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Turkish and US Future-Teachers on War and Peace Education

Gulistan Gursel-Bilgin
Bogazici University

Ozlem Erden-Basaran
TED University

David J. Flinders
Indiana University

This comparative qualitative study employs interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate how 38 American and 43 Turkish future-teachers conceptualize war, peace, and peace education (PE). Drawing upon Noddings's work in PE and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the study examines how these beliefs are constructed, mediated, and enacted within distinct sociocultural and institutional contexts. It explores the ways in which teachers' meaning-making processes reflect and reproduce dominant cultural logics such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint and how these orientations shape pedagogical dispositions toward teaching peace. Findings reveal that participants' conceptions of peace and conflict are deeply embedded in national, moral, and historical narratives, producing culturally specific enactments of peace pedagogy. The study highlights the tensions between dialogic and nationalistic discourses in teacher education, offering theoretical and practical implications for advancing contextually grounded and critically engaged approaches to PE across diverse education settings.

Keywords: *comparative education, curriculum, teacher education/development, violence, qualitative research, curriculum studies, peace education practice, future-teacher beliefs, teaching peace, teaching war, teacher beliefs*

Introduction

Education systems are rarely neutral; they often function as sites that either reproduce societal divisions or foster dialogue and transformation (Davies, 2004; Freire, 1970; Zembylas, 2018). Within this dynamic, teachers are widely recognized as central actors whose beliefs and values shape the success of peace education (PE) initiatives (Bar-Tal, 2002, 2011; Bickmore, 2025; Lopes Cardozo, 2011). PE research continues to identify psychological, cultural, political, and institutional barriers that complicate its integration into curricula and classroom routines in different contexts (Darder, 2012; Erden, 2017; Harris & Morrison, 2012; Gursel-Bilgin, 2021, 2022; Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2020, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023; Noddings, 2012; Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). Yet, despite decades of research focused on PE practices, broader patterns of similarity and difference across contexts remain insufficiently understood. Comparative analyses are therefore needed; however, studies examining how sociocultural and political contexts shape teachers' perspectives on PE remain limited (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Kuppens & Langer, 2016).

The need for this study arises from notable gaps in the literature concerning teacher agency in PE. Despite broad agreement that teachers play a central role in shaping how peace-related concepts are interpreted and enacted, the ways in which their beliefs and professional orientations are formed within specific sociopolitical and cultural conditions remain insufficiently documented (Bar-Tal, 2002, 2011; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023; Kuppens & Langer, 2016; Lopes Cardozo, 2011). Research has paid limited attention to future-teachers whose understandings of war, peace, and PE are still in formation and are often shaped by dominant national narratives, institutional expectations, and personal histories. As Lopes Cardozo (2011) argues, teacher agency in PE is inseparable from broader political contexts, underscoring the need to examine how prospective teachers negotiate their professional roles within such constraints.

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Building on these gaps, this comparative study investigates how future-teachers in Türkiye and the United States (US) understand war, peace, and PE, and how their perspectives are shaped by cultural norms, educational systems, and broader sociopolitical forces. Although PE has frequently been examined in conflict-affected societies and within single-country contexts, comparative analyses of (future) teachers' perspectives remain scarce. The Türkiye–US comparison is particularly underexplored despite the countries' historical linkages and their distinct roles in global politics and education (Kırkgöz & Karakaş, 2022; Onursal-Beşgül, 2016; Üsdiken & Wasti, 2009). Placing these contexts side by side allows for identifying convergences and divergences that often remain hidden in single-country research. Comparative scholarship shows that PE is consistently mediated by cultural norms, political histories, and institutional structures, and that examining cases together generates deeper analytical insight (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Kuppens & Langer, 2016). This design, therefore, foregrounds how global discourses of peace intersect with local histories, policies, and practices of teacher education across contrasting yet interconnected contexts.

To interpret these perspectives meaningfully, the study first situates both countries within their educational and sociopolitical contexts before turning to the conceptual framework that guides the analysis. Before continuing the further explanations about the study, it is important to define the term future-teacher to generate a consensus about what we mean by it. It is operationalized to define participants who were registered in higher education undergraduate or graduate programs in education faculties with the intention of teaching, regardless of whether they were entering the profession for the first time, continuing as practicing teachers, or returning after prior experience. We adopt this inclusive term to foreground the process of becoming a teacher as a reflective and reconstructive endeavor rather than a fixed professional status. This term is beyond a simple determination of teaching status and captures the diverse backgrounds represented in both the Turkish and US samples and reflects that becoming teachers is not only a one-directional process. This qualitative comparative design explores how future-teachers in Türkiye and the US understand war, peace, and PE by focusing on future-teachers enrolled in teacher education programs in both contexts. Drawing on participants' lived experiences and reflective accounts, the study foregrounds future-teachers as teachers-in-formation whose emerging beliefs provide insight into how PE is anticipated, negotiated, and positioned within different national and institutional settings.

This study contributes to the field in three ways, by (a) clarifying the conceptual foundations of PE through an operational definition that integrates humanistic, skills-based, and critical perspectives; (b) analyzing how teacher beliefs about peace are shaped in two structurally connected but sociopolitically divergent contexts; and (c) showing how global discourses of peace are reinterpreted within national teacher education systems. In doing so, the study advances PE and comparative teacher education research by illustrating the complex intersections of culture, politics, and pedagogy. The following questions were formulated to examine how future-teachers make sense of PE within the moral context of their professional lives, connecting personal convictions to structural influences while remaining consistent with a phenomenological commitment to interpreting lived experience.

1) How do future-teachers in Türkiye and the US conceptualize the ideas of war, violence, and peace?
2) In what ways do the cultural norms, values, and sociopolitical discourses shape these conceptualizations of war, peace, and PE in each context?
3) How do these beliefs, together with teachers' conception of pedagogy, inform their perceived roles and practices in teaching peace in schools?

Context of the Study: Türkiye and the United States

Comparative education emphasizes that teachers' perspectives cannot be understood in isolation from the institutional systems, curricula, and political narratives in which they are embedded (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Kuppens & Langer, 2016). Providing contextual information on each country, therefore, strengthens the methodological and theoretical grounding of the study by ensuring that interpretations of future-teachers' beliefs are read in light of national and institutional dynamics. The contextual lens of this study also contributes to the decolonization of PE knowledge by integrating perspectives from different cultural and geopolitical locations (Kester et al., 2019; Sefa Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024).

This comparative education research situates the analysis within the educational and sociopolitical contexts of both Türkiye and the US as they are linked through political alliances, cultural exchanges, and shared global challenges. They have strong military and political ties due to NATO. Additionally, they established cultural and educational exchange programs like the Fulbright and bilateral research projects (Kayaoğlu, 2021). Finally, both countries face distinct yet parallel tensions structured around unity and diversity. They both utilize PE to negotiate issues of justice and civic education. While Türkiye negotiates issues of language and forced migration related to antirefugee sentiments and ethnic diversity (Önal & Baki Pala, 2022), the US has, in recent years, witnessed intensified contestation over racial justice and anti-bias curricula, with federal executive actions and state-level legislation increasingly constraining how issues of diversity, equity, and justice are addressed in both

K–12 and higher education (Casey, 2025; O'Neal & Bridgeforth, 2025). The following sections provide concise yet sufficient contextual details on the education systems and sociopolitical conditions of Türkiye and the US to situate our analyses.

Educational and Sociopolitical Challenges: Türkiye

Türkiye's centralized education system, governed by the Ministry of National Education, imposes uniform curricular and teacher education standards that limit institutional flexibility (Mahalingappa & Polat, 2013). Although teacher education is housed in universities, compulsory national coursework (e.g., educational psychology, educational philosophy, educational sociology) constrains the systematic inclusion of topics such as peace and human rights, which remain optional and inconsistently addressed across programs (Aydin & Baskan, 2005); individual faculty members may incorporate peace-oriented content, but it is not structurally required (Gursel-Bilgin, 2022; Gursel-Bilgin & Bengu, 2021; Onursal-Beşgül, 2016; Üsdiken & Wasti, 2009). Recent research confirms that even when human rights and peace-related content are introduced, they remain inconsistent across programs and contexts (Erbas, 2019; Gurdogan-Bayir & Bozkurt, 2018). In a large-scale study of 632 teacher candidates and 47 faculty members, Abedi and Fer (2023) found that human rights education was widely recognized as important but integrated only superficially into teacher education curricula.

