that are biodegradable and eco-friendly	1
	Opting for public transportation to reduce carbon footprint	1
	Maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in public facilities	1
	Adhering to social norms and ethical standards	1
	Utilizing reusable shopping bags to minimize plastic waste	1

Table 6*Conscious consumer survey items and participation rates of pre-service primary school teachers*

Consumer types	Survey items	Mean	SD
Environmentally Conscious Consumption	I believe that I can protect the environment by purchasing environmentally friendly products.	4.20	.84
	Global warming and climate change causes me to worry about the future	4.37	.88
	I think that underground waters and the sea pollution will give rise to very important problems in the future.	4.55	.65
	I believe that humans must live in harmony with nature.	4.43	.79
	I think that environmental pollution is one of the most important problems of our age.	4.50	.57
	I am of the opinion that the enterprises should encourage consumers with respect to collecting the solid wastes back.	4.42	.65
Ethical Consumption	The enterprises' having activities aimed at protecting the environment makes me happy	4.55	.62
	When shopping, I don't eat /drink anything without paying	4.53	.70
	When I notice that the invoice or the account has been calculated below the value, I immediately give information.	4.55	.62
	When I notice the underpayment in the bill after leaving the store, I definitely ensure the elimination of this shortcoming	4.48	.95
	I immediately return the change given extra during shopping.	4.77	.46
Voluntary Simple Consumption	When I give damage to a product during shopping, I inform the officials and pay for the damage	4.50	.72
	I'd like to be the first user of the new products on the market	2.28	1.12
	I believe that the expensive products I buy add me value	1.85	.99
	It is important for me to lead a flashy life.	1.70	.92
	I think that luxurious products add respectability to the person	1.97	1.09
Socially Responsible Consumption	Financial wealth is very important to me..	2.23	1.18
	I pay attention to buying the products of the companies which I think gives importance to the rights of its employees	4.15	.73
	I don't buy products or services from the companies that have been proven to employ child labor.	4.11	.94
	I prefer to buy the products of the companies that employ the individuals with disabilities.	4.08	.83
	I do not buy products or services from the companies that have been proven to apply discrimination against people.	4.08	.93
	I prefer to buy the products of the companies that have been proven to give support to medical researches.	4.00	.66
	I prefer to buy the products of the companies that donate a part of their profits to those in need	4.27	.63
	I think that the products/services of the companies which test products on animals should not be purchased	4.37	.78
	I think that companies should employ disabled individuals more	4.42	.70

Discussion and Conclusion

Consumption is the collective behaviour of all individuals who make up the consumer society. Children constitute an important segment of the consumer market due to their consumer identity, loaded with satisfying needs and desires (Uyanik, 2020, p. 1074). It is crucial to raise children's awareness and instil conscious consumption habits from an early age. In this context, school provides an important opportunity to teach children about consumer issues, and to help them develop critical skills. Taking advantage of this opportunity requires teachers to be familiar with consumer issues, and to have sufficient teaching resources available (OECD, 2009, p. 9). At the basic education level, teachers need to have both professional and personal competences that promote responsible and conscious consumer behaviour among students with regard to the socio-cultural, economic and health impacts associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services (Ortega et al., 2020).

In Türkiye, primary school curricula include learning outcomes that aim to promote conscious and responsible consumption across different subjects (MoNE, 2018). The extensive integration of a number of learning outcomes related to Conscious Consumption underlines the importance of raising awareness among students through targeted educational objectives. The inclusion of such outcomes requires that educators responsible for delivering these lessons have a thorough understanding of conscious consumer. Only with adequate knowledge and awareness can teachers effectively enhance students' understanding and conscious behaviour in this area. Therefore, it is imperative to assess teachers' current level of knowledge and perceptions of Conscious Consumption and to provide them with relevant professional development.

This study aimed to assess pre-service teachers' perceptions of the concept of conscious consumer. Firstly, a word association test was used to explore teacher candidates' cognitive structures in relation to the concept. Analysis of the data from the test revealed that each participant generated an average of 7.8 words, with 13.2% of these words being repeated at least once. Participants associated the concept of 'conscious consumer' with different behaviours (e.g. saving, consuming, avoiding unnecessary expenditure, shopping), affective attributes (e.g. necessity, responsibility, thrift), affected elements (e.g. world, nature, environment, health), potential negative consequences (e.g. waste, scarcity, global warming), , resources used (e.g. water, products, money, electricity), purchase priorities (e.g. expiry date, quality, receipt, price), different perceptions (e.g. usefulness, value, balance) and supporting practices (e.g. recycling, environmentally friendly products).

