



# An analysis of the postgraduate theses focusing on the social studies curriculum

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## Abstract

The attempts to evaluate the published postgraduate theses aiming to research the Social Studies curriculum in Turkey between the years of 2015-2020. The study adopted general survey model. The study consisted of 866 open access theses which were conducted on the Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020, and which were obtained from Council of Higher Education (HEB) National Thesis database in Turkey by using the keywords such as “Social Studies”, “Social Studies Curriculum”, “Social Studies course”. The study samples comprised a total of 177 theses that met the certain criteria in the thesis analysis form, consisting of 22 criteria. The data were analyzed through the document analysis technique. The results revealed that the postgraduate theses have increased in number over the years except for 2020. It is noteworthy that the published theses mainly consisted of doctoral dissertations. The ratio of female supervisors (22.5%) was found to be low. The findings also suggested that qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in the theses, and those using mixed research method were fewer. Another significant result of the study was that the majority of participants were students.

**Keywords:** Higher education, postgraduate theses, social sciences curriculum, open access

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## 1. Introduction

Social Studies, having a significant place in the primary education curriculum, aiming at the understanding of citizenship with active participation in the democratic process as the main goal and ensuring the socialization of the child, is defined as the structure that deals with the interaction of people with their physical and social environment over time (Doğanay, 2008). Aykaç (2007) described Social Studies course as one of the most fundamental lessons that enable students to gain a sense of responsibility as good citizens, to realize the problems of the society they live in, to comprehend human

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relations, and that understand national and international values. Social Studies course is considered as the lesson providing an individual to realize his/her potential by recognizing himself/herself, recognizing social institutions and the state, adopting national values and integrating them with universal values as well as gaining the behaviors during the educational process (Gazel & Erol, 2011). The course, which has been taught to raise active, productive, democratic and suitable citizens by combining the knowledge required by society, an important part of human life, through using different branches of science is called Social Studies (Kaymakçı & Ata, 2012). Social Studies is a course that aims to educate young citizens' knowledge, skills, beliefs and values, to evaluate the accuracy of knowledge, to make comparisons between knowledge, to respect the opinions of other individuals while doing these, and to improve their decision-making skills by analyzing accurate information (Barr, 1997).

As in the definition of each concept, differences emerge in the definition of the Social Studies course, yet there are still common points in these definitions. These are; the main purpose of Social Studies is citizenship education and that this education includes the dimensions of knowledge, information processing skills, democratic values and beliefs and social participation skills (Doğanay, 2008). Besides, Social Studies is defined with the concepts of getting to know different cultures, improving interpersonal interaction, human rights and democracy (Michaelis & Garcia, 1996).

The main goal of the Social Studies course is "to understand the world". Schools, which are the means of society in this process of understanding, play a significant role in democratizing young citizens. The democratization process is based on the success of educating the members of the society related to democratic principles and actions by continuing to live in accordance with people's lifestyles, values and ideals. In the meantime, the concept of "understanding" is regarded as important in the Social Studies curriculum since learning does not occur by memorization. Knowledge is considered as the basis for students to develop concepts and general understanding. The main objective is to develop thinking skills. With these thinking skills, students use information elements to process facts by transforming them into thoughts or understanding in different ways (Barr, 1997; Jarolimek, 1964).

The concepts of Social Studies and social sciences are sometimes confused and used interchangeably. However, there are differences between them although these two concepts are intertwined. Social sciences deal with human relations with people and institutions, that is, searching their social environment. Its aim is to have multiple perspectives towards social affairs and to produce and implement different solutions. It can be classified as history, geography, law, economics, education, sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc. (Alataş, 2008). Social Studies, on the other hand, is a field of study that adopts basic knowledge, skills, attitudes and values related to social life along with the knowledge selected from the social sciences discipline so as to raise students in

primary schools as responsible citizens (Doğanay, 2002). In addition, the content of Social Studies includes various basic concepts of social sciences (geography, history, social psychology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science) (Jarolimek, 1964). In other words, while social sciences examine the relationship between man and his environment, Social Studies is a course that aims to raise citizens.

As in every field, various approaches have been put forward in the Social Studies teaching. These approaches are divided into three categories such as Social Studies as citizenship transmission, Social Studies as social science, and Social Studies as reflective inquiry. These approaches can be summarized as follows (Barr, Barth and Shermis 1977; Michaelis, 1985; Barth & Demirtaş, 1997; Doğanay, 2002; Öztürk, 2015):

a. *Social Studies as citizenship transmission*: It is the most general and oldest approach. The approach aims at the continuation of the ongoing social situation by transmitting the basic institutions, values and beliefs of the society to the students. The best and correct values must be taught. It adopts the teaching method in which certain behaviors, attitudes and values are tried to be adopted by the students with the guide of teachers. Moreover, this approach notes that social norms, respect for the rights of other individuals, fundamental rights and responsibilities are also transmitted to students. This teacher-centered approach aims at raising future generations as good citizens by transferring cultural heritage. In this regard, it has a traditional structure. In addition, prior knowledge and facts; institutions, beliefs and values accepted as the foundation of society form the basis of cultural heritage. It is claimed that these be adopted by the students and be a citizenship transmission.

b. *Social Studies as a social science*: Individuals have been facing various problems throughout their lives. The nature of these problems varies in direct proportion to the age of the individuals. Therefore, the approach emphasizes that Social Studies teaching should be handled as Social Science by asserting that traditional approaches will be insufficient in solving the problems that citizens may experience in the future. The approach also puts forward that disciplines related to Social Science should be effective in teaching Social Studies. The best method to raise a good citizen in Social Studies teaching is thought to gain knowledge, skills and values belonging to the disciplines covering Social Sciences. The processes of acquiring and using this knowledge in Social Studies teaching should be carried out through use of the methods and techniques of social sciences. This approach is generally used in "subject-centered" curricula. Individuals who adopt the approach also emphasize that the content of the Social Studies curriculum should constitute significant findings, knowledge and comments expressed by social scientists. They adopt the research-dissemination method. Paul Bohannon, Lawrence Senesh and Edwin Fenton are among the pioneers advocating this approach.

