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The Relationship Between Primary School Students' Social Skills and Attitudes towards Social Studies Course and Their Academic Achievement

Nurcan Şener¹

¹ Marmara University, Turkey. Email: nsener@marmara.edu.tr

Abstract

In the current study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between fourth grade students' social skills, their attitudes towards Social Studies course and their academic achievement. In line with the purpose, the present research adopted a convergent parallel design, one of the mixed type research methods. Quantitative data were collected from 172 fourth grade students who were enrolled in state school in İstanbul. The quantitative phase of the study conducted using 'Social Skills Evaluation Scale' and 'The Attitude Scale Towards Fourth- Grade Social Studies Course.' The qualitative data were collected from 30 students through simple random sampling method. 'Structured Interview Form' was employed in order to collect qualitative data. Analysis of the quantitative data included simple linear regression while the analysis of qualitative data included content analysis. Results showed that social skills and students' attitudes towards Social Studies courses were a low-level, significant and positive predictor of their academic achievement.

Keywords: Social Skill, Attitude, Social Studies, Academic Achievement

1. Introduction

Human beings, as social entities, tend to communicate and establish healthy relationships with others in their surroundings. Accordingly, an individual needs social skills. It may be troublesome for certain individuals to constituting the social adaptation process which is at the bottom of these skills, while it may not for others. According to Karataş (2020), a set of factors such as family atmosphere, personality traits, environment and education play a significant role to develop social skills. These skills do not develop independently; instead, individuals convert their social skills into behaviours, thereby forming a development process. In addition, social skill facilitates the arrangement of educational and instructional activities by measuring behaviours across scales (Bacanlı, 2020). Taking into account the fact that personality is not independent of social skills, it can be posited that this is indeed a favourable criterion to reveal personal traits and social competencies.

The children who are relatively more social entities compared to adults constantly interact with their surroundings. Social skill is regarded as a need in order for the child to develop self- concept. When faced with a problem, the children with high level of social skills can have a wider range of alternatives compared to those with low level of social skills (Samancı and Uçan, 2017). Therefore, providing education towards the acquisition of those skills needed by the children in every step of their lives is considered important. The vitality of social skills acquired during the childhood period is better understood in the coming years of the life.

Social skills, a multidimensional concept, include such abilities to start and maintain a relationship, to collaborate, to control anger, to solve a problem and to have academic skills (Karataş, 2020). These are not separate dimensions, but the structures are complementing one another. Considering that what is learned during childhood period is more permanent, it would be more appropriate to commence social skill education in this period. Social skills are generally acquired during childhood period through imitation and role modelling. However, not just positive behaviours but also negative ones are acquired during this process. For this reason, social skills must be included in curricula instead of expecting random learning. Social skills as well as academic ones play a pivotal role in their lives and lack of those skills causes social incompatibility and low academic achievement (Samancı and Uçan, 2017). Those skills vary significantly based on parental educational level. In this regard, the significance of social skills curricula can be witnessed. It has been seen that social skills curricula foster students' level of social skills (Kam, 2019). The children with high level of social skills are able to adapt more easily to their environment since they have the ability to express their feelings and thoughts in a more comfortable way. This adaptation may affect academic achievement positively. In addition, this adaptation also requires establishing a relationship between the Social Studies course which is one of the main courses where students' social skills are improved and other disciplines.

When looking at Social Studies curriculum, it has been seen that it is aimed to raise individuals who are to follow innovations and developments, produce information, has critical thinking, offers solutions to certain kinds of problems and select the most appropriate one, lives together with the society in harmony and makes contributions to the society (Ministry of National Education, 2018). Furthermore, it has been alleged that the Social Studies curriculum serves for enhancing a set of skills since, only in this way is it possible to raise individuals having those properties. Those skills may undoubtedly be provided through different courses; however, it has been acknowledged that Social Studies, by definition, is highly effective course in order to make individuals acquire social skills (Akbaba and Aksoy, 2019). It can be said that this reflects to individual's attitudes and behaviours.