The sociopolitical climate and historical legacies in Türkiye further shape how future-teachers perceive issues of war and peace. Nationalist discourses, reinforced by state rhetoric since the early 2000s, and religiously informed political narratives influence both curriculum design and public expectations of teachers (Yazan et al., 2023). In Türkiye, the legacy of militarized civic education is particularly significant. Until 2012, secondary and high school students were required to take National Security courses, taught by military officers, reinforcing nationalist and militarist values (Kırkgöz & Karakaş, 2022). Additionally, the arrival of more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees has brought questions of multiculturalism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia directly into schools (Erden, 2023). In this context, PE debates in Türkiye cannot be separated from wider struggles over identity, citizenship, and cultural diversity.

Educational and Sociopolitical Challenges: The United States

The US education system is decentralized, with curricula and teacher education standards set primarily at the state level, though influenced by federal frameworks and accreditation bodies. Teacher education programs vary significantly across institutions but must meet state certification requirements, often emphasizing accountability and measurable outcomes. Despite these frameworks, PE rarely appears as a systematic component of teacher preparation (Brantmeier, 2011; Wang, 2018). Exposure to peace-related content typically depends on elective offerings or faculty initiative, resulting in wide variation across programs (Millican et al., 2021).

The sociopolitical climate and historical legacies in the US are also prominent in PE. Cold War Era policies emphasized patriotism and loyalty, while character education programs in schools reinforced notions of discipline and citizenship (Cristol et al., 2010). These legacies provide an important backdrop for understanding why PE often remains marginal, as it has historically been overshadowed by national security priorities and assimilationist ideals (Gursel-Bilgin, 2020a). Following the events of 9/11, discourses of patriotism, national security, and militarism became more prominent in both schools and teacher preparation programs (Giroux, 2008; Gursel-Bilgin, 2020a). These intersect with enduring racial inequalities, immigration debates, and the persistence of Islamophobia, shaping how teachers approach questions of peace and conflict (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009). Within this landscape, institutional demands for testing, classroom management, and compliance also overshadow explicit peace-oriented approaches. As Millican et al. (2021) note in a cross-national study, higher education institutions face systemic barriers to embedding peacebuilding pedagogies, including accreditation pressures, institutional legitimacy, and limited resources. These challenges resonate strongly in the US context, where teacher education is increasingly shaped by policy mandates rather than transformative pedagogical agendas (Brantmeier, 2011).

Variations in Turkish and the US Contexts

Although this study examines Türkiye and the US at the national level, both contexts exhibit substantial internal variation. In Türkiye, regional inequalities in educational access and resources, particularly between the Southeast and Northeast and the more affluent Western regions, shape schooling and teacher education experiences (Gultekin & Yıldız, 2023). These disparities affect teacher preparation, as candidates encounter uneven institutional support and work in contexts influenced by migration and nationalist political discourses (Çiftçi & Cin, 2017). Similarly, in the United States, pronounced institutional differences persist, with rural schools offering fewer advanced courses, limited broadband access, and weaker professional networks than urban and suburban schools (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017; Gottfried, 2012). Such variations shape prospective teachers' learning experiences and their exposure to issues of diversity, civic responsibility, and PE (Brantmeier, 2011).

Despite these differences, both systems position teachers as mediators of national identity and social cohesion. In Türkiye, teachers are often tasked with reinforcing national unity and collective historical narratives (Karakus-Ozdemirci & Akar, 2025), while in the US teachers are expected to navigate competing civic ideals shaped by pluralism, patriotism, and contested understandings of democracy (Knowles & Camicia, 2025). Future-teachers in both contexts must negotiate tensions between professional ideals and dominant sociopolitical discourses, rendering their perspectives on war, peace, and education particularly instructive (Gursel-Bilgin, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023). Furthermore, as Purwanto et al. (2023) demonstrate, even when PE is articulated in higher education mission statements, its enactment often hinges on individual faculty initiative and political feasibility (Gursel-Bilgin, 2022). Together, these findings highlight the need to examine how global peace discourses are reinterpreted within interconnected national contexts such as Türkiye and the United States, where teachers' understandings of peace are shaped by broader cultural and institutional logics as well as personal commitments.

Conceptual Framework

This study drew from Nel Noddings's (2012) work on PE and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001, 2011). Noddings theorizes how twentieth-century wars and political events contributed to the normalization and glorification of war and violence in education, shaping individuals' psychology through nationalistic bias, masculinity, religion, and affective attachments to power and security. Her framework enables an analysis of how beliefs about war, peace, and violence are culturally produced, attending to the evolutionary and sociocultural dimensions through which individuals negotiate competition, gender roles, and collectivist commitments to national identity. Central to Noddings's argument is the role of schooling in cultivating psychological orientations that normalize prescribed forms of citizenship, gender, and religious identity, while discouraging dissent by casting peace as feminized, unrealistic, or disloyal.

Complementing Noddings's moral–philosophical perspective, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory offers a macro-sociological lens for examining how cultural values shape collective beliefs and practices across societies. The framework's six dimensions—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint—illuminate how sociocultural norms shape educational meanings of war and peace. For example, in high power-distance contexts, deference to authority may constrain teachers' willingness to question dominant national narratives, whereas lower power-distance settings may enable greater pedagogical critique and debate. Similarly, cultures characterized by strong uncertainty avoidance tend to privilege order and moral certainty, encouraging prescriptive approaches to peace, while those more tolerant of ambiguity are more likely to support dialogic engagement with conflict and reconciliation. The individualism–collectivism dimension further shapes whether peace is framed as an individual ethical commitment or a relational and communal responsibility within the social order.

The masculinity–femininity dimension concerns the value accorded to care, empathy, and relationality: In more masculine cultures, caring dispositions may be marginalized, whereas more cooperative cultures legitimize care as a professional and ethical orientation. Long-term versus short-term orientation shapes how educators conceptualize social change, with peace understood either as a long-term project of civic renewal or as an immediate curricular objective. Finally, the indulgence–restraint dimension influences the expression of emotion in educational contexts, as more expressive cultures permit open engagement with injustice and hope, while restrained settings regulate affect through formal classroom norms. Taken together, these dimensions illuminate how teachers' constructions of peace, war, and violence are mediated by broader cultural values and institutional hierarchies.

These frameworks converge in their emphasis on the situated nature of human understanding, highlighting how psychological orientations are shaped through cultural structures and social meanings. Noddings foregrounds the micro-level moral reasoning informing teachers' interpretations of peace, while Hofstede elucidates the macro-level cultural forces that shape and constrain those interpretations. Combined, they enable an analytic linkage between individual sense-making and broader sociocultural and institutional contexts, aligning with the study's comparative and phenomenological design. In combining these perspectives, this study avoids the oversimplification of cultural or psychological explanations by positioning teacher beliefs as products of dynamic interaction between personal ethics and collective norms (Signorini et al., 2009). This integrated framework thus guided both the design of the interview protocol and the cross-case analysis, ensuring that participants' narratives were interpreted in light of both their lived moral commitments and the cultural dimensions structuring their educational environments.

Literature Review

Peace Education: Offerings and Challenges

PE is a multidimensional and transformative field integrating policy, pedagogy, and institutional practice to address both direct and structural forms of violence (Bajaj, 2008; Bickmore, 2025; Harris, 2004; Reardon, 1988). As a vital component of social education (Noddings, 2012; Page, 2008; Salomon & Nevo, 2005), PE seeks not only to prevent

overt conflict but also to challenge systemic inequalities embedded in educational and social structures (Cremin & Bevington, 2017; Galtung, 1969, 1990; UNESCO, 2021; Zembylas, 2025b). Drawing on Galtung's multidimensional framework of peace and violence, this study approaches PE as both a pedagogical praxis and an ethical paradigm aimed at fostering critical consciousness, empathy, and transformative action across diverse learning environments (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016; Zembylas, 2025b).

PE has been theorized through complementary strands that emphasize distinct yet interconnected dimensions of peace. The humanistic strand centers on empathy, care, and justice in human relations (Noddings, 2012; Reardon, 1988); the skills-based strand emphasizes communicative and conflict-resolution competencies developed through education (Harris & Morrison, 2012; Salomon & Nevo, 2002); and the critical strand challenges structural and institutional forms of violence (Darder, 2012; Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). Collectively, these perspectives frame PE as a holistic and context-sensitive field in which teachers play a pivotal role (Bar-Tal, 2002, 2011; Lopes Cardozo, 2011). Despite this theoretical diversity, limited research explores how teachers' beliefs about peace and war are shaped by sociocultural contexts (Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2021; Kuppens & Langer, 2016). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes PE as pedagogical beliefs and practices through which future-teachers interpret and engage with ideas of war, peace, and violence, integrating humanistic, skills-based, and critical dimensions.

