

What Is Efficient Social Studies Instruction?

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ABSTRACT

Effective social studies instruction should intend to train young individuals who are interested, are capable of participating in the learning process, are capable of utilizing technology, have a good memory, look forward to the future with confidence, and transfer the knowledge they acquire at school to daily life. The aim of the present research is to determine the problems experienced in the instruction of social studies course based on teacher views and the means for an efficient social studies instruction. Thus, the case study method, a qualitative research design, was employed in the present study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers, employed in five middle schools in Elazığ province urban center, during the 2016-2017 academic year, and the data were analyzed with descriptive analysis. Thus, it was determined that the inadequacy of course hours and the redundancy and complexity of the topics were the main problems experienced in social studies courses and these were identified as the factors that led to the lack of student interest. According to the views of the teachers, efficient social studies instruction requires a focus on current issues, requires employment of available technologies, and should allow the individuals to transfer content knowledge to life. It is concluded that an efficient social studies instruction would be possible through the transfer of knowledge to real-life situations, the employment of technological tools, active student participation, the simplification and the elimination the discontinuities between textbook content.

Key words: Social Studies, Efficient Social Studies Instruction, Social Studies Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Education aims to train efficient, creative and responsible citizens. In fulfilling this objective, the efficiency of social studies course plays a significant role. The determination of the problems experienced in social studies instruction would partially reveal the criteria for a more effective social studies instruction. Social studies is a self-renewing, dynamic and complex field of study developed to train individuals with universal and national good citizenship values, who could adapt the skills identified in the curriculum to real life, and plan a healthy future based on the knowledge acquired in various sciences (Çatak, 2016).

Deveci (2015) aimed to determine the expectations of pre-service teachers from the future curricula. The study findings demonstrated that pre-service teachers expected the future curricula to train global citizens, allow the individuals to acquire national and universal values, include an applicable content, fully implement constructivism in learning and instruction processes, and adopt the process evaluation technique. They stated that the curricula should be revised based on the above mentioned criteria.

Previous studies revealed that certain problems have been experienced in social studies courses. In a study conducted

by Çelikkaya and Kürümlüğü (2018), teachers stated that they experienced problems because the course hours were inadequate, the content was not suitable for the student level, the syllabi were dense, and the textbooks were far from satisfactory in the new curriculum. Can (2017) reported that the curriculum achievements were in low-level knowledge areas. The findings reported by Demir et al. (2014) were consistent with the above-mentioned results. Based on the study findings, pre-service teachers considered student textbook activities moderately suitable for critical thinking skill. Similarly, in a study by Çırak (2020), 8th grade students stated that they could use the knowledge acquired in the social studies course and social studies teachers should have democratic attitudes. Öztürk and Kafadar (2020) reported that 2018 social studies curriculum lacked information on the measurement and evaluation methods and techniques that should be utilized.

A similar study was conducted by Letina (2015). The findings of that study demonstrated that science and social studies teachers employ conventional evaluation methods more when compared to alternative evaluation methods. On the other hand, the views of the teachers about alternative evaluation methods were more positive when compared to conventional methods. This demonstrated that the

knowledge of teachers on alternative evaluation methods was limited.

Similarly, Meziobi et al. (2012) investigated the implementation of UBE (Universal Basic Education), a reform enacted in the state of Imo in Nigeria. The study findings demonstrated that social studies teachers were not adequately informed about the objectives of UBE. Furthermore, it was determined that educational institutions did not prepare teachers for the implementation of UBE.

Certain problems were identified in technology literacy as well. The findings of the study conducted by Sezer et al. (2020) demonstrated that teachers were at a traditional level in technology use. Furthermore, it was determined that the creative ideas and skills of the social studies teachers were inadequate in technology use and instructional material design, and they perceived that technology integration was limited to the classroom activities. Similarly, in a study conducted by Yontar (2019) to determine the digital literacy levels of pre-service teachers in classroom and social studies education programs, it was reported that the digital literacy levels of the participants were moderate.

Teacher perspectives towards the students are also affect the education and instruction process. In a study conducted by Keefer (2017), inadequate approaches of social studies educators were investigated in Florida. In the study, the views of five teachers were obtained. The study findings demonstrated that the perspectives of the social studies teachers towards impoverished students were improper. It was emphasized that social studies teachers should be trained to improve the asset-based knowledge of these students and to change their inaccurate approaches that lower expectations and promote stereotypes.

Fraenkel (1995) conducted a study to determine the attributes of efficient social studies teachers. Fraenkel (1995) attempted to identify the activities conducted in social studies classes and the attributes and behaviors of efficient social studies teachers. The study findings revealed that efficient teachers tended to have high expectations about the students and share these expectations clearly with the students. They could change instruction methods and classroom activities. It was also demonstrated that efficient teachers were effective on the students and interested in not only the course content but the learning of the students. According to Karademir and Akgül (2019), an efficient social studies teacher should be a model for the students, is aware of the current agenda, emphasizes individual differences, possesses political and citizenship knowledge, democracy culture, and leadership skills.