An individual's attitude as well as his/ her social skill influences his/ her behaviours. An attitude refers to set of positive or negative tendencies towards a particular object, person, thing or event. A positive attitude increases the likelihood of behaviours towards a particular object, person, thing or event whereas a negative attitude reduces. An individual's attitude may develop either in a positive or negative way depending on the environment or social groups s/he lives in. The objective of Social Studies courses is to make students have positive attitudes towards the behaviours approved by the society (Coşkun, 2019). Moreover, individuals' attitudes have an impact on their point of view on the environment and interests. As a result, all those factors play a key role in academic achievement. In order for the objectives to be gained and for the Social Studies course achievement to be increased, it is a must to ensure students to have positive attitudes towards the course. Since social skill and attitude factors can have an effect on academic achievement, it is crucial to measure both levels of effect. Thus, students' academic achievement may be increased by developing certain processes to improve their social skills and attitude. Taken into account the significance of both factors, positive developments can be seen in students' personal lives, communication and adaptation skills through planned activities.

In the related literature, there are not any studies investigating the variables of academic achievement, social skill and attitudes towards the course through mixed method. To gain an in- depth understanding of the topic, this study has been carried out using quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between students' attitudes towards Social Studies course, their social skills and academic achievement. In line with this objective, the answers to the following questions have been sought:

1. What is the predictor role of students' social skills on their academic achievement in Social Studies course?
2. What is the predictor role of students' attitudes towards Social Studies course on their academic achievement in Social Studies course?
3. What are the students' feelings and thoughts about Social Studies course?

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

In this research, a convergent parallel design, one of the mixed type research methods was utilized. A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the qualitative and quantitative elements in the same phase of the research process, analyses the two components independently and interprets the results together (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). 'Mixed methods' is a research method whereby researchers have a broader perspective on research problem (Gültekin, Gürdoğan Bayır and Yaşar, 2020). The convergent parallel design involves the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data. However, this approach involves independent analyses. The researcher weighs the qualitative and quantitative data equally (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). In the present study, the research data were collected simultaneously and were aimed to complement one another. Analysed independently, the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated and interpreted.

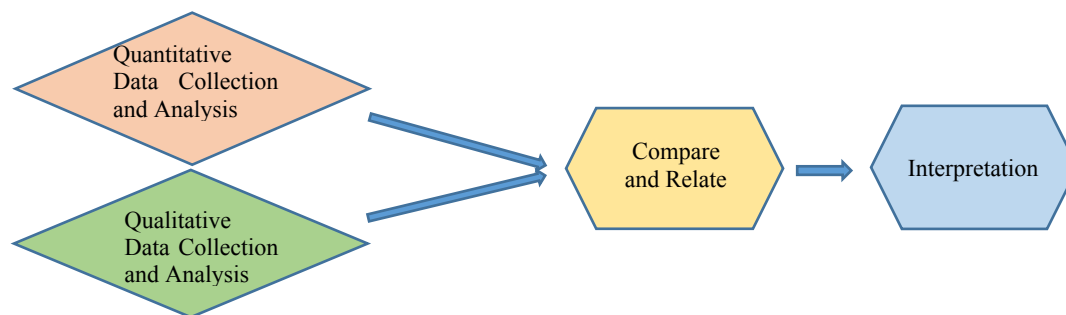


Figure 1: The schematized version of the phases of convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2015).