c. *Social Studies as reflective inquiry*: This approach focuses on the importance of learning and teaching processes in which students can apply their skills of identifying,

recognizing, analyzing and making decisions about current and personal problems. The approach is inspired by John Dewey's ideas. The reflective inquiry approach highlighted the significance of thinking processes in solving social problems. The Social Studies course is not limited to the subjects that are predetermined in the approach. The content of the lesson is not processed depending on certain criteria. In contrast, Social Studies lesson can be formed from the current problems or world issues. Similar to Social Studies as social science, they adopt the research-dissemination method. Another critical point of this approach is that it considers various skills. What is more, this approach aims to develop the inquiry ability of the individuals as content by addressing their problems. Hence, the approach is individual oriented. Maurice P. Hunt, Lawrence Metcalf, Byron Massialas, Frederick Smith are among the scientists supporting this approach.

As a consequence; the traditional teaching method, which is the center of the teacher, is formed as the basis in the Social Studies teaching approach as citizenship transmission. The main goal is to convey social values and norms to students. Social Studies for Social Science teaching requires that the content of the Social Studies course include the methods of social sciences in order for students to solve the problems they will encounter in the future. In this context, the approach argues that the Social Studies lesson should be composed entirely of different disciplines of social sciences. Social Studies teaching approach as reflective inquiry is an approach that puts the student at the center and the teacher should serve as a guide. This approach concentrates on the importance of student thinking processes. It also refers to the importance of students' knowledge and skill development. Social Studies course subjects should not be covered with predetermined content. In other words, the subject of the Social Studies course should be problem-centered. Students must be equipped with various skills that can solve these problems they may face in their daily life.

Upon examining the historical development of the Social Studies lesson in our country, there are *Musâhabât-ı Ahlâkiyye* (TSM), History and Geography lessons in the classes that can be described as primary education in 1913. With the new curriculum in 1922, History, Geography and *Malûmât-ı Medeniyye* (Civil Knowledge) lessons began to be taught. In 1924, the *Musâhabât-ı Ahlâkiyye* and *Malûmât-ı Vataniyye*, History and Geography lessons, which were in the first curriculum of the Republic period, were evaluated within the scope of the Social Studies course (Keskin, 2008). From the 1926 until the 1936 curriculum, History, Geography and Civics lessons were conducted in the 4th and 5th grades in primary education and in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades of secondary school. It was not until 1968 that Social Studies was taught as a course in our country (Altunya, 2006). History, Geography and Civics courses, which were taught as separate courses in previous years, were brought together under the name of Social Studies course (Sönmez, 1998). The first curriculum of the Social Studies course was prepared on the basis of primary education integrity in 1998. The curriculum was prepared within the framework of the latest developments and practices in the world (Sözer, 1998). The Social

Studies Curriculum published in 2004, the pilot implementation of which was conducted in the 2004-2005 academic year, was put into practice in the 2005-2006 academic year in our country (Keleşoğlu, 2008). The 2017 Primary School Social Studies Curriculum, which is currently being implemented, is a national and universal curriculum whose content is clear and understandable, whose content is compatible with the objectives, which is suitable for the individual's interests and needs, which is free from rote learning and prepared for practice and which includes events and problems in a balanced way. (Taş & Kiroğlu, 2018).

The basic structure of the Social Studies curriculum of the Ministry of National Education (2017) shows that the curriculum is structured within 7 learning areas. The content of the curriculum is organized depending on these learning areas, yet the units have different titles according to the grade levels by considering this framework. These areas are as follows (MoNE, 2017): Me and Us (making use of psychology, sociology and social psychology sub-disciplines of social sciences for students to be "Me" and "Us", that is, to understand the structure of the individual and society), Culture and Heritage (developing and protecting the culture with the basic elements of Turkish culture for creating national awareness in students), People, Places and Environment (providing students with the spatial knowledge, skills and values necessary for human life), Science, Technology and Society (teaching students critical and scientific thinking, innovativeness are the basis of scientific and technological developments), Production, Distribution and Consumption (providing students with entrepreneurship and conscious consumer skills and understanding that their country's economic resources are limited, that they need to protect these resources as well as making efforts to improve economic conditions), Effective Citizenship (making students aware of being an active citizen within the framework of the fields such as political science, sociology and law), Global Connections (raising students as active and responsible Turkish citizens who follow the developing World and who can solve their problems).

Upon analyzing the relevant literature, the postgraduate theses conducted on Social Studies curriculum were examined by several researchers at different periods in Turkey (Dilek, Baysan and Öztürk, 2018; Oruç and Ulusoy, 2008; Sezer, İnel and Gökalp, 2019; Aksoy, Sönmez, Meray and Kaymakçı, 2009; Şahin, Yıldız and Duman, 2011; Tarman, Acun and Yüksel, 2010). The study conducted by Oruç and Ulusoy (2008) consisted of 100 postgraduate theses related to Social Studies teaching between 2007 and 2008 in Turkey through using random sampling method. They analyzed the postgraduate theses in terms of source, method, spelling and semantic errors. Aksoy, Sönmez, Meray, and Kaymakçı (2009) analyzed 118 postgraduate theses within the context of citizenship in the Social Studies curriculum between 1998-2008. In another study conducted by Tarman, Acun, and Yüksel (2010), 294 master's and 41 doctoral theses published between 1994 and 2010 were determined, and the majority of the postgraduate theses were identified to adhere to a certain framework. Şahin, Yıldız and Duman (2011) examined 550 master's and 62