While foundational studies continue to inform the field, more recent discussions of PE underscore its dynamic and contested nature, reflecting shifts in global conflict patterns and sociopolitical realities. Scholars also underline the controversial nature of PE as it inherently implies confronting the sociocultural, political, and structural factors (re)producing violence (Bickmore, 2025; Erden-Basaran & Gursel-Bilgin, 2023; Gursel-Bilgin, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2021; Harris & Morrison, 2012; Reardon,1988). Rather than suggesting a settled consensus, the existing studies illustrate ongoing debate about whether PE can challenge the structures that sustain violence.

In line with this controversy, numerous studies have highlighted the challenges PE researchers and practitioners face (Bickmore, 2011; Gursel-Bilgin, 2020a). For example, despite the rhetoric of democracy and social justice in public schooling, good-intentioned PE practice may become part of the problem it tries to solve (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013) or contribute to negative peace rather than democratic transformation (Bickmore, 2011). Similarly, others emphasize the need to question taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs about peace (education) and the hegemonic patriarchal structure of public schools and negative peace practices aimed at the elimination or temporary prevention of overt violence (Bekerman & McGlynn, 2007; Bickmore, 2011; Salomon & Nevo, 2005; Zembylas, 2025a; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013). Hence, PE scholars call for a critical approach to the philosophy and practice of PE (Bajaj, 2008; Bekerman, 2007; Brantmeier, 2011; Diaz-Soto, 2005; Zembylas, 2008, 2025b).

The Key Role of Teachers in Peace Education

A growing body of literature underlines the significance of the role of teachers in determining the effect of PE practices as well as in overcoming various challenges faced in diverse settings (Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023; Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). More specifically, theoretical, sociocultural, political, methodological, and pedagogical orientations of the practitioners remarkably influence the assumptions regarding (peace) education, their prototypical attributes, and the fundamentals of desired outcomes (Bajaj, 2008; Salomon & Nevo, 2005). Studies recurrently found a link between teachers' attributes and their conceptualizations and practice of PE (Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2020, 2021; Horner et al., 2015; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013).

Consequently, teacher agency has been repeatedly underlined as a fundamental concept in teaching peace, which requires robust exploration through empirical research (Charalambous et al., 2013; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007; Weldon, 2010). Yet, despite this recognition, questions remain about how teacher education can adequately prepare future educators for the moral and political demands of peace pedagogy. Particular challenges exist in integrating PE in teacher education and training programs (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Cook, 2014).

Peace Education and Teacher Education in Türkiye and the United States

Despite the growing literature, PE is still contested, and its legitimacy is often questioned in public schools in the United States (Stomfay-Stitz, 2008), resulting in challenges to integrate PE in mainstream schooling and teacher education (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014; Gursel-Bilgin, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2021). This tension reflects the enduring struggle between civic conformity and critical pedagogy within US educational discourse. These challenges frequently relate to teachers' fear of being regarded as communist sympathizers (Burnley, 2003) or disloyal to their homeland (Harris & Morrison, 2012; Horsley et al., 2005; Westheimer, 2007).

Research shows that teachers who sought to integrate PE into formal curricula often encountered professional and social repercussions, which underscores the political vulnerability of peace pedagogy in certain US contexts (Gursel-Bilgin, 2021). Some teachers were even fired and lost their jobs and homes in the state, making apprehension toward such work understandable (Gursel-Bilgin, 2021). Moreover,

studies emphasize that teachers have limited perceptions and/or knowledge of PE as a potential curricular component (Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2021; Cook, 2014), or they feel incompetent to practice PE as a potentially controversial content (Gursel-Bilgin, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2020, 2021; McLean et al., 2008). Consequently, the literature points to a persistent practice gap regarding how PE can be meaningfully enacted within contemporary Western education systems (Bickmore, 2011, 2017, 2025; Flinders, 2005, 2006; Gursel-Bilgin, 2016; Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2020, 2021; Paulson & Tikly, 2023). Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of attending to sociocultural and historical contexts in shaping teachers' curricular decisions and PE practices.

In Türkiye, PE remains relatively underexplored compared to the extensive scholarship developed in the United States, reflecting distinct sociocultural and historical trajectories. While US research centers on teacher anxieties and curricular omissions, research in Türkiye more frequently foregrounds systemic concerns such as structural violence, centralized assessment regimes, and teacher preparedness. Nevertheless, national curricula across several subject areas (e.g., social studies, Turkish language, history, human rights, citizenship and democracy, and the history of revolutions and Atatürk's principles) formally incorporate learning objectives related to peace (Aydemir, 2018; Keskin & Keskin, 2009; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2018).

Despite this formal inclusion, the literature emphasizes particular challenges integrating PE in Turkish school routines due to the centralized evaluation system, teachers' lack of skills and knowledge, political climate, and teachers' and students' attitudes towards learning peace values (Aktas & Safran, 2013; Aydemir, 2018; Avci & Tarhan, 2015; Demir-Basaran, 2011; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023; Özdemir & Celik, 2017). Scholars generally agree that these structural constraints reflect deeper ideological tensions in national education policy and civic identity formation. Critical examination of the complexities and underlying reasons of this failure from the perspectives of practicing and preservice teachers would provide insights overcoming these challenges. A recent study also supports the idea that peace almost does not exist in future-teachers' lives despite the concrete presence of war and violence (re)produced through gender norms, media, patriotic values in social life and schooling (Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023).

Others emphasize that violence and bullying are widespread in Turkish schools (Arslan et al., 2012; Atik, 2009; Kepenekci & Çınkır, 2006) as the citizenship education reflects on traditional citizenship focused on a unified national identity rather than critical democracy, pluralism, and human rights (Ipek, 2011; Sen, 2019), and teacher education programs lack concepts such as multiculturalism, democracy, and humanism (Akar, 2010; Çelik & Gür, 2014; Çetinsaya, 2014; Gok, 2016; Gurdogan-Bayir & Bozkurt, 2018; Kurt & Gümüş, 2015; Simsek, 2007; Tonbuloglu et al., 2016). As a result, despite significant peace discourse in schools (Aydemir, 2018; Keskin & Keskin, 2009), PE practices remain largely superficial and fragmented (Demir, 2011; Deveci et al., 2008; Gurdogan-Bayir & Bozkurt, 2018; LePage et al., 2011). This gap underscores the limited translation of policy rhetoric into transformative pedagogy. As local approaches to PE are still emerging, especially regarding structural violence, social injustice, and inequality (Demir, 2011; Mandry, 2012), research foregrounding teachers' lived experiences is crucial to understand both the potential and the constraints of meaningful reform.

The literature widely concurs that no single model of PE can be universally applied across sociocultural contexts (Bekerman & McGlynn, 2007; Davies, 2004; Gallagher, 2004; Harris & Morrison, 2012; Salomon & Nevo, 2005), underscoring the need for contextually grounded and comparative approaches attentive to local histories, sociopolitical conditions, and cultural narratives. Yet comparative research remains limited, particularly in examining how these contextual factors shape the conceptualization and practice of PE in diverse settings (Gursel-Bilgin, 2022; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023; McGlynn, 2009). Comparative and interdisciplinary analyses can therefore offer valuable insights into how peace-related values and pedagogies are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted across cultures. Addressing this gap, the present comparative study examines future-teachers' beliefs about war, peace, and PE in Türkiye and the United States.

Positioning the Authors' Prior Scholarship

Across these debates, the authors' previous research has made a sustained contribution to examining the moral, political, and curricular dimensions of PE. Prior works (Flinders, 2005; 2006; Gursel-Bilgin, 2016, 2020, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin & Flinders, 2020, 2021; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023) in curriculum studies, teacher education, and PE have illuminated how teachers' professional identities, sociopolitical contexts, and moral reasoning intersect to shape understandings of war, peace, and violence. This study acknowledges this trajectory and builds on, but does not conflate with, the existing international literature, situating three authors' previous findings within a broader comparative framework. This explicit recognition clarifies that while the authors' scholarship has advanced key debates in PE, the current study seeks to extend those insights by integrating cross-cultural perspectives and empirical evidence from both Türkiye and the United States, a need emphasized by scholars (e.g., Bickmore, 2017; Zembylas, 2025a, 2025b).

Method

Research Model

This study employed comparative education research grounded in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This design reflects the study's aim to explore how sociocultural and political contexts shape future-teachers' understandings of war, violence, and peace, while IPA provides the methodological foundation for interpreting the moral, relational, and experiential dimensions of those perspectives. This study used the three-step strategy of comparative education research: contextual description, interpretation of practice, and cross-case synthesis (Bray et al., 2014). We first focused on the contextual description to examine the Turkish and US future-teachers' understanding of war, peace, and violence. Second, the interpretive phase focused on analyzing participants' narratives to understand their pedagogical orientations and moral–relational reasoning, situated within our theoretical framework. Finally, we initiated the cross-case synthesis step to identify the convergences and divergences across the two national contexts, thereby addressing how global PE discourses are realized differentially in distinct sociopolitical settings.