2.2. Study Group

Quantitative data were collected from fourth grade students who were enrolled in state school in İstanbul and voluntarily participated (N= 172). Of all the participants, % 44.19 (N=76) were female and % 55.81 (N= 96) were male students. The participants were fourth grade students and their mean age was $\bar{X} = 9.96$. The school where the study was carried out was selected due to the fact that it was easy- accessible and the school management and teachers were voluntary to participate. To gain a micro- size and in- depth understanding, all fourth grades in this school were included in study group of the research. For the purposes of the study, only one school was selected considering the fact that differentiation in academic achievement resulting from different schools may have an adverse effect on the research results.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the study group consisted of 30 students, in each class, selected through simple random sampling. As simple random sampling is a sampling technique where every item in the population has an even chance and likelihood of being selected in the sample (Balci, 2004), it has been preferred in the current research.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

'Social Skill Evaluation Scale' and 'An Attitude Scale towards Social Studies Course' were used as quantitative data collection tools. 'Social Skills Evaluation Scale' (for ages 7- 12), with 69 items and 12 sub- dimensions, was developed by Akçamete and Avcioğlu (2005). The purpose of the scale is to determine students' social skill levels. The sub- dimensions of the scale were as follows: basic social skill, basic speaking skill, advanced speaking skill, building a relationship skill, maintaining a relationship skill, collaboration skill, emotional skills, self- controlling skills, dealing with aggressive behaviour skills, bearing the result skills, giving instruction skills and cognitive skills. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the original scale is .98; however, in the present study, it was determined as .96. In addition, 'The Attitude Scale towards Fourth- Grade Social Studies Course' was developed by Ulu Kalın and Topkaya (2017). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for reliability of the original scale which consists of 12 items is determined as .84; nevertheless, in this study, it was found as .90. In the qualitative stage, structured interview form, developed by the researcher, was used. The students were asked, (1) 'Do you like Social Studies course? Why?' and (2) 'How would you have this lesson if you were the teacher?'

Personal Information Form includes each student's academic achievement score in Social Studies course stated by their classroom teachers. The steps for developing structured interview form were followed one by one. In order to ensure validity and reliability, 3 experts' views were taken and, in this respect, the form was created.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The research data were collected by the researcher in 2019- 2020 academic year. Quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were applied simultaneously. The researcher carried out the applications in the classroom at a certain time determined by the teachers.

In order to reveal the predictor role of social skill on academic achievement, students' marks in Social Studies course and total score of social skill evaluation scale by performing simple linear regression analysis. The main purpose of simple linear regression analysis is to describe the relationship between one dependent and one independent variable using a straight line (Stock and Watson, 2011). In addition, same analysis was conducted with the aim of indicating the effect of students' attitudes towards Social Studies course to predict academic achievement.

For the qualitative data analysis, content analysis was used. Content analysis is 'a research tool used to make valid inferences, to quantify qualitative information and to make objective and systematic classifications of the documents or communication artefacts in terms of meaning and/ or grammar' (Tavşancıl and Aslan, 2001, p.22). Content analysis requires the researcher to probe into the research data and to gain certain concepts, categories and themes. The researcher focuses on presence and occurrence of certain statements and identifies code units. Categories are made up of the code units and themes are formed by categories and interpreted (Merriam and Grenier, 2019; Bengtsson, 2016; Crabtree and Miller, 1999). In the research, the questions were stated in a clear and proper manner and the researcher abided by initial data. For this aim, direct quotes were used and the phenomenon was depicted clearly. Each participant in qualitative study group in the research has been represented using the letter 'P' accompanied by a number (i.e., P1, P2, P3...P30). The themes and sub- themes were presented for to 3 experts and the codes gained were compared. In this process, the data were examined in terms of consistency and the final version of themes and sub- themes was obtained. For the reliability of the research data, the formula described in Miles and Huberman (1994) as 'reliability= number of agreements/ (number of agreements+ disagreements) x 100' was used and the reliability was found as % 86. As stated by the regulation of MoNE (2018) (Article - 33), grading system is as follows: 0-44 is Failed, 45- 54 is Pass, 55-69 is average, 70- 84 is Good and 85- 100 is Very Good.

3. Findings and Remarks

The findings regarding research questions determined bin line with the study objective have been presented respectively.

3.1. Findings regarding the first research question

Table 1 shows the results concerning the predictor role of social skills on students' academic achievement in Social Studies course.