doctoral dissertations which cover the years 1990-2010 and which are directly related to the Social Studies curriculum. As a result, they concluded that the theme of the curriculum was mainly examined in the master's theses, while the theme of teaching methods and techniques in the doctoral dissertations. Dilek, Baysan and Öztük (2018) analyzed 415 graduate theses conducted between the years of 2010-2017. Accordingly, it was found that the most common research was on subject-concept teaching. Sezer, İnel and Gökalp (2009) examined 144 postgraduate theses whose working group consisted of Social Studies teachers in Turkey. The results suggested that the research topics were grouped under three themes: Social Studies curriculum, Social Studies teachers and other subjects. Upon analyzing the relevant literature, the postgraduate theses conducted on the field of Social Studies curriculum were found to draw a general framework, and there are limited studies carried out by taking certain subject areas into account (Tarman, Acun, & Yüksel, 2010). Besides, analyzing the postgraduate theses on the Social Studies curriculum covering the last five years is expected to contribute to the determination of the current studies in this field. In this regard, this research was carried out to make an in-depth examination of the postgraduate theses by taking into account certain criteria in the field of Social Studies curriculum between the years 2015-2020 (theses that examine the strategies, methods, models and techniques applied as subject area; theses covering the research subject, tools or materials used in the Social Studies curriculum).

The study aimed to examine the general trend of the postgraduate theses conducted in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020. In this regard, answers to the following research question was sought:

***How is the distribution of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between the years of 2015-2020 in terms of;***

- a. years of publication?
- b. publication type?
- c. authors' and supervisors' gender?
- d. geographical region?
- e. types of the institutions?
- f. the research method, research model, sample group and data collection techniques?
- g. the distribution of the number of research problems, results and recommendations?
- h. the focus points?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This research used a general survey model. In general survey models, the researchers reflect the research subject as it is, without any intervention to the dependent or independent variable (Glasow, 2005). Survey model was used in this research as the current situation was tried to be described as it is.

### 2.2. Sampling

The population of the study consisted of open access 866 theses which were conducted on the Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 and which were obtained from Council of Higher Education (HEB) National Thesis database in Turkey by using the keywords such as “*Social Studies*”, “*Social Studies curriculum*”, “*Social Studies course*”. The elicited theses were evaluated depending on the following criteria: a.) Theses that examine the strategies, methods, models and techniques applied as subject area; b.) Theses that include tools or materials used in the context of the Social Studies curriculum as a research subject. 866 theses were examined in the context of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020. 183 theses were found to meet the research criteria, and 177 of them were included in the study, while 5 of which were not included in the scope of the study since they were closed to open access.

### 2.3. Data collection tools

A thesis analysis form consisting of 22 criteria was developed with the review of the relevant literature and the examination of the theses open to access at the Council of Higher Education national thesis center between 2015-2010. The developed thesis analysis form was reviewed by three faculty members who are experts in the field of Social Studies curriculum, and the number of criteria in the analysis form was reduced to 14 in line with the faculty members' views. In this regard, the research deployed a thesis analysis form consisting of 14 criteria as a data collection tool.

### 2.4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using document analysis technique, one of the qualitative research technique. Document analysis is a technique that facilitates access to information without the need for interviews or observations and that should be considered in qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). The data obtained from document analysis is tried to be explained in its own context (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). In this regard, 177 theses were examined by two data encoders according to 14 criteria, and the frequency (f) and percentage (%) values of these criteria

were depicted in graphics. Besides, the coding form was developed. The reliability calculation of the coding form carried out by two data encoders was identified by the reliability formula as  $\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement})$  stated by Miles and Huberman (1994). Hence, the reliability of the research was determined to be 96%. In addition, the analysis data related to which sub-themes were embodied by 177 theses were displayed in tables and figures.

### 3. Results

The results regarding each research question are presented via tables, figures and graphics as in the following:

#### 3.1. Results regarding the research question; "How is the distribution of the open Access postgraduate theses related to Social Studies curriculum by year?"

Table 1 below depicts the distribution of the theses that were conducted between 2015-2020 and that can be reached open access from the HEC national central thesis by year.

Table 1. Distribution of the postgraduate theses by year



As is presented in Table 1, 45.8% (81 theses) of the theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum were carried out in 2019. The number of the theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum was identified to increase regularly between 2015 and 2019. While the number of theses conducted in 2015 was 10 (5.6%), this number increased to 15 (8.4%) in 2016. The number of theses in 2017 was found to be 20 (11.3%) and 28 (15.8%) in 2018. Besides, the year 2019 emerges as the date when the most theses were performed in this field. It was also found a remarkable decrease in the number of theses in 2020.

#### 3.2. Results regarding the research question; "How is the distribution of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 by publication type?"

Figure 1 demonstrates the distribution of the types of theses that can be reached open access from Higher Education Council of Turkey national central thesis.

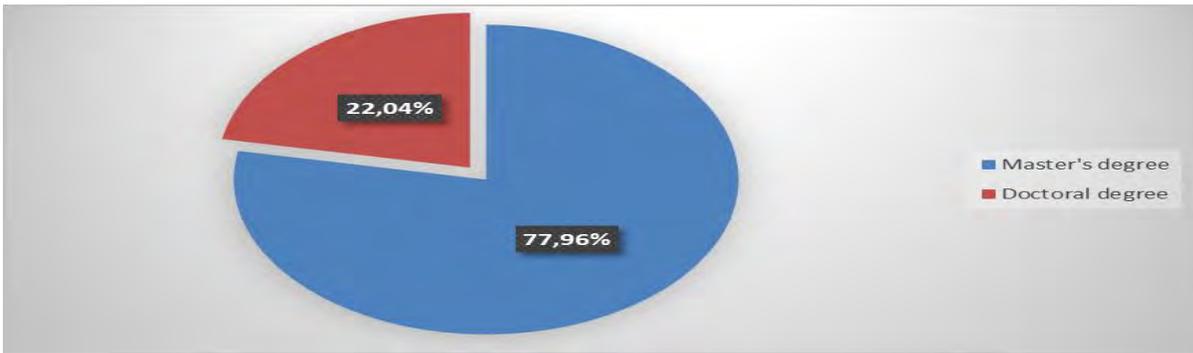


Figure 1. Distribution of the postgraduate theses

Figure 1 reveals that the theses conducted in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020 were mainly composed of master's theses. While 138 master theses (77.96%) were carried out in these years, the published doctoral theses were 38 (22.04%). In this regard, it may be wise to mention that the number of doctoral theses is limited. On the other hand, the number of master's theses was determined to be highly significant

*3.3. Results regarding the research question; “How is the distribution of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 in terms of the authors’ and supervisors’ gender?”.*

The distribution is depicted in Figure 2.