This comparative education research grounded in IPA is needed to capture both the unique and shared dimensions of how future-teachers in Türkiye and the United States make sense of war, violence, and peace. IPA allows researchers to develop relational or reflective bonds with their participants and provides advantages in relation to understanding the inner deliberation of the participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017). Additionally, IPA provides a platform for participants to narrate their lived experiences the way they see proper, free from any misrepresentation, while allowing researchers to build reflective bonds, which will be explained later, with their participants (Alase, 2017). This advantage of IPA comes from the fact that it is commonly used to examine the individual psychology of a particular issue from a philosophical lens and underlines that experiences can be narrated in various ways (Smith, 2011; Tuffour, 2017).

Reflexivity and Positionality

We, as qualitative researchers, recognize the impact of subjectivity on all aspects of a study and the degree of inner bond that researchers could develop with the participants' situationality (Ratner, 2002). The inner bond refers to the interpretive rapport that we build during interviews and analytical stages as the hallmark of IPA (Alase, 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2017). It is the researchers' effort to understand participants' lifeworlds with sensitivity and develop an interpretive closeness. Given the number of participants in this study, our engagement with participants was limited to one time with each participant. We tried to create a welcoming and open space for all, where they could freely articulate their experiences and perspectives. However, it was grounded in ethical attentiveness and dialogic respect rather than emotional rapport. This approach was compatible with the backgrounds of the first and second authors. The first and second authors are insiders, as they completed their undergraduate and graduate education in Türkiye, and outsiders, as they later pursued doctoral studies in the United States as Fulbright scholars. Their personal and professional trajectories provided deep familiarity with both educational systems and the social conditions that inform this study. The third author, educated entirely in the United States, contributed as a critical outsider who balanced cultural proximity with critical distance.

Instruments

For this study, we used semistructured interview protocols consisting of three parts. The interview structure was developed to ensure both cross-cultural comparability and space for phenomenological depth. The first part included demographic questions (e.g., post-graduation plans, number of years teaching, subject area) and brief inquiries about participants' exposure to war (e.g., knowing someone who had participated in armed conflict) to identify those whose responses might be informed by direct or indirect experiences with war. Part two introduced a series of questions about peace, war, and violence to invite participants to describe and reflect on their lived experiences, emotions, and moral reasoning regarding peace, war, and violence, and to understand their relationships with the psychological and social factors drawn from our conceptual framework based on Noddings' (2012) work in PE and Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. The final part focused on the role of schools in teaching about war and peace. Together, the three sections aimed to capture not only participants' conceptual understandings but also how they located themselves within socially and politically constructed discourses of peace, war, and violence as students, citizens, family members, and future-teachers. Although the content was equivalent across contexts, several items were culturally adapted to reflect contextual realities such as Türkiye's compulsory military service and the limited use of the term "nonviolence." A full bilingual comparative version of the interview questions is provided in Appendix A.

Participants and Recruitment Process

Before recruiting participants, we received IRB approval from a US institution and ethical approval from a Turkish institution. To recruit participants, we put out calls to students in all teacher education programs in both contexts. The call briefly described the study in lay terms and asked for volunteers. The only criterion for the selection of volunteer participants was that participants were required to be

enrolled in a teacher education program at the undergraduate or graduate level. We did not target individuals with a particular interest in PE, although a few participants from both countries told us that they had volunteered for that reason.

Thirty-eight individuals from the United States volunteered to participate, and all were interviewed. We had 29 undergraduate students between the ages of 19 and 35 and nine graduate students between the ages of 31 and 51. Our participants included both new and experienced teachers working in the elementary grades through college. The sample included preservice teachers and graduate students completing their credentials at a large state university in the Midwestern United States. This institution hosts several defense-related initiatives, including its language and cultural training programs for US military personnel and security professionals preparing for overseas assignments. This situation results in having veteran students and local military families in the region. Participants also included a range of subject areas at the secondary level, including math, science, arts, English language, and social studies.

Forty-three future-teachers volunteered from Türkiye, and all were interviewed. We had 33 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 and 10 graduate students between the ages of 24 and 34. The newly graduated participants enrolled in master's programs were practicing teachers at local public and private schools. Their perspectives combined being a student at the university and a practicing teacher at a local school. Undergraduate students were from various subject areas, including guidance and psychological counseling, foreign language education, computer education and educational technology, primary education, and secondary school science and mathematics education. An additional comparative note with regard to knowing someone with war experiences, Türkiye has a compulsory military service for all men.

Data Collection

The interviews with the US participants were conducted face-to-face in 2018 by the first and third authors in English at a site convenient for each participant. Although we similarly planned to conduct the interviews with the Turkish participants through face-to-face interviews, due to the unexpected pandemic, the interviews with the Turkish participants were conducted by the lead author via telephone, Skype, or Zoom platforms in Turkish in 2020. With the exception of a few long interviews, each interview took approximately 45 minutes. During the interviews, although we avoided asking questions about participants' gender identity to respect their privacy, they expressed their opinions on how their gender identity was influential in developing their perceptions of war, peace, and violence. Therefore, we used their gender claims in the data organization and analyses.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in their original language. The data were analyzed separately for the two countries by using MAXQDA Plus 2020, and a comparative analysis was later conducted to interpret the emerging themes in light of the social, cultural, and historical backgrounds of Türkiye and the United States. Each transcript was uploaded to the software and then classified based on the demographic information provided by the participants.

The authors coded the transcripts simultaneously. First, we utilized our conceptual framework's premises, such as war, violence, peace, education, and "other," as the initial step of coding. It functioned as deductive, theory-informed categories, which helped us identify how participants used cultural language to make sense of peace and war. In the second part, inductive comparative coding was applied to identify subthemes emerging from participants' own words and expressions. These subthemes were continuously refined through iterative readings, analytic memoing, and team discussions.

The authors debriefed their codes once they finished their individual coding process and examined where and when their codes differed. This debriefing process was iterative and interpretive rather than mechanical. We compared cultural backgrounds, as Turkish or US scholars. This shaped our interpretation, and then we reached consensus through discussion, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing. After the debriefing, the authors agreed on the codes and the code clusters. Then, all code clusters were organized into higher-order themes aligned with the three research questions.

For instance, the first-cycle deductive code "War" was derived from the conceptual framework and expanded through participants' narratives into inductive subthemes, such as "war as human failure," "war as defense of national identity," and "normalization of militarism in daily life." These subthemes captured participants' descriptions of war as both a moral crisis and a normalized social construct reinforced through education, media, and national narratives. Similar processes continued with deductive codes such as peace and violence. This iterative movement between framework-informed and data-driven analysis exemplifies how the research team refined codes into higher-order thematic clusters, such as "definition of conflict, violence, war and peace."

In order to increase the credibility and validity of the results of this study, triangulation across data sources and member-checking techniques were employed (Denzin, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the follow-up interviews with the selected participants, member-checking techniques were employed to check for perceived accuracy and reactions. Twelve participants from Türkiye and nine participants from the United States were contacted via email and

online meetings after preliminary analysis. Minor changes were made to clarify or change phrasing where participants' feedback suggested contextual reinterpretation, but no themes were substantially altered.

Contextual Considerations Shaping Interpretation

The data from the American participants were collected face-to-face, but the data from the Turkish participants were collected online due to COVID-19 lockdown. The same semistructured interview protocol with slight contextual differences and follow-up member-checking procedures was employed across both contexts to ensure comparability and depth of reflection (see Appendix A). Another contextual factor is the age range of the participants from Türkiye and the United States. Rather than a methodological limitation, this variation reflects cultural patterns consistent with Hofstede's (2011) framework. Individuals in Türkiye tend to pursue graduate studies within a few years after completing undergraduate degrees (Guclu & Yılmaz, 2019), whereas individuals in the United States may pursue graduate education later in life, offering a culturally grounded variation rather than a methodological bias (Gardner, 2008).

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in four themes: 1) conceptualization of peace, war, and violence, 2) the role of patriotism, 3) perspective about world peace, and 4) hopelessness about PE. The first theme addresses the first research question by examining how future-teachers in both national contexts understand and conceptualize conflict, violence, war, and peace. The second and third themes respond to the second research question by examining how cultural norms and values shape these conceptualizations. The final theme addresses the third research question by exploring how these understandings influence future-teachers' pedagogical orientations toward PE.