Table 1: The Regression Analysis Results on Social Skill and Academic Achievement in Social Studies Course

Academic Achievement in Social Studies Course	B	S.E.	β	T	p	R	R ²	F	p
Constant	103.044	2.701		38.143	.000				
Social Skill Evaluation Scale Total	-.105	.020	-.365	-5.112	.000	.365	.133	26.133	.000**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ ($N=172$; $dF(1,170)$)

As seen in Table 1, social skills explain % 13 of total variance for the prediction of students' academic achievement in Social Studies course.

The result indicates that social skills are a low-level, significant and positive predictor of students' academic achievement in Social Studies course. The students with high level of social skills may have a greater level of self-confidence, self-reliance to question the points they do not understand and attendance in-group works. Thus, it can be posited that permanent learning is realized, thereby prepossessing students' academic achievement levels.

3.2. Findings regarding the second research question

Table 2 presents the results concerning the predictor role of students' attitudes towards Social Studies course on students' academic achievement in Social Studies course.

Table 2: The Regression Analysis Results on Students' Attitudes towards Social Studies Course and Their Academic Achievement in Social Studies Course

Variables	B	S.H.	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
Social Stu.									
Constant	95.177	1.990		47.836	.000				
Attitudes Towards Soc. Stu.	-.274	.093	-.221	-2.958	.004	.221	.049	8.750	.004*

* $p < 0.01$ ($N=172$; $dF(1,170)$)

As manifested in Table 2, students' attitudes towards Social Studies course explains % 5 of total variance for the prediction of their academic achievement in Social Studies course. The results revealed that students' attitudes towards Social Studies courses are a low-level, significant and positive predictor of their academic achievement in Social Studies courses. It can be thus claimed that the students who engagedly follow the course, voluntarily take part in learning processes and enjoys learning course subjects may have greater academic achievement thanks to the higher motivation s/he possesses.

3.3. Findings regarding the third research question

Table 3a and Table 3b show students' answers to the questions of 'Do you like Social Studies course? Why?' and 'How would you have this lesson if you were the teacher?'

Table 3a: Students' Feelings and Thoughts towards Social Studies Course

Theme	Code	Sub- Codes	f	Academic Achievement
The status of liking Social Studies Course	I like (n=18)	Enjoyable	11	Very Good
		New information	8	Very Good/ Good
		Related to daily life	8	Very Good
		Interesting	7	Very Good
		Easy	7	Very Good
		Academic Achievement	3	Very Good
		Teacher's teaching style	1	Very Good
	I do not like (n=12)	Boring	12	Good/Average
		Not interesting	8	Good/ Average
		Demanding excessive memorizing	6	Very Good/ Good
		Few activities	5	Good
		Demanding excessive reading	4	Good
		Difficulty in learning	4	Good/ Average
		Academic failure	4	Average
		Demanding excessive writing	3	Good/ Average

According to Table 3a, 18 students said 'yes' and 12 students said 'no' to the question of 'Do you like Social Studies course?' As for the reasons, the students stated different opinions as follows: 'Quite an enjoyable lesson' (n= 11), 'I learn new information' (n=8), 'It helps me with my social life' (n=8), 'The subjects are really interesting' (n=7), 'Quite an easy lesson' (n=7), 'I get high grades' (n=3), 'I like my teachers' style' (n=1). The students' views on the Social Studies course and their statements regarding the reasons of their views have been presented below:

Example 1. P1; "No, because it is boring." (Academic Achievement Score: Good)

Example 2. P22; "No, I do not like it because I am having difficulty in this course" (Academic Achievement Score: Average)

Example 3. P8; "I do not like writing. Our teacher wants us to write so much in this course. We also need to memorize so much. I do not have a good score in this lesson already. I just do not like this course!"