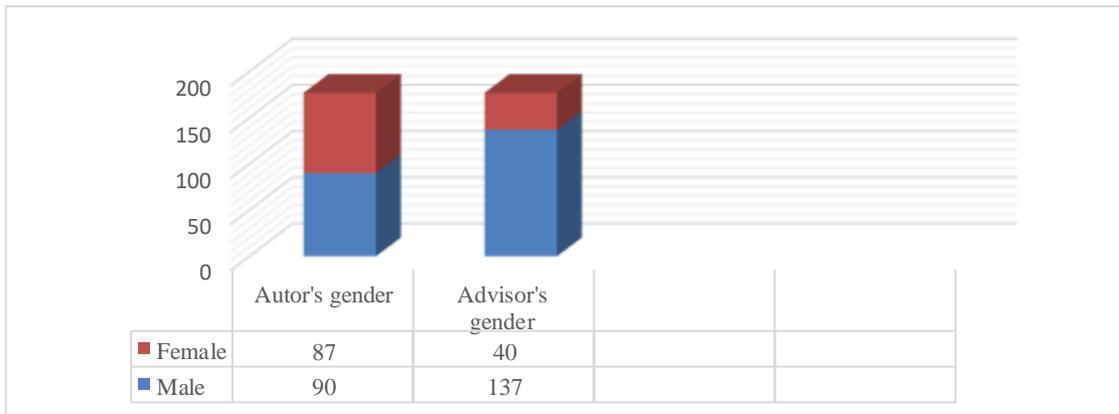


Figure 2. Distribution of postgraduate thesis authors and supervisors

Figure 2 shows that 90 male (50.84%) and 87 female (49.16%) authors published a postgraduate thesis in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020. This paved the way for the fact that the number of men and women conducting postgraduate thesis in this field was close to each other. On the other hand, the number of female supervisors in this field was 40 (22.59%), indicating a very low rate considering the number of male supervisors (137). In this regard, it is noteworthy that male supervisors (77.41%) expert in the field of Social Studies curriculum between the years 2015-2020 had a high ratio.

3.4. *Results regarding the research question; "How is the distribution of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 by geographical region?"*.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution chart of the postgraduate theses published in this field.

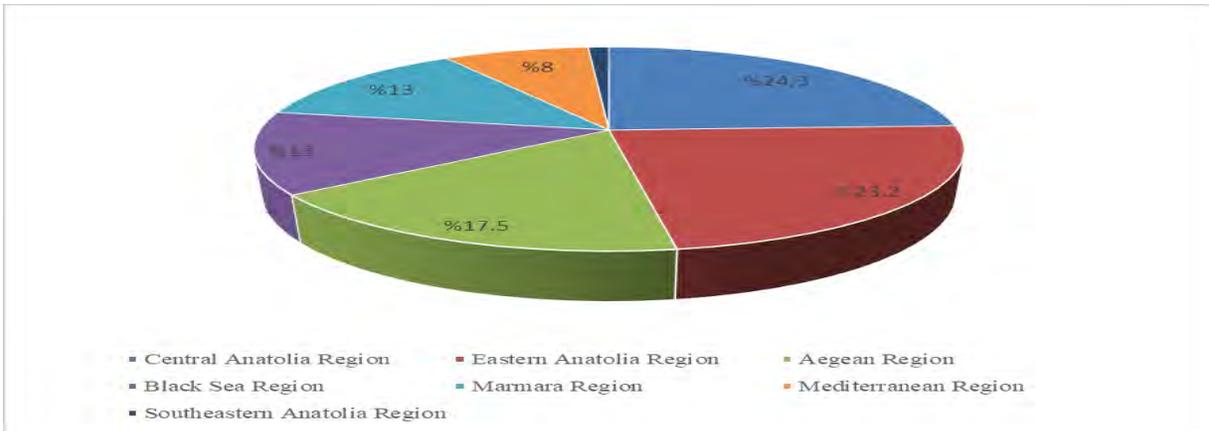


Figure 3. Geographical distribution of the postgraduate theses

Considering the geographical distribution of the postgraduate theses, the postgraduate theses were identified to be mostly published in Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia Regions. Accordingly, it was determined that 43 (24.3%) theses were published in the Central Anatolia Region and 41 (23.2%) in the Eastern Anatolia Region. The number of theses conducted in these two regions was noted to be close to half (47.5%) of the total number of the theses. The third region with the highest number of the published theses was the Aegean Region, with 31 theses (17.5%). This was followed by the Black Sea and Marmara Regions. Theses published in the Black Sea and Marmara Regions had equal ratio (13%). The region with the lowest number of theses published in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020 was found to be the Southeastern Anatolia Region with 2 theses (1.12%).

3.5. *Results regarding the research question; "How is the distribution of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 in terms of the types of institution?"*.

Figure 4 below illustrates the distribution chart of the postgraduate theses published in this field.