Conceptualization of Conflict, Violence, War, and Peace

Almost all participants from Türkiye and the United States (except P4 and P5 from US) expressed that conflict and violence were closely interrelated. They commonly defined conflict as "disputes, disagreements, and differences of opinions" and violence as "the result of disputes and coercive situations." However, these participants did not have similar conceptualizations of conflict when they thought about their culture and ongoing political discourses.

Among the US future-teachers, conflict was conceptualized as personal and interpersonal tension shaped by exposure to war-related discourse and family histories of military service. Several participants referred to relatives or acquaintances who had served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or earlier conflicts, indicating that war was not an abstract concept but a lived presence within their social networks. In these cases, conflict was understood less as a political abstraction and more as a human struggle associated with trauma, emotional restraint, and moral ambiguity. Rather than being framed as a collective or structural issue, conflict was frequently individualized and filtered through personal proximity to military experience. US-P3, for example, reflected on her brother's silence about military service and how she interpreted it as evidence of psychological weight: "I think if my brother wanted to tell me, I think he would . . . I'm not suggesting that he has seen horrible things, but I think it's just one of those things he deals with internally."

Some US future-teachers also described avoiding conversations about war or conflict when such conversations were emotionally effective. Rather than a collective avoidance, this tendency appeared to be shaped by individuals' proximity to military life and personal decision. One participant, US-P9, illustrated this tension by describing her distant yet empathetic engagement with a relative's military experience:

> With the exception of my roommate's boyfriend, she tells me just a little bit about what he's done for the military overseas. I used to send cards to my second cousin when he was in Afghanistan . . . and he would occasionally send back letters. But just saying thank you so much for that. He did talk about how they were building schools for a long time. I thought it was pretty cool. (US-P9)

This finding suggests that US participants often encountered conflict indirectly through family narratives rather than through immediate lived experience. In contrast, Turkish future-teachers conceptualized conflict as an embedded feature of everyday social life. Rather than a distant or abstract issue, they viewed conflict as something encountered through national discourse, media coverage, and interpersonal dynamics. Several participants attributed this constant exposure to Türkiye's geopolitical position and ongoing regional tensions. As Turkish-P9 mentioned, they "hear a lot of news about people who die for the country due to terror or cross-border military operations." Although most participants from the United States and Türkiye did not report direct personal involvement in war, conflict was nevertheless experienced as socially proximate. This proximity was symbolic rather than experiential, but it shaped how they understood war as a persistent social condition.

Gender also emerged as an important aspect for all female and some male Turkish future-teachers in defining conflict "as a struggle against patriarchy." They mentioned patriarchy and gendered discourse of heroism and national pride shaped everyday understandings of power and violence. This situation is also accepted as the reason for the cultural normalization of aggression and the marginalization of feminine values. They critiqued dominant narratives of heroism, nationalism, and masculinity, describing these as

contributing to everyday forms of violence. As Turkish-P35 explained:

> Women are subjected to a lot of violence. That's why concepts like Women's Day and women's rights defenders exist. There is an ongoing environment of violence, and naturally women can become more defensive because they experience it in many ways. I don't know what kind of psychology men have. It is whether a "let sleeping dogs lie" mentality or something else, but they often consciously or unconsciously turn a blind eye. Peace is difficult under these conditions.

This framing expanded the meaning of conflict beyond warfare to include structural and gender-based violence, highlighting how social hierarchies shape perceptions of peace and insecurity. Across both contexts, participants expressed difficulty defining peace, despite its centrality to the interviews. Most defined peace in negative terms as the absence of war rather than through positive concepts such as justice, equity, or coexistence. As US-P5 said, "I think the most concise definition that you could get is still the absence of war so it's a good definition. It does not describe what it actually is but a concise definition is difficult." Similarly, Turkish-P25 defined peace as "the respect that each country shows to each other and absence of war."

This tendency to define peace in negative terms rather than through positive social values (e.g., justice, equality, coexistence) indicates how dominant political discourses shape participants' moral imagination. US future-teachers tended to draw on narratives of peace as security, stability, and military strength, while Turkish participants often referenced the ideological legacy of "peace at home, peace in the world," attributed to Atatürk, despite recognizing its declining relevance in contemporary politics. Turkish-P22 captured the current situation of rising neoconservatism as follows:

> Everywhere now we have war propaganda because of the current politics. The opposition says if there is a war, we should protect ourselves. . . . The ruling group says we must fight for our politics. Politicians changed the desire for peace even in schools.

Overall, this comparison showed the shared struggles of future-teachers in defining peace and suggested that US and Turkish future-teachers' moral vocabularies are shaped less by pedagogical reflection and more by inherited national narratives of power and security.

The Role of Patriotism and Culture

Future-teachers in both contexts described patriotism as something transmitted implicitly through schooling, curriculum, and daily routines. In the United States, participants emphasized institutionalized practices such as the Pledge of Allegiance as mechanisms through which patriotic values are normalized. As US-P12 explained, "It's implicitly taught all the time. . . . It's a state law in this state." In Türkiye, future-teachers similarly described patriotism as embedded within education but emphasized that its meaning has shifted over time in response to political situations. Turkish-P27 reflected, "I learned a lot about patriotism in school, but when we think about today's political structure, the version of patriotism I learned is different from what is taught now." This comment points to a temporal tension between inherited civic values and contemporary political narratives and suggests that patriotism is reinterpreted.

When discussing heroism, US participants often associated it with military service and personal sacrifice, particularly in relation to post-9/11 discourse. Turkish participants also acknowledged the cultural centrality of heroism but tended to situate it historically, especially in relation to the War of Independence. As Turkish-P16 noted, there is a need for "a new version of heroism" beyond the glorification of wartime sacrifice. US-P1 articulated the connection between patriotism and heroism as follows: "Heroism includes standing up for your country. . . . Those boys are heroes." This contrast reveals a key difference: US future-teachers often framed heroism through contemporary military engagement and personal proximity to soldiers, whereas Turkish participants more frequently located heroism within national history while simultaneously questioning its relevance in present-day education.

Discussions of terrorism further illuminated these differences. US participants spoke openly about terrorism through the national trauma of 9/11 and often framed military action as justified defense. US-P15 narrated how soldiers had become heroes again after 9/11:

> WWI and WWII in the US, soldiers were considered to be heroes. But for some reason, that changed in the Vietnam War . . . I also think that another major reason is 9/11. When the US was attacked by the terrorists, I think that people started to value soldiers again, because for the first time the US was attacked on its own soil.

In contrast, Turkish participants approached terrorism and military power with greater ambivalence. While acknowledging the military's symbolic role, many resisted its glorification in schools or textbooks. Several Turkish future-teachers reflected that the nationalist phrase "Every Turk is born as a soldier" had lost its relevance in the curriculum and among younger generations (except Turkish-P9 and P23). In contrast, while US future- teachers tended to reproduce a patriotic ethos shaped by global interventions, Turkish participants negotiated inherited historically structured nationalist ideals alongside growing critical awareness of militarization in education.

Perspectives on World Peace

Across both contexts, many participants expressed skepticism about the attainability of world peace, though the reasoning behind their views differed. While US

future-teachers tended to frame peace as unrealistic due to human nature or geopolitical realities, Turkish participants more often grounded their pessimism in global inequality and power asymmetries. Among US participants, world peace was frequently described as an ideal rather than an attainable goal. Several framed their views in pragmatic or religious terms, suggesting that conflict was inevitable. As US-P3 stated, "I mean, world peace would be nice, but I think it is impossible." US-P9 explained this belief through a religious lens, noting that *"*I don't think we'll ever have world peace at all. In my particular religion, things are just going to progressively get worse.*"* US-P22 described peace as an abstract ideal rather than a realistic political objective: "Well, it's hard to say that absolute peace is achievable in every situation. It is very idealistic." US-P7 acknowledged contradictions between national rhetoric and practice:

> We have military bases all over the world. So, we're ready to go to war. It doesn't really take much to provoke us into it. I don't think we're looking for long-term peace at all. We say that we are, but I think that that's completely untrue.

These reflections suggest that while US participants were aware of global power dynamics, they often interpreted them as inevitable features of international politics rather than conditions that could be fundamentally altered. Among Turkish participants, skepticism toward world peace was expressed more explicitly in relation to global inequality and geopolitical power hierarchies. Several described world peace as "utopian" or unattainable (Turkish-P3 and Turkish-P6), while others emphasized Türkiye's limited influence in shaping global outcomes. Turkish-P42 noted, "I do not think that Türkiye has a very forward-looking plan on this issue." In contrast to US participants, Turkish future-teachers more frequently framed peace as constrained by the actions of powerful states, rather than by human nature or ideology alone. This perspective was often accompanied by concern about Western political influence and intervention.