Example 4. P14; "I like Social Studies course because it is quite enjoyable and educational and my favourite course." (Academic Achievement Score: Very Good)

Example 5. P20; "I like because I can use the things I learn in the course in my daily life." (Academic Achievement Score: Very Good)

As seen in the examples above, the academic achievement scores of the students stating that they like Social Studies courses are relatively higher than the ones saying that they do not like Social Studies courses. According to the quantitative results, students' attitude towards Social Studies courses is a significant predictor of their academic achievement in the course. In addition, this argument is supported by qualitative results obtained. The students saying that they liked the Social Studies course stated that the course was interesting, enjoyable and related to the daily life. On the contrary, those saying that they did not like Social Studies course

stated that the course included few activities, was not interesting, demanded excessive memorizing, reading and writing and they also said that they did not like teacher's lecturing style. It can be inferred that all these factor affect students' attitudes towards the course.

Table 3b: Students' Expectations on the Teaching of Social Studies Course

Theme	Code	Sub- Codes	f	Example Statements
Expectations on the teaching process of the course	Activity, Based Process(n=36)	Activity	11	P1: "I would have this lesson with more activities and games for quick and clear learning." P22:"I would carry out lots of entertaining and educational activities"
		Game	9	P13: "I would make my students play games in order for them to have a better understanding the subject" P24: "I would teach my students by entertaining. "
		Theatre and drama	7	P15: "I would teach the subjects by performing a theatre." P1: "I would allow my students to perform in order to see what they do in their social lives."
		The diversity of examples	3	P21: "I would allow my students to play games and give lots of examples to make the lesson easier"
		Smartboard	3	P5: "I would allow my students to watch documentaries on smartboard." P17: "I would carry out question –answer activities on smartboard."
		Trip-observation	2	P14: "I would arrange lots of trips and activities."
		Reading with comics	1	P28: "I would make my students read books with comics, thereby following the lesson engagedly."
		Group Works	3	P3: "I would carry out group works for each learning unit."
		Group work	1	P20: "After explaining the subject, I would line up my students and ask questions and end the activity with the last two students."
		Relation to the student	Relation to the interest and expectations	2
	Answer to each question	2	P2: "I would explain the subjects in- depth and try new ways to re- explain the points that my students do not understand."	

In Table 3b, the answers given by the students to the question of 'How would you have this lesson if you were the teacher?' are as follows: 'I would carry out lots of activities' (n=11), 'I would allow my students play more games' (n=9), 'I would perform theatres and drama more' (n=7), 'I would have the lesson by giving lots of examples' (n=3), 'I would use smartboard more often' (n=3), 'I would arrange trips and have my students make observations more often' (n=2) and 'I would make my students read books with comics' (n=1). The

aforementioned answers were presented under the theme of *activity- based process*. Such answers as ‘I would carry out group works more often’ (n=3) and ‘I would arrange competitions at the end of each unit’ (n=1) were included in the theme of *group work*. However, certain answers as ‘I would answer each question’ (n=2) were presented under the title of *relation to the student*.

With reference to the students’ answers, it can be claimed that their views have been mostly covered in the theme of *activity- based process*. In this regard, it has been seen that the activities carried out based on students’ interests and needs play a pivotal role in their effective learning. This result implies that students prefer activity-based processes, in which they undertake an active role and interact with their friends and teachers, with a greater extent due to the fact that they acquire the opportunity of learning to reach and constructing information in practice. Besides, it can be said that this situation may result from that fact that the students are game- aged in terms of their development.

4. Discussion and Result

In the current study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between fourth grade students’ social skills, their attitudes towards Social Studies course and their academic achievement. According to the results, social skill is a low- level, significant and positive predictor of students’ academic achievement in Social Studies course. This result correlates with similar studies indicating a relationship between the level of social skill and academic achievement in primary school education (Coşkun and Samancı, 2012). Samancı and Diş (2014) revealed that the students with low levels of social skill also had low academic achievement. The fact that students’ academic achievement in Social Studies course increases while their levels of social skill do not improve at the same level is considered as an expected situation. This is due to the fact that lessons are exam- based and parents mostly focus on their children’s cognitive skills. As a result, this causes individuals to have high level of academic achievement but to lack of social skills.