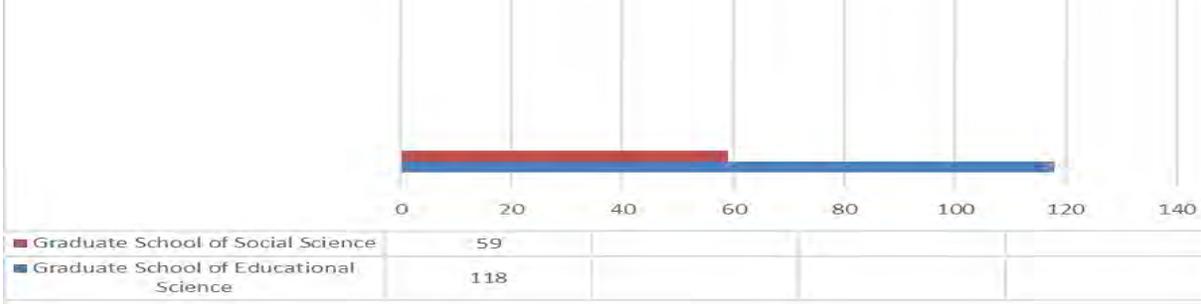


Figure 4. Distribution chart of the postgraduate theses

As is seen in Figure 4, the postgraduate theses that can be accessed through open access in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020 were mostly (66.6%) published in the institute of educational sciences. The rate of the postgraduate theses published in the institute of social sciences was determined to be 33.4%. Given the number of the postgraduate theses in this field, 118 of these theses were published in the institute of educational sciences while 59 in the institute of social sciences.

*3.6. Results regarding the research question; "What are the research method, research model, sample group and data collection techniques of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020?"*

Findings related to these data are demonstrated in figures 5 to 8 below:

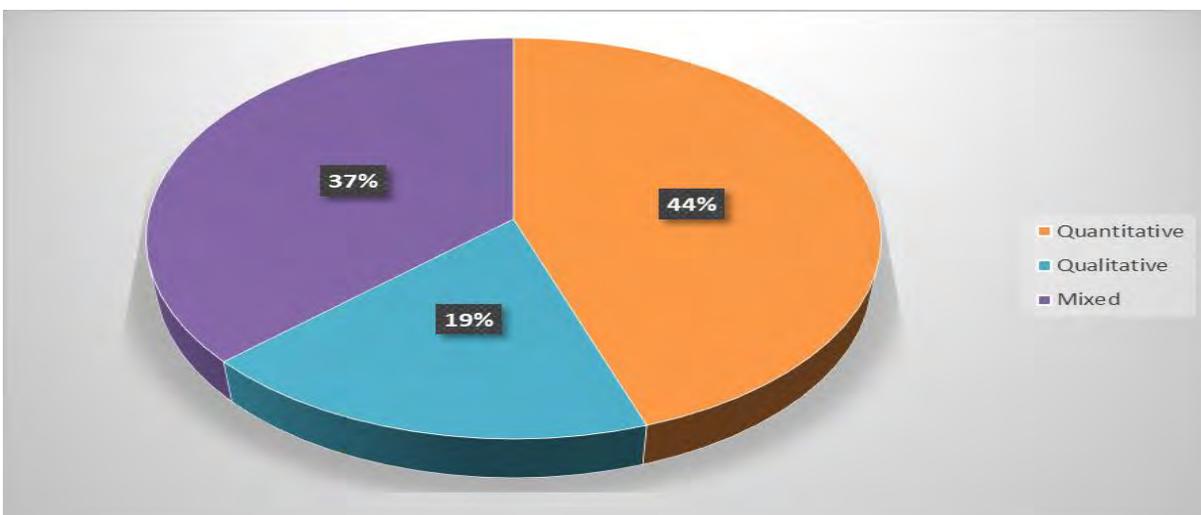


Figure 5. Methods in postgraduate theses

According to Figure 5, the postgraduate theses were conducted through use of three different research methods: quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods. 44% of the theses were carried out with quantitative research method and 79 theses were published based on this research method. This was followed by the mixed research method with 65 theses (37%). 33 theses were determined to employ qualitative research method. The rate of the theses using qualitative research method was approximately 19%. This may signify that the qualitative research model is used in a limited number in the open access theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020.

Method types of the postgraduate theses are displayed in Figure 6.

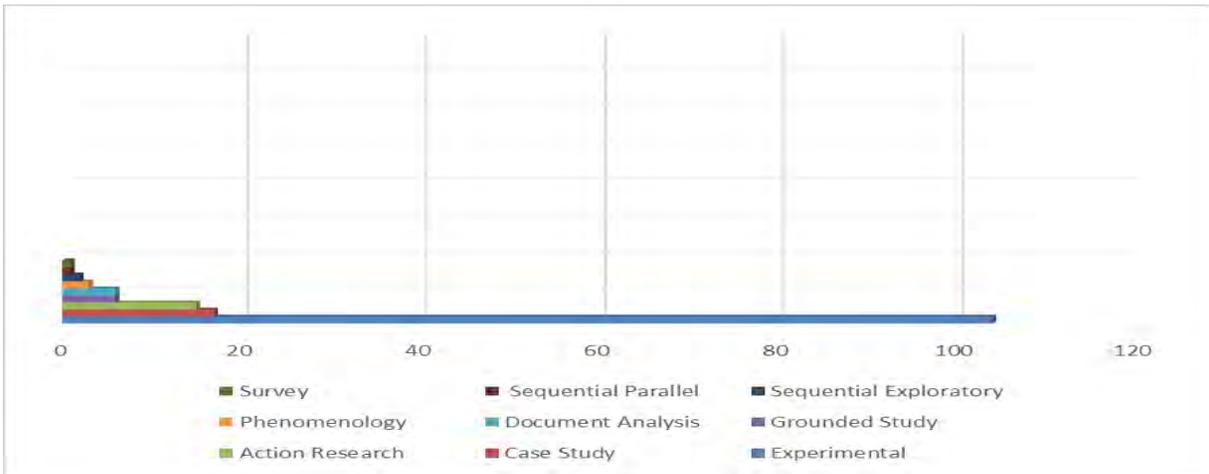


Figure 6. The method types of the postgraduate theses

Figure 6 shows that experimental models were preferred in 117 theses (66.1%) conducted in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020. Case method were used in 17 theses (9.6%) while action research models in 15 theses (8.47%). These were followed by grounded theory model and document analysis (5.64%) with 10 theses each. The limited number of the postgraduate theses deployed phenomenology (3 theses), survey (2 theses), explanatory sequential mixed (1 thesis) and exploratory sequential mixed method (1 thesis). It is remarkable that the number of the theses that used the mixed research method was quite low.