When examining the definitions of the concept of conscious consumer provided by the participants, the majority tended to define the concept within a single behavioural context. Definitions often emphasised behaviours such as 'using/consuming resources/products only as needed', 'being environmentally aware' or 'not wasting'. A general examination of the participants' definitions (Table 3) showed that they sought to align their definitions with the behaviours identified in the literature on the concept. Of the participants, 35 defined conscious consumers using a single behavioural expression, 19 used two different behavioural expressions, 5 used three different behavioural expressions and 1 used five different behavioural expressions. The majority of participants' definitions of the concept are quite limited and superficial. The limited knowledge of conscious consumer provided by participants may potentially lead to inadequate competencies in this area among their future students once they enter the profession. Uyanik (2020) examined students' definitions of conscious consumer in a study on fourth graders and also found that their definition of conscious consumers are also limited. Furthermore, Dere and Aktaşlı (2020), in their study with undergraduate students, described conscious consumers as limited behaviours. These researchers identified students' existing knowledge of the concept and did not provide information on the possible reasons for these limitations. Based on our study, it was concluded that participants also have limited knowledge of the concept of conscious consumer. When assessing competences related to conscious consumer, it can be said that pre-service teachers who will teach the same age group in the future have insufficient knowledge in terms of defining the concept. This situation could be interpreted as an indication of a possible relationship between the weak competences of teachers in this area and the weak competences of their students.

Ecologically conscious consumers are defined as those who purchase products and services which they perceive to have a positive (or less negative) impact on the environment (Roberts, 1996, p. 222). Within the scope of the study, the majority of participants indicated that they engage in behaviours such as buying and separating recyclable products, minimising waste of resources and avoiding environmentally harmful purchases. In particular, there was a particularly high level of participation in the environmental awareness dimension of the Conscious Consumer Survey. Thus, participants exhibit behaviours indicative of both green purchasing practices and post-consumer recycling behaviours, confirming their status as green consumers. The literature highlights a positive correlation between individuals' environmental knowledge, attitudes towards the environment and corresponding behaviours (Flamm, 2009; Polonsky et al., 2012; Roberts & Bacon, 1997; Taufique et al., 2014). It is widely accepted that consumers' environmental

behaviour stems from pro-environmental attitudes (Taufique et al., 2014). Therefore, the demonstrated high levels of environmental awareness and related behaviours among participants suggest robust knowledge and positive attitudes towards environmental issues. In conclusion, the observed high levels of environmentally conscious consumption and associated behaviours among participants are indicative of their strong knowledge base and attitudes towards environmental issues, which is consistent with existing scholarship.

The voluntary simplicity movement has emerged as a counter-response to the pervasive consumerist culture (Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016a, p. 196). In this context, simplicity is not a confining lifestyle but a liberating way of life that contributes to the well-being of the world and future generations (Elgin, 2013, p. 72). In this study investigating conscious consumption among participants, the results indicated a departure from behaviours associated with consumers, such as early adoption of new products, valuing expensive items, pursuing conspicuous lifestyles, and believing that luxury goods confer social status. Participants also expressed a notable lack of brand fixation, a reluctance to purchase items based solely on their trendiness, and a tendency to prolong the use of purchased goods. Thus, it can be argued that participants have a preference for voluntary simplicity in consumption and exhibit behaviours consistent with this ethos.

Ethical consumers exercise their consumer rights by choosing products and services that support healthy diets, contribute to local socio-economic development by supporting domestic producers, avoid products tested on animals, prefer sustainably produced goods, patronise Fair Trade certified companies, ensure full payment for products, and engage in legal purchasing practices (Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016a; Harrison et al., 2005; Tallontire et al., 2001; Ünal-Kestane, 2020). Through their consumption choices, ethical consumers actively demonstrate their commitment to societal values. The analysis of the responses of participants in the current study on conscious consumption reveals a discrepancy: while participants showed high levels of agreement with ethical consumption criteria, their conceptualisations and everyday behaviours did not feature prominently in ethical consumption practices. For example, only one participant reported refraining from buying counterfeit or imitation products, while 59 participants did not articulate any behavioural inclination towards conscious consumption. This trend may be attributed to the socio-economic backgrounds and aspirations of students, suggesting that ethical considerations may not be prioritised in their consumer decision-making processes. Research also suggests that as students gain independence from family influences, they may increasingly engage in behaviours that

are inconsistent with ethical norms (Saray & Hazer, 2017). Furthermore, media influences that emphasise factors such as price, quality and fashion often overshadow ethical considerations in consumer behaviour, potentially leading individuals to engage in unethical practices such as consuming counterfeit goods or engaging in retail theft (Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016a). In conclusion, despite the participants' stated alignment with ethical consumption principles in their survey responses, the limited emphasis on ethical consumer behaviours in both their definitions and practical behaviours suggests that participants may not fully integrate or prioritise the ethical dimensions of conscious consumption.