According to Lennon (2017), it is important for teachers to conduct classroom discussions and critical thinking exercises in the social studies course. Critical thinking and student dialogues are powerful tools for young adults and children that should be attempted by the educators. These are the skills required for critical analysis of current issues and learning and discussion of these issues with a civilized attitude. Teachers are concerned about the possibility that the method could backfire. According to the author, America changes, and although older teachers may have some

reservations about the method, others should help them understand.

Different instruction models should be employed based on the intelligence level of the students. Abas and Solihatin (2019) conducted a study to determine the impact of interpersonal intelligence on social studies learning outcomes. In the study that included experimental and control groups and conducted in an elementary school in Indonesia, the sample included 22 students with high and low interpersonal intelligence. The findings demonstrated that face-to-face instruction models had a better impact on students with high interpersonal intelligence. It was demonstrated that the direct instruction model had a better impact on students with low interpersonal intelligence.

In a study conducted by Yalley (2017), it was emphasized that social studies teachers should acquire technological pedagogical knowledge in teacher training institutions in Ghana. It was reported that the Ministry of National Education should organize periodic workshops for social studies teachers on technology-assisted instruction methods and techniques. It was also stated that it would be more effective if social studies courses are integrated with technology, content and pedagogy to reform high school education.

Previous studies mainly concentrated on the problems associated with social studies instruction and only a few studies were conducted on how social studies should be instructed. The views of the teachers are important since they are the main actors in teaching.

Objective and Research Questions

The study findings are expected to guide curricula developers by analyzing the problems in the curriculum and determining the criteria required for more efficient social studies instruction. Thus, the following research problems were determined: "What are the problems that affect the efficiency of social studies instruction?" and "How a more efficient social studies course could be instructed?"

METHOD

In the study, the problems that affect efficient social studies instruction and more efficient social studies instruction methods were determine were investigated in depth. For this purpose, the case study approach, a qualitative research design was employed. The main characteristic of qualitative case study is the in-depth investigation of several cases. In other words, the factors that affect a case are investigated with a holistic approach and the study focuses on how these factors affect and affected by the relevant case (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005, p. 77).

The Study Group

The study group was assigned with the criterion and convenience sampling methods. Easily accessible middle schools in Elazığ provincial center were preferred. Teacher participants were assigned based on the criterion sampling method based on the following criteria: Employment in a

public middle school as a social studies teacher and voluntary participation in the study. The criterion sampling method could be described as the inclusion of all cases that meet a set of predetermined criteria in the study. The criteria could be determined by the researcher or the list of predetermined criteria could be employed (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

The study was conducted with 20 social studies teachers employed in five middle schools in Elazığ province urban center during the 2016-2017 academic year. Teachers who were employed in Elazığ, Istiklal, Gazi, Mezre, Dumlupınar Middle schools participated in the study. The criterion sampling method was employed to assign the participants. Employment in a middle school as a teacher was the inclusion criterion. The study aimed to investigate the experiences of the teachers with the social studies curriculum. The participant demographics are presented in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, 11 interviewed teachers were female, 9 were male, 7 were Faculty of Education graduates, and 13 graduated from other faculties.

Data Collection Instrument

Initially, official approval was obtained from the Provincial National Education Directorate to conduct the study. During the dates approved for the research, schools were visited to collect the study data. The author visited the schools and personally delivered the semi-structured interview forms to the participating teachers. They were asked to complete the interview within 40 minutes.

In the study, only volunteering teachers were included. Initially, the form that included the research questions was applied to five teachers in the pilot scheme. The form used in the pilot scheme was reviewed and organized with the assistance of a field expert. The data collected in the pilot scheme were not included in the main study. In the main study, questions that included participant demographics and the semi-structured interview questions were included in the survey form. Open-ended questions were posed to the teachers on their experiences with the social studies curriculum. Social studies teachers stated their views on the semi-structured interview form. The following questions were included in the form.

1. What are the problems that affect efficient social studies instruction?
2. What is efficient social studies instruction?
3. How could the efficiency of the social studies instruction be improved?

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Teacher demographics	<i>f</i>
Gender	
Female	11
Male	9
Faculty of Graduation	
Faculty of Education	7
Other	13
Total	20

Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed with the descriptive analysis technique. The survey forms completed by social studies teachers were read first. In the study, each question posed to the teachers was considered a theme. The collected data were initially read with a holistic approach. The questions were then considered as a theme and the answers were classified based on similarities. The interrater reliability coefficient was 96%. The study was explained in detail, and the views of the teachers were also included as direct quotes. Direct quotes are presented based on the survey form order such as T1, T2, etc.

FINDINGS

The study findings are presented under three categories: the problems experienced in social studies instruction, views on efficient social studies instruction, and on more efficient social studies instruction.

The Problems Experienced in Social Studies Instruction Based on Teacher Views

The problems experienced in social studies instruction based on the views of teachers are presented in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, according to more than half of the teachers, the problems experienced in social studies courses were insufficient course hours and crowded classrooms. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