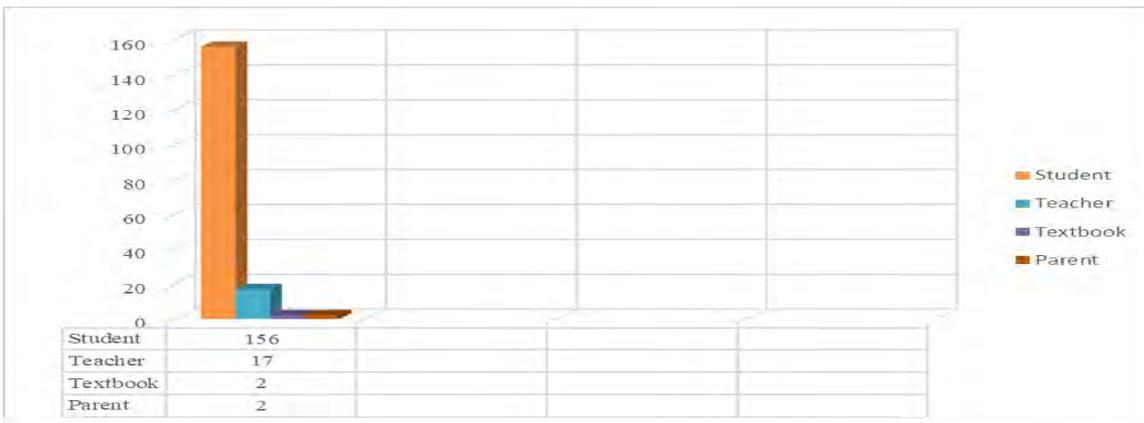


Figure 7. Sample group of the postgraduate theses

Figure 7 illustrates that the sample group of the postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between the years 2015-2020 was gathered around four main themes. These were students, teachers, textbooks and parents. The sample group of the postgraduate theses published in the field of Social Studies curriculum between these years was mostly consisted of students (88.13%). In this context, the working group of 156 postgraduate theses was composed of students. Teachers (9.6%) in 17 postgraduate theses, parents (1.12%) in 2 graduate theses and textbooks (1.12%) in 2 theses were determined as the working group. It is noteworthy that the working group is limited except for the students. That the sample type in postgraduate theses was predominantly consisted of teachers is a significant finding of the present study. Another important

finding was that the number of sample groups including parents and teachers was low. Figure 8 depicts data collection tools used in postgraduate theses.

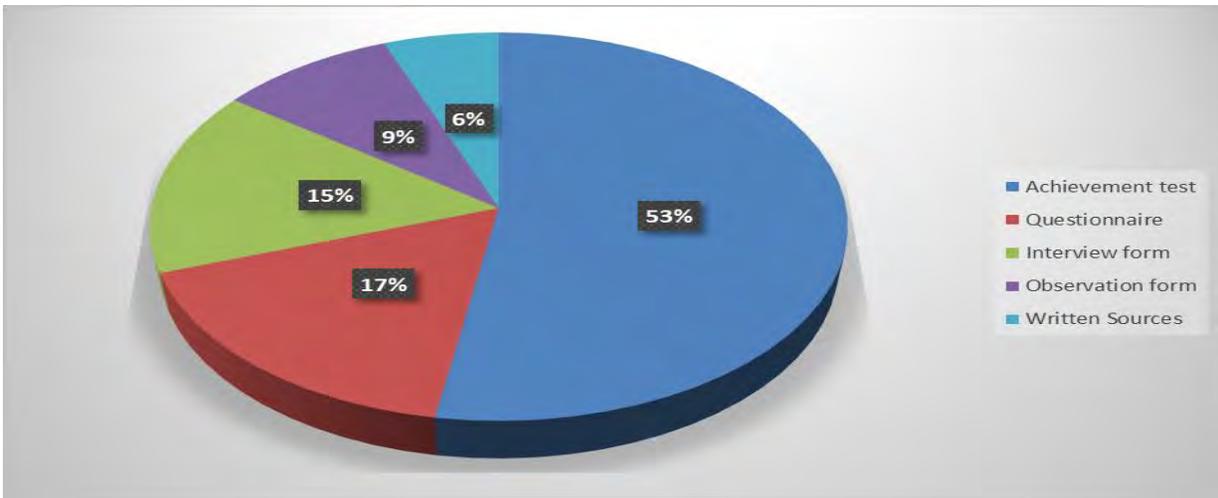


Figure 8. Data collection tools of the postgraduate theses

As is seen in Figure 9, the achievement test (53%) was used in 99 postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020 as a data collection tool. Hence, it is likely that achievement tests consisted of more than half of the data collection tools used in postgraduate theses. In addition, questionnaires (17%) were also used in 99 graduate theses. These were the interview form with the rate of 15%, the observation form with 9%, and the written sources with 6%.

*3.7. Results regarding the research question; “How is the distribution of the number of research problems, results and recommendations of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020?”.*

The distribution of data is shown in Figure 9.

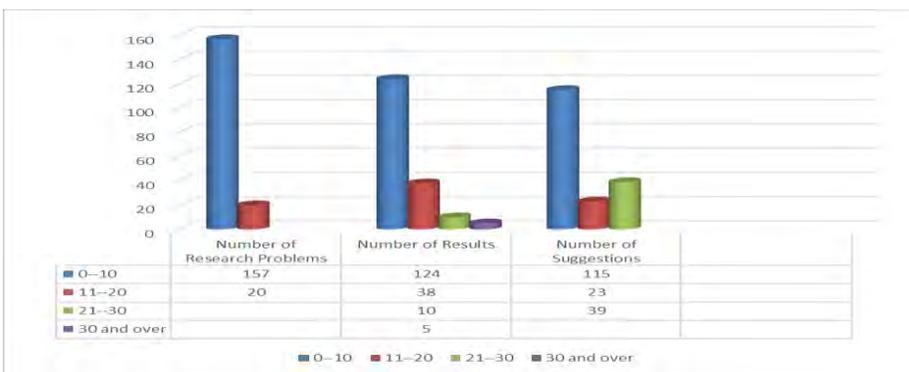


Figure 9. Research problem, result and recommendation distribution of the theses

Figure 9 illustrates that the number of research problems in postgraduate theses varied across 0 and 20. While the number of research problems varied between 0 and 10 in 157 graduate theses (88.7%), it differed across 11 and 20 in 20 graduate theses (11.3%). The number of the results was concentrated between 0 and 10 in 124 theses (70.05%). The