A small number of participants across both contexts expressed disengagement from the topic of world peace altogether. Some described emotional fatigue or avoidance, explaining that global conflict felt overwhelming or beyond their control. US-P8 stated that they "preferred not to engage with discussions of world peace because it felt impossible" (US-P8). Similarly, Turkish-P1 explained that constant exposure to conflict-related discourse led to disengagement rather than reflection (Turkish-P1).

Only a few participants expressed conditional optimism about the possibility of world peace. Turkish future-teachers suggested "the United Nations to change their definition of peace to be more inclusive" (Turkish-P34) and "building ideals that place peace at the maximum importance for all countries" (Turkish-P35). US future-teachers emphasized collaboration and moral responsibility among world leaders, arguing that "World peace means every nation needs to strive to achieve it, you can't have world peace with one country" (US-P10), and "Leaders must value and prioritize multiculturalism. Without accountability, like with world peace, it seems unrealistic. But I believe it is absolutely possible" (US-P15). US-P4 voiced critical reflections on the contradictions between peace rhetoric and foreign policy in the United States:

> The US acts like the world's sheriff, promoting peace through war . . . getting involved in other countries' conflicts for the sake of peace. But isn't that the idea of war? To get what you want and then have peace because the other side is gone?

Similarly, Turkish future-teachers voiced concern about Western intervention and used the term "foreign forces" to describe perceived manipulation under the guise of "being the guardians of democracy and human rights." As Turkish-P9 mentioned: "We can give America entering the Middle East as an example. First they made sure that they brought democracy and peace . . . and then they took their army. There is still no peace in the region."

These findings suggest that both groups are cognizant of their countries' current policies and their broader geopolitical implications. US future-teachers tended to perceive these policies as an unfortunate but a natural consequence of their nation's global influence. In contrast, their Turkish counterparts interpret peace as undermined by global inequalities.

Hopelessness About Peace Education

Turkish and US future-teachers agreed that the formal curriculum includes components of PE but has no place in the enacted curriculum. US-P22 explained: "There are themes within the formal, explicit curriculum, that if teachers paid attention to them, they would correspond with this movement toward PE. It's just the teachers choose to not do it because they themselves feel uncomfortable." Similarly, some Turkish future-teachers described the presence of peace-oriented objectives in national curricula but emphasized the constraints imposed by political discourse and institutional control. As Turkish-P14 noted:

> There is Atatürk's saying, "peace at home, peace in the world," but many things have changed in the curriculum. The discourse of current politicians is very sharp. When I look at the texts, I see that they are not in favor of peace.

Across both contexts, future-teachers thus described PE as symbolically present but practically constrained. They described learning about peace primarily outside formal schooling. However, the source of their learning differed. Turkish future-teachers often referenced civil society spaces, such as workshops, NGOs, reading groups, or student organizations focused on peace and nonviolence (Turkish-P1 and

Turkish-P25). Several described actively seeking out these spaces to compensate for the absence of peace-oriented dialogue in schools.

By contrast, US future-teachers more often described informal learning through conversation-based spaces, such as discussion groups or noncredit courses. These settings allowed them to engage with historical narratives, war, and global conflict without the pressures of formal curriculum or institutional accountability. As US-P3 explained, participation in discussion groups helped her reflect on how wars such as Vietnam or 9/11 were presented in textbooks. US-P18 shared that she took noncredit classes about different countries and learned about others' perspectives of war and peace. This contrast suggests that while both groups relied on informal learning, Turkish participants tended to seek organized collective spaces, whereas US participants more often relied on individualized or dialogic learning contexts.

When asked how PE might be incorporated into schools, participants in both contexts expressed uncertainty. Most identified social studies, language, or humanities courses as the most feasible sites for PE, while viewing STEM subjects as less compatible. As US-P13 explained:

> There's definitely a place for it in English. It's a little bit harder to fit it in math and science. And science is traditionally taught. It would seem like you were artificially putting it in rather than it being a natural part of the curriculum.

Turkish participants echoed this view, particularly emphasizing history education as a potential entry point, though often with hesitation. Turkish-P4 reflected:

> It should be given directly in history lessons, but how should they be given? Should they be given as if this war happened here or should they be given in a critical way? I don't know. I can't think of the age group right now. But again, I think, peace can be taught to children indirectly.

These responses illustrate a shared uncertainty about how PE can be meaningfully integrated into existing curricula, even when participants support its inclusion in principle. Across both contexts, participants commonly expressed a sense of emotional fatigue when reflecting on how to engage with peace-related issues. US participants described avoiding such topics to maintain collegiality or respect differing views. For example, US-P17 explained he refrained from engaging in peace-related conversation because of others' experiences:

> These conversations happened more on the sidelines, not in class or with students, but in personal or private settings, like at lunch. Some people supported the war in Iraq, while others were against it, and that created tension and concern.

Turkish participants, however, described more explicitly political and personal constraints. They articulated "the fear of psychological exhaustion" (Turkish-P3), "anxiety about being intimidated by authority" (Turkish-P8), "power dynamics" (Turkish-P9), "being a woman or person identifying with other minority gender forms" (Turkish-P13), and "the fear of troubling socially-constructed heroism" (Turkish-P41).

In short, these responses illustrate that "hopelessness" about peace does not stem from apathy but constrained agency. While US participants' reluctance was shaped by emotional boundaries and interpersonal sensitivities, Turkish participants' hesitation reflected structural power relations and political risk within educational spaces. In both contexts, the emotional labor required to navigate these constraints ultimately limited teachers' willingness and capacity to engage in peace-oriented pedagogy.

Discussion

The findings discussed previously cut across the participants' observations and experiences in their educational, social, and cultural lives and their development as future-teachers in two settings. Drawing extensively from these observations and experiences, they created their perceptions of violence, war, and peace as well as their projections of PE and its limitations and possibilities for practice in both educational systems. The immediate cultural environment and prevailing social discourses play a decisive role in shaping our participants' beliefs. Future-teachers in both countries were found to be influenced by dominant masculinity and the glorification of traits such as heroism, patriotism, and militarism. These constructs often hindered open discussions about peace, limiting such conversations in both their personal experiences and anticipated teaching practices.

In this section, we discuss themes drawn from participants across two countries. We aim to highlight the shallowness and ambiguities of peace and the futility of PE, as well as convergence and context-specific differences in perspectives on conflict, patriotism, and war. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first two parts address themes related to the absence of the concept of peace, as well as intersectional conceptions of patriotism, war, and conflict in our data, respectively. In the final section, we suggest the study's implications by pointing to the challenges that PE must overcome to pursue PE curriculum and practice aims.

(World) Peace: Removed From Life and School

The participants' limited knowledge and incomplete perception about peace and their conceptions of war, patriotism, and violence as intertwined concepts provided answers to all three of the research questions exploring future-teachers' perceptions of war, violence, and peace; how these perceptions reflected cultural norms; and how they are transmitted by the content and methods of instruction in the Turkish and

US settings. The future-teachers in both countries found the concept of peace vague and unreal and had difficulties in defining peace. When they did, they defined it as negative peace, referring to the absence of violence, discrimination, prejudice, polarization, and racism. As Galtung (1969, 1973) underscored decades ago, such a perspective on peace is insufficient for addressing various forms of violence.

PE practice must concentrate on building comprehensive peace (i.e., collaboration, cooperation, and integration) to transform the present violent realities (Bekerman & McGlynn, 2007; Danesh, 2007; Salomon, 2002). As Bekerman and Zembylas (2014, p. 15) say, teachers are the "critical design experts" in this process. Our analyses extend earlier studies by showing that few participants felt the insufficiency of such a negative conception of peace, but they could not provide definitions or examples of peace from a comprehensive perspective.

In general, our participants underlined the excessively high presence of violence and war in their lives through gender norms, media, socioculturally developed patriotic and religious values in schools and social life, whereas the concept of peace was not really embodied in life and schooling. This finding aligns with previous research (e.g., Bickmore, 2025; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2007) that educational practices often legitimize and reinforce overt and structural violence (Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023). However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating how these dynamics are already internalized by future-teachers themselves.