Socially conscious consumers are aware of their potential to effect social change through their purchasing decisions (Castano et al., 2016). An examination of the responses of participants to the survey on the dimensions of conscious consumption and social responsibility found that they tend to favour brands that prioritise workers' rights, support medical research and employ people with disabilities. Conversely, they are reluctant to buy products from companies that engage in child labour, discrimination or animal testing. Despite their high level of engagement with survey items related to these dimensions, their definitions of conscious consumer often fail to emphasise behaviours indicative of socially responsible consumer practices. For example, only one participant mentioned abstaining from products that harm animals, while 59 participants made no reference to behaviours in their daily lives that are consistent with these dimensions. Pre-service teachers show comparable levels of competence in the dimensions of socially responsible consumption and ethical consumption. Despite their high level of engagement with survey items related to these dimensions, they did not integrate any corresponding behaviours into their definitions of conscious consumer. Furthermore, only a minimal number of students referred to behaviours from both dimensions in their daily practice. This suggests that participants may overlook or prioritise ethical and socially responsible consumption less in their understanding of conscious consumer. This finding has significant academic value as it highlights a potential lack of awareness among participants of their ability as consumers to influence markets according to their ethical standards. In this context, the participants' insufficient knowledge and behavioural alignment with ethical and socially responsible consumption dimensions may indicate an underestimation of their consumer agency.

Rational consumption practices include avoiding unnecessary purchases influenced by factors such as advertising, fashion trends, or brand prestige; distinguishing between wants and needs; conducting price comparisons; reading product labels and

instructions; keeping receipts; and budgeting effectively (Aygen, 2005; Buğday & Babaoğlu, 2016a; Ünal-Kestane, 2020). After analysing the participants' definitions of conscious consumers, it was found that nine out of the 12 behaviours they mentioned were consistent with the principles of rational consumption. Furthermore, participants collectively reiterated 201 behaviors across 32 different actions related to conscious consumer, with 21 of these actions specifically focusing on rational consumption (e.g., saving, buying only what is necessary, conducting price research, keeping financial records). These findings suggest that participants' knowledge and behaviours related to the conscious consumer are predominantly centred on the principles of rational consumption.

In summary, this research aimed to determine the perceptions of participants towards the concept of conscious consumer. The results show that the participants have insufficient knowledge about the conscious consumer. Their conceptualisations are primarily manifested through limited and superficial patterns of behaviour, referring to only 12 specific behaviours and indicating a significant lack of understanding. Furthermore, their practical application of conscious consumer in everyday life appears to be limited. In addition, the definitions and behaviours articulated by the participants are largely consistent with the principles of rational consumption. Importantly, almost none of the participants demonstrated behaviours associated with ethical and socially responsible consumption in their daily lives, suggesting a lack of prioritisation of these dimensions.

Recommendations and limitations

This study was limited to 60 pre-service primary school teachers studying at the faculty of education in a state university in Türkiye during 2023-2024 academic year. The scope of the research was limited to their mental structures towards the concept of conscious consumer, their definitions of the concept, their behaviors in the context of conscious consumerism, their level of conscious consumerism, and their perceptions towards the concept. In their research, Buğday and Babaoğlu (2016a) discussed the concept of conscious consumption in five basic dimensions: "socially responsible consumption", "rational consumption", "Environmentally consumption", "ethical consumption" and "voluntary simple consumption". This research is also limited to these five sub-dimensions. More fine-grained analyses could be executed to identify different types of conscious consumption in future research.

Conscious consumers, because they are educated, can change the economy and society (Zureik & Mowshowitz, 2005). Cunningham and Cunningham (1976) found that people with higher levels of

education are more sensitive about consumer rights than those with lower levels of education. Individuals' consciousness in this context is largely gained through education (Bradley et al. 2010; Hampe et al., 1995). When the social importance of conscious consumption and the research findings are evaluated together, some suggestions for future research are developed. One of them is to provide conscious consumer training to pre-service primary school teachers studying in faculties of education. Education is an effective tool in achieving most social gains. According to Karsu (2013), laws to be enacted by official institutions and organizations, regulations to be carried out by central and local governments and efforts to be made by some social institutions and organizations, no matter how perfect they are, are not sufficient alone in establishing the concept of consumption awareness among individuals. Another suggestion is that in addition to the trainings that can be given at the university level in the context of conscious consumer, primary school teacher candidates could produce projects on conscious consumption. Experimental research can be designed using alternative methods in order for pre-service primary school teachers to gain awareness of conscious consumer behaviors. OECD (2009) also emphasizes the critical importance of consumer education and the importance of developing knowledge and skills to make informed and rational choices that take into account social values and goals.

To ensure that future educators understand and encourage responsible consumer behavior, it may be recommended that teacher training programs include a special course on conscious consumption. Student-focused activities such as sustainability projects and waste management training can be recommended to encourage hands-on learning. Universities may also offer seminars on consumer awareness and sustainability to better inform students. At a broader policy level, the study may suggest specific initiatives for the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) to integrate consumer education into school curricula. In order to increase the relevance of the concept of conscious consumerism to the education sector, in-service training programs can be organized for teachers on how to inculcate conscious consumption habits in their students.

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Ethics Statements

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee at Recep Tayyip Erdogan University (Protocol no: 2023/367 and date of approval 13.12.2023)

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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