results also varied between 11 and 20 in 38 theses (21.46%), between 21 and 30 in 10 theses (5.64%), and 30 and above in 5 theses (2.82%). Finally, the number of recommendations in theses varied across 0 and 30. While the number of recommendations was determined to be between 0 and 10 (64.97%) in 115, it was 23 that varied between 11 and 20 (12.99%). Besides, there were also recommendations whose number varied between 21 and 30 (22.3%).

*3.8. Results regarding the research question; "What are the focus points of the open access postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020?"*

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of codes and themes.

Table 2. The focus points of the postgraduate theses

The main points	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Activities implemented in the curriculum	52	29,37
Materials used in the curriculum	35	19,77
Methods employed in the curriculum	30	16,94
Models applied in the curriculum	28	15,81
Approaches adopted in the curriculum	20	11,29
Strategies organized in the curriculum	12	6,77

Note: They were produced from the theses selected according to certain criteria within the context of the Social Studies curriculum of the postgraduate theses at the HEC national thesis center between 2015-2020.

As it is seen in Table 2 the main points of the postgraduate theses selected according to certain criteria in the field of Social Studies curriculum between 2015 and 2020 could be categorized as six sub-themes. These are, "*Activities implemented in the curriculum*", "*Materials used in the curriculum*", "*Methods employed in the curriculum*", "*Models applied in the curriculum*", "*Approaches adopted in the curriculum*" and "*Strategies organized in the curriculum*". Hence, the most coded theme was concluded to be the "*Activities implemented in the curriculum*" sub-theme. This theme was found to be present in 52 postgraduate theses (29.7%). The least used sub-theme was determined to be "*Strategies organized in the curriculum*". This theme was found to be available in 12 postgraduate theses (6.77%).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

Rapid change and development in science and technology, and those in learning and teaching approaches today, where social and individual expectations vary across the conditions of the age, significantly affect the roles expected from the individual (MoNE [Ministry of Education], 2018). The changes and innovations in this framework have also reflected in the curriculum. The Social Studies curriculum aims to prepare students for the conditions of the age in line with these innovations. An analysis of the postgraduate theses published within the context of the Social Studies curriculum between the 2015-2020 years in Turkey is expected to contribute to the relevant literature in terms of revealing the recent studies and the focus areas. In this regard, 177 postgraduate theses were identified to be mainly composed of master theses. The number of doctoral theses in the Social Studies curriculum was found to be fewer compared to that of master theses. In the Social Studies curriculum (Mc Guire, 2007), which is as significant as literacy and mathematics skills, postgraduate theses are expected to increase in both doctoral and

master's fields. In fact, there has been an increase in the number of theses published in the context of certain criteria between 2015-2018. 2019 was found as the year with the highest increase between the years of 2015 and 2020. Likewise, similar findings emerged in the studies conducted by Tarman, Acun, and Yüksel (2010) and Dilek, Baysan, and Öztürk (2018). Having examined the Social Studies curriculum in the context of the 291 master's and 41 doctoral theses in Turkey, Tarman, Acer and Yüksel (2010) reported an increasing trend of postgraduate theses since 2005. In addition, Dilek, Baysan and Öztürk (2018) noted an increase in the postgraduate theses published between 2010-2017 in Turkey. The reason for the decrease in the number of postgraduate theses in 2019 in this study may be due to the Covid - 19 epidemic causing the closure of thousands of educational institutions worldwide and negatively affecting education in this respect (Toquero, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

The results revealed that the number of the female and male authors of the postgraduate theses conducted in the field of Social Studies instruction between 2015-2020 and examined according to certain criteria was determined to be close to each other. On the contrary, a significant difference emerged in the ratio of female and male supervisors. Accordingly, the number of male academic supervisors was found to be three times more than that of female academic supervisors. These findings are supported by the number of academicians working in all areas of the Higher Education Information System. Upon analyzing the data in the system, the number of male academicians working at state and private universities was 46.615, while this number increased to 52.295 in 2020. On the other hand, while the number of female academicians was 26.125 in 2015, this number increased to 34.581 (Higher Education Information Management System, 2020). Given that the supervisors conducting postgraduate theses are academicians, the number of the female academicians may be said to be lower than that of male academicians.

The most common regions of the postgraduate theses were determined to be Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean regions. The findings showed that fewer theses were conducted in the Central Anatolia, Black Sea, Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions. The high number of universities with education faculties in the Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean regions may be one of the reasons for the emergence of this result. Besides, it may be due to the fact that these regions are developed regions (Erkan, Şentürk & Akbaş, 2012; Garipağaoğlu, 2020).

Considering the institutional distributions of the postgraduate theses, the theses were published in two types of institutes, that is, the Institute of Educational Sciences and the Institute of Social Sciences. The findings suggested that the number of postgraduate theses published in the Institute of Educational Sciences was twice the number of those published in the institute of social sciences. While the postgraduate theses conducted within the context of the Social Studies curriculum were being produced in the departments under the Institute of social sciences, the increase in the number of Educational Sciences institutes in recent years and the fact that these postgraduate theses are carried out in the departments of educational sciences institutes may be the reason for the emergence of this finding. Indeed, the number of institutes in educational sciences has reached 43 in 2020 in Turkey (Higher Education Information Management System, 2020).