In the current study, the results have also shown that students’ attitudes are significant and positive predictor of their academic achievement in Social Studies course. This result is accordance with those in similar studies. Yılmaz and Demir (2014) articulated that students’ positive attitudes towards Social Studies course are influenced by getting good grades in the exams of the course. In the same study, it was emphasized that the students saying that Social Studies course was their favourite were the ones having more positive attitudes towards the course compared to other students. Likewise, Yüce (2008) found that the higher grades students got in Social Studies course, the more positive attitudes students had towards the course. Accordingly, Demir (2010) unearthed a low- level, significant and positive relationship between students’ grades in Social Studies course and their attitudes towards the course. In addition, there are other studies showing similar results in the literature (Oğur, 2009; Ergin, 2006; Tay and Akyürek Tay, 2006; Altıntaş, 2005). In the related literature, the studies argue that the increase in students’ academic achievement in Social Studies course led to an increase in their positive attitudes towards the course. Moreover, in lights of the research results, it can be posited that students’ interests and attitudes towards the course promote academic achievement. There have been several studies indicating that students’ attitudes and level of academic achievement increase or decrease correspondingly, showing that enhancing students’ positive attitudes towards the course would raise their academic achievement (Coşkun and Samancı, 2012; Keskin, 2007; Koçkan, 2004). Furthermore, there are other studies highlighting that students’ interest towards the course prepossesses learning and acquisitions as well as their attitudes (Yılmaz and Şeker, 2011; Çetingöz and Özkal, 2006; Öztürk and Baysal, 1999). It may be said that positive attitudes towards the course have a greater impact on course achievement compared to interest.

The students noted that they would prefer activity and game- based process in Social Studies course. Assuming the fact that students’ expectations may affect their attitudes positively in terms of the subject they are to learn, it can be said that those results are based on their ages and developmental characteristics. In order for the teaching process to be successful, applying certain strategies, methods and techniques which are in accordance with the course and subject and well- planned is of great importance. Consequently, teachers should pay attention to arranging activities considering students’ ages and interests, ensuring qualified and permanent teaching and guiding the students to help them notice their skills (Demirel, 2009).

It has been concluded that students had positive attitudes towards game- based activities in Social Studies course. On the condition that they are arranged depending on students' ages and developments, games are among the leading methods and techniques providing qualified, interesting, enjoyable and permanent learning. Games include a wide range of skills, foster self- confidence and social skills, have its own dynamics and rules and serve for qualified learning where children have the opportunity to entertain (Gözüalan and Koçak, 2014). Games are the times when each individual, in their childhood, were able to express their feelings and explore themselves and their surroundings (Öğretir, 2008). The purpose of the game may not always be for certain and the game is played with or without rules. However, games are the learning processes which children always want to be included in; provide a basis for their cognitive, affective and psychomotor developments; prepare them for life and offer the most significant and qualified learning for them (Kaya and Elgün, 2015).

In addition to educational games, material use has also been considered important in terms of appropriate methods and techniques for the course. In particular, there have been several studies revealing that visual materials used in Social Studies course enhance student achievement (Altınışık and Orhan, 2002; Yaşar, 2004). In this regard, it has been concluded that visual material use in Social Studies course has positive effects on increasing academic achievement.

5. Suggestions

- According to the results of the study, more social activities have been recommended to be carried out in schools in order to develop students' social skills. Besides, further experimental studies may be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of social skills and attitudes towards Social Studies course.
- Teachers are required to make efforts to get their students to have positive attitudes towards the course, and to determine negative ones. In this regard, in order to eliminate the negative attitudes, different methods, techniques, activities and examples should be used during the course. Teaching process should be carried out based on the principles of multiple intelligence theory.
- Teachers are not recommended to merely focus on academic achievement. Instead, they should aim to make their students acquire life skills. Moreover, eligible learning environments where course acquisitions can be transferred to daily life should be provided for students. It is of great importance not to overlook students' interest, talents and expectations.

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