This situation is closely tied to masculinity and how it is used to create a power dynamic in both cultures because the discourse of future-teachers' responses shows that peace is a feminine concept (Noddings, 2012). This is very evident in the Turkish context, where participants underlined that peace is overshadowed by the masculine and hierarchy of masculinity present in their culture. In the US culture, future-teachers emphasize the importance of masculinity in creating a power dynamic, like in Türkiye, but the pressure of this form of power on people can be reduced with the US individualism, which may allow for more personal detachment from national narratives (Hofstede, 2001).

Turkish and US future-teachers almost had the same concerns that objectives related to peace are ignored and overlooked during the implementation process. Consistent with Akdağ and Haser's (2016) analysis, future-teachers in our study described peace-related conversations as operating through an alternative or informal curriculum centered on classroom order, silence, and discipline rather than critical engagement. This framing aligns with Kaya's (2015) argument that peace orientations in schooling are often shaped by religion, culture, and conservative policy discourses, limiting opportunities for transformative PE. Research by Demir (2011), Deveci et al. (2008), Gurdogan-Bayır and Bozkurt (2018), and LePage et al. (2011) consistently demonstrates that PE practices remain rare across educational settings. Our findings corroborate these studies while further illustrating how future-teachers experience this gap through their limited opportunities to engage with peace as a pedagogical concept. As Demir (2011) argues, teachers are often not adequately prepared to incorporate peace into their teaching, a limitation that was also evident in our participants' accounts.

Scholars such as Elmore (2012), Leahey (2012), and McManimon et al. (2012) have shown that schooling in the United States often operates through an implicit curriculum that normalizes ferocity, conquest, and militarized forms of virtue. Our findings resonate with these analyses but also extend them by revealing how future-teachers themselves internalize and reproduce these narratives, even in contexts where PE is formally articulated in curriculum documents. In our study, dominant societal narratives about war and patriotism were evident among participants in both countries, yet they were interpreted in context-specific ways. US future-teachers frequently framed the military as a defender of democracy beyond national borders, whereas Turkish future-teachers emphasized the necessity of military force to protect the nation from more powerful states. This comparison suggests that national narratives, rather than curricular texts alone, shape how PE is understood and enacted. Consequently, the central challenge for PE lies not in formulating objectives or strategies but in disrupting the normalization of violence, war, and conflict sustained through hidden curricula of masculinity, power, and restraint that shape future-teachers' dispositions well before they enter the classroom.

In relation to the implicit curriculum of war, masculinity, power, and restraint, the participants' indifference to world peace differed across contexts. When asked about world peace, many US future-teachers were able to disengage with little consequence to their daily lives, whereas Turkish participants emphasized exhaustion from war-related conversations in social life, media, and schools. The US learners' and teachers' indifference and a sense of personal disconnection with war (Flinders, 2005) can be linked to the individualistic setting in which they grew up. This finding intersects with sociocultural, geopolitical, and educational policies and practices captured in Hofstede's cultural framework (Hofstede, 2001).

Intersections of Patriotism, War, and Conflict

Our analyses showed that participant comments regarding patriotism, war, and conflict were in part connected. The US future-teachers were more patriotic and supportive of the military than those from Türkiye. Participants from the United States were less critical and most frequently evaluated the matter from personal lenses due to having more war experiences or family members who experienced real war situations. Additionally, the US future-teachers referred to

terror acts, particularly 9/11, considerably more frequently than the Turkish future-teachers did, although Türkiye has experienced more terror attacks in its recent history. Moreover, Turkish participants provided ideas more critical of the army and violence in comparison to the US participants in the study. Our findings demonstrated that US future-teachers were more detached from conflicts and their results in real life while Turkish future-teachers frequently perceived conflict as a daily conversation, especially due to geographical location, and defined conflict as a feminine struggle against patriarchy.

All these recurring themes come together to point to a power discourse for the US future-teachers and struggle and oppression for the Turkish future-teachers, both underlying an acceptance of social order and reality based on an unbalanced distribution of power. A US future-teacher's statement, "I mean you don't get to be a super power without exploiting," offers insights in this regard. Exploitation and power go hand in hand in the dominant world order. This also provides an explanation for why future-teachers in both groups cannot visualize comprehensive peace because what we do not live is difficult to envision.

If learners as future-teachers are not educated according to peace-related values (collaboration, harmony, social justice, and equity), they are educated according to violence and war-related values (inequality, exploitation, oppression, dehumanization). Although different aspects of PE, particularly conflict-resolution education, have been frequently practiced in US schooling contexts for decades now (Bickmore, 2002; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007), our findings raise concern regarding their impact. The related literature has emphasized a positive impact on school climate (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), particularly improved academic performance, positive attitudes toward school (Bickmore, 2002; Bodine & Crawford, 1999), and decreased aggressiveness, drop-out rates, and violence (Jones & Kmitta, 2000). Our findings call for a more comprehensive and closer look at the PE practices in the US settings, particularly exploring the complexities and consequences of these efforts and seeking possibilities to enhance their impact on the individual and societal levels. It might be helpful to focus on the underlying reasons for US future-teachers' apathy and indifference about PE, as our data has revealed.

As a relatively new scholarly field, PE is yet to be explored theoretically and empirically in the Turkish settings. Our participants' remarks also confirmed that their years of experience as students in Turkish schools lacked integration of PE despite the presence of peace-related objectives in the formal curricula for decades and learners' pressing need to process and transform the effects of violence and war across various dimensions of life. The limited literature supports this need (Demir, 2011; Deveci et al., 2008; Gurdogan-Bayir & Bozkurt, 2018; Gursel-Bilgin & Bengu, 2021; LePage et al., 2011).

Implications for Peace Education Practice: Constraints and Possibilities

Our findings emphasize once more the urgent need for systematic transformation of schooling and teacher education. We have referred to the literature underlining the implicit curriculum of violence within schools in the literature review (e.g., Elmore, 2012; Flinders, 2006; Leahey, 2012; Mcmanimon et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2007). These implicit messages are powerfully enacted in individuals' ways of being and doing across several dimensions of schooling, from the classroom interactions through teaching materials, as underlined by Brown (2022) and Wozolek (2020). The structural barriers in various dimensions of schooling have been reported for decades: curriculum as a privileged discourse (Apple, 1990), educational practices legitimating and reinforcing structural and/or overt violence (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2007), and educational discourses rationalizing military aggression in the name of victory, freedom, and security at home (Darder, 2012). These dynamics may also punish teachers who challenge dominant discourses (Gursel-Bilgin, 2021). Noddings's (2012) ideas discussed in our conceptual framework effectively underline the psychological, social, and cultural factors supporting war and violence, and she urges schools to examine and transform the glorification of war and the concept of the warrior within the larger culture and curricula. Such efforts are justified given their significant potential to generate meaningful and sustainable improvements in educational practice.

Another significant implication for practice based on our findings is that (future) teachers do see the potential of PE and agree that it can be practiced even in the present standardized test-based accountability systems. Despite this agreed-upon potential of PE, our participants' answers also demonstrate that teachers do not know how to practice it within their (current) settings. Teachers are the key to fulfilling PE aims. Therefore, empowering teachers with essential knowledge, awareness, skills, and tools must be the first step toward successful practices. Our previous work across diverse settings demonstrates that learners at varying grade levels need and expect classroom instruction to help them process and transform the horrors of violence and war (Flinders, 2005, 2006; Gursel-Bilgin, 2022; Gursel-Bilgin et al., 2023). This calls for a systematic (re)consideration of teacher training and teacher education to empower teachers with the essential knowledge and skills to practice this potentially controversial pedagogy.

Last but not least, there is a need for more local materials and program development to improve classroom practices and teachers' readiness to become change agents. McLaughlin (2013) suggests two approaches to mutual adaptation for classroom teaching: 1) specificity prior to local initiation and 2) an organizational perspective that

focuses on the development of users. The first approach will potentially minimize the need for individual users to make decisions as the details of the activities and strategies are laid out for them. The second approach will require a more organizational perspective that focuses on the user's development by using the local resources and strategies. We suggest using the second approach because the development of the US and Turkish future-teachers as peace agents can potentially be successful if it is based on the contextualized specific planning of PE strategies designed by community members based on local resources. The motivation should be internalized because our findings show that without altering or removing the negative impact of the US and Turkish traditions of war and peace based on mutual ground, the ongoing problems of glorifying war and the deliberate removal of peace content from the curriculum may continue. It is also important to note that, as McLaughlin (2013) explains, this is a resocialization process, and "even willing teachers have to go through such a learning (and unlearning) process in order to develop new attitudes, behaviors, and skills for a radically new role" (p. 212). Supporting future-teachers in reconnecting with peace traditions requires sustained guidance, time, and direction from teacher educators, as well as a deliberate reprioritization of teacher education curricula. This process should emphasize mutual adaptation, combining new pedagogical approaches with locally grounded peace traditions. Integrating PE more fully into teacher preparation programs is therefore essential for enabling future-teachers to internalize and enact peace-oriented values in both their professional practice and personal lives.