It is notable that the methods used in postgraduate theses were grouped under three headings which were qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods. The qualitative and quantitative research methods were determined to be mostly compared to mixed research methods. This finding is consistent with those of the studies conducted by

Tarman, Acun, and Yüksel (2010) and Dilek, Baysan, and Öztürk (2018). Tarman, Acun, and Yüksel (2010) noted that quantitative and qualitative research methods were used more than the mixed research method in postgraduate theses. Dilek, Baysan and Öztürk (2018) examined 415 master's theses within the context of the Social Studies curriculum between 2010 and 2018, and concluded that quantitative and qualitative research methods were more frequently used than the mixed research methods. In addition, this finding is supported by the findings of the postgraduate theses examined by Oruç and Ulusoy (2008) between 2000-2007. The basic philosophy of the qualitative research is grounded on the positivist or post-positivist paradigms (Creswell, 2014; Robson, 2015) in which numbers and statistical data are taken into account. The main philosophy of qualitative research includes interpretive paradigms (Lune & Berg, 2017; Patton, 2002). In this regard, the methods of the postgraduate theses examined in the context of the Social Studies curriculum between 2015-2020 were predominantly conducted with positivist, post-positivist and interpretive theories. When the types of research models used in postgraduate theses were examined, more than half of the theses was found to use experimental models, which are among types of quantitative research models. Moreover, survey models, another type of quantitative research models, were also used in the postgraduate theses. Experimental models in theses were respectively followed by qualitative research models (case study, action research, document analysis, phenomenology) and mixed research models. Similarly, Sezer İnel and Gökalp (2019) examined 283 postgraduate theses whose working group consisted of Social Studies teachers and which were conducted between 1992 and 2018, and concluded that types of quantitative research models were mainly adopted. This was followed by theses carried out with varieties of qualitative research models. The researchers emphasized that the most commonly used models in educational research in Turkey are qualitative and quantitative models (Göktaş, 2012; Karadağ, 2010; Tavşancıl et al., 2010). On this basis, it may be reasonable to mention that there is no significant change over the years in the types of research models of postgraduate theses published in the field of Social Studies curriculum.

The results revealed that most of the working group of the postgraduate theses consisted of students who continue their education at different levels (primary school, secondary school and undergraduate education levels). In addition, teachers working in the field of Social Studies teaching determined teaching materials in this field as other working groups. One of the most striking points in the study was that only two postgraduate theses chose families as the working group. While this research finding contradicts with the findings of the research conducted by Sezer, İnal and Gökalp (2019), it is in line with those of the study conducted by Dilek Baysal and Öztürk (2018). The reason may be due to the fact that only Social Studies teachers constituted the working group of the study conducted by Sezer, İnal, and Gökalp (2019). On the other, in the study conducted by Dilek, Baysan and Öztürk (2018), students learning at different levels (primary, secondary and undergraduate students) constituted the working group. Furthermore, a part of the working group of the study consisted of teachers and a limited number of academicians.

More than half of the data collection tools used in postgraduate theses were achievement tests. This finding indicates that experimental models are frequently used in postgraduate theses conducted within the context of Social Studies curriculum. Other data collection tools were determined to be questionnaires, interview form, observation form and written sources. Similar findings emerged in the studies carried out by Göktaş et al., 2012; Dilek, Baysan and Öztürk, 2018; Sezer, İnal, & Gökalp, 2019. In these studies, in which postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum were

examined by taking into account certain time intervals in different years, the data collection tools were tests, scales, observation and interview forms and documents related to the field. Research results in different fields also imply that test, scale, interview and observation forms and documents are frequently used in educational research (Dunkin, 1996; Eğmir, Erdem, & Koçyiğit, 2017; Hanafi, Iriani & Ramadhan, 2020). As a matter of fact, interview and observation are mostly used as data collection tools in qualitative research, (Creswell, 2014; Maruster & Gijsenberg, 2013; Patton, 2002), and test, questionnaire and scale in quantitative studies (Creswell & Clarck, 2011; Thomas, 2003). The finding related to the research question “How is the distribution of the number of research problems, results and recommendations in postgraduate theses in the field of Social Studies curriculum between the years 2015-2020?” indicated that the number varied between 0-10. In this regard, the number of the research problems, results and recommendations in postgraduate theses may be said to be largely similar. The research problem in postgraduate theses is a significant element in describing both the theoretical framework and the factors expected to contribute to the field (Murray, 2011). The results and recommendations of the theses are expected to shed light on further studies and related literature within the scope of scientific research (Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Institute of Educational Sciences Thesis Writing Guide, 2020). Thus, the increase in the number of research problems, results and recommendations in postgraduate theses published in the field of Social Studies curriculum is of great importance in terms of both contributing to the relevant literature and further research.

The study findings demonstrated that the main subjects that the postgraduate theses focus on were the activities, models, strategies and approaches applied depending on the objectives and contents of the Social Studies curriculum and the tools and materials used during the implementation of the curriculum. The findings of the research conducted by Oruç and Ulusoy (2008) and Şahin, Gögebakan Yıldız and Duman (2011) favor this finding. The study conducted by Oruç and Ulusoy (2008) on examining 100 theses between 2000-2007 put emphasis on teaching methods and teaching materials. Besides, Gögebakan Yıldız and Duman (2011) determined that the theme of teaching methods was one of the leading themes used in 612 postgraduate theses on Social Studies education between 1990 and 2010.

## **5. Recommendations**

The samples the theses mainly consist of students and teachers. Studies on the curriculum may be carried out with academicians who are experts in the field. Postgraduate theses mostly employ quantitative and qualitative research models. Therefore, the number of studies including mixed research models may be increased. Master's and doctoral theses published in the context of the Social Studies curriculum may be compared considering various criteria. The focus points of the postgraduate theses published in the context of the Social Studies curriculum can be examined by taking different year intervals as criteria. Postgraduate theses published in the Social Studies curriculum can be examined through use of different methods such as mega-multiple holistic approach and meta-analysis. Although five postgraduate theses met the specified criteria in the study, these theses were excluded from the scope of the study as they were not accessible on the website of the Council of Higher Education or their files were not loaded. In this regard, creating an internet infrastructure that will provide access to all the theses related to the field will provide significant accommodation to researchers.

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