Conclusion

This study shows that although Turkish and US future-teachers often rely on similar terminological definitions of conflict, violence, war, and peace, these shared definitions do not translate into shared pedagogical orientations. Once peace-related concepts are situated within lived cultural norms and values, future-teachers' understandings diverge in systematic ways. These divergences demonstrate that peace is learned less through formal schooling than through sociocultural discourses absorbed across schooling and everyday life, shaping future-teachers' moral and pedagogical orientations before they enter the profession.

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration that future-teachers in both contexts are insufficiently prepared to enact PE as a meaningful pedagogical practice. Across Türkiye and the United States, PE remains marginal, fragmented, and weakly embedded in teacher education. Rather than functioning as a sustained framework for democratic engagement or social transformation, peace is experienced as an abstract ideal that future-teachers struggle to translate into classroom practice. This finding points to a structural limitation in current teacher education models: Exposure to peace-related discourse alone does not cultivate teachers as confident or capable peace educators.

Most importantly, this study reveals that the challenges of PE extend beyond curriculum design to deeper cultural and institutional conditions. Participants recognized the potential of integrating peace-related issues such as social justice and equality across subject areas, yet consistently described peace learning as occurring outside formal educational spaces. This disjunction between curricular intention and lived practice fosters hesitation and disengagement, even among future-teachers who are acutely aware of the consequences of war and violence. By foregrounding future-teachers' perspectives across two distinct yet interconnected contexts, this study highlights why PE remains difficult to enact and underscores the need to reposition peace as a lived, teachable, and institutionally supported commitment within teacher education.

APPENDIX A
Bilingual Interview Protocol

United States (English)	Türkiye (Turkish + English Translation)	Rationale / Conceptual Alignment
What subject area or areas do you plan to teach in?	Hangi bölümde öğrencisiniz? Mezun olunca ne yapmayı düşünüyorsunuz? (*What area are you studying in? What do you plan to do after graduation?*)	Establishes participants' *professional identity formation* and links to moral commitment (Noddings, 2012).
Do you know anyone who has participated in a war such as Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, another? If so, have they told you anything about their experience? Do you think the experience of being at war influences people? If yes, how?	Bir savaşta savaşma deneyiminin bir insanı ne şekilde etkileyebileceğini düşünüyorsun? (*How do you think fighting in a war affects a person?*)	US question probes personal proximity to war; Turkish version omits direct reference because Türkiye has not engaged in official warfare since the Independence War. Captures *lived imagination of conflict* (IPA orientation).

(continued)

APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

United States (English)	Türkiye (Turkish + English Translation)	Rationale / Conceptual Alignment
Imagine a Martian asks you to describe war. What would you tell him? What characteristics does war have? What are the main causes of wars between nations? Do you think women and men see war similarly?	Savaş nedir? Nasıl tanımlanabilir? Savaşın hangi özellikleri var? Milletler arasındaki savaşların sebebi nedir? Kadın ve erkeklerin savaşı aynı şekilde gördüğünü düşünüyor musunuz? (*What is war? How can it be defined? What are its characteristics and causes? Do men and women see war similarly?*)	Elicits *moral reasoning and gendered perceptions* of conflict (Noddings's ethics of care; Hofstede's masculinity/femininity dimension).
Sometimes peace is defined as the absence of war. Do you think that is a good definition, or would you add anything?	Barışı bir kavram veya fikir olarak nasıl tanımlarsınız? Uluslararası barış nedir? (*How do you define peace as a concept or idea? What is international peace?*)	Probes *conceptual and moral constructions* of peace—justice, care, and social cohesion.
What does nonviolence mean? What characteristics does nonviolence have?	("Şiddetsizlik" kavramı Türk bağlamında yaygın değildir.)	*Concept omitted in Turkish version due to limited lexical and cultural salience; demonstrates *contextual adaptation and translation sensitivity*.
One of the long-term goals of the United Nations is world peace. Do you think the United States should have the same goal? Why or why not? Do you think world peace is a realistic goal?	Birleşmiş Milletler'in uzun vadeli amaçlarından biri dünya barışıdır. Sizce Türkiye'nin de böyle bir hedefi var mı? Olmalı mı? (*The UN's long-term goal is world peace. Do you think Türkiye has or should have such a goal?*)	Compares *national ideology and global citizenship orientations*.
The United States is not officially in a war now. Would you say it is at peace? Why?	Türkiye şu anda savaşta değil. Sizce Türkiye barış içinde mi? Ülkemizin diğer uluslarla barış içinde olması mümkün mü? (*Türkiye is not currently at war. Do you think it is at peace? Is peace with other nations possible?*)	Explores *internal vs. external peace discourses* and perceived stability (Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance).
How do you view the military? Do individuals have the right to refuse military service if their country is at war?	Ordu hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? Askere gitmek mecburi olmalı mı? (*What are your thoughts on the military? Should military service be mandatory?*)	*Follow-up questions differ: compulsory service in Türkiye vs. voluntary service in the United States reflects *cultural and legal differences in citizenship obligation.*
Do you regard yourself as patriotic? Does that affect how you view war?	Vatansever misiniz? Vatanseverliğe olan yaklaşım bireyin savaşla ilgili görüşünü etkiler mi? (*Do you consider yourself a patriot? Does patriotism influence views on war?*)	Probes *national identity and moral self-definition* (Hofstede's power distance; Noddings on moral commitment).
Do you belong to a faith? If so, do your religious beliefs influence how you think about war and peace? If not, do you think religion encourages or discourages peace?	Bir dine mensup musunuz? Sizce bireyin dini görüşleri savaş ve barış konusundaki düşüncelerini etkiler mi? (*Do you belong to a religion? Do religious views influence ideas about war and peace?*)	Captures *cultural values and moral schemas* relevant to collectivism and long-term orientation.
Have you learned anything about war and/or peace at school? Outside of school?	Eğitim hayatınızın herhangi bir döneminde ya da dışında savaş ve/ya barış hakkında bir şey öğrendiniz mi? (*Have you learned about war or peace in or outside school?*)	Identifies *formal and informal curriculum exposure* (linked to hidden curriculum and teacher socialization).
Do you think the topics of war and peace should be taught in schools? If so, what should be taught and in which subject areas?	Okulda savaş ve barış konularının öğretilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyor musunuz? Eğer öyleyse, ne ve hangi derslerde öğretilmeli? (*Should war and peace be taught in schools? If so, what and in which subjects?*)	Links directly to *teacher agency and curricular beliefs* (core for RQ3).
Do you think teachers should teach peace in their classrooms? Why or why not? Can you give an example?	Öğretmenlerin sınıflarında barışı savunması gerektiğini düşünüyor musunuz? Neden ya da neden olmasın? (*Should teachers advocate peace in their classrooms? Why or why not?*)	Connects to *pedagogical agency and moral action*, central to phenomenological focus on lived pedagogical experience.

*Highlights context-specific modifications.

Author Contributions

Author Gulistan Gursel-Bilgin and Ozlem Erden-Basaran collaborated on all aspects of the research, including study design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation under the supervision of David J. Flinders. Although authorship order reflects a technical requirement, this work represents a fully collaborative effort.

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ORCID iDs

Gulistan Gursel-Bilgin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9987-7982
Ozlem Erden-Basaran https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0374-1942

Data Availability Statement

Due to confidentiality commitments, full interview transcripts cannot be deposited in a public repository. The interview protocols in English and Turkish are publicly available as part of this study. Researchers with a legitimate academic interest in accessing de-identified transcripts may contact the corresponding author. Access will be considered on a case-by-case basis, contingent upon institutional ethics approval, a formal data use agreement, and oversight by the authors to ensure compliance with the original consent agreements and IRB requirements.

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Authors

GULISTAN GURSEL-BILGIN is associate professor at Bogaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkiye; email: gulistan.bilgin@bogazici.edu.tr. Her research focuses on curriculum theory and research, critical peace education practice, and multicultural education.

OZLEM ERDEN-BASARAN is associate professor at TED University, Ankara, Turkiye; email: ozlem.erden@tedu.edu.tr. Her research focuses on refugee and immigrant education, curriculum theories, sexuality and citizenship politics, multicultural education, and peace education.

DAVID J. FLINDERS is Professor Emeritus at Indiana University Bloomington, IN; email: dflinder@iu.edu. His research focuses on curriculum theory, research methodology, and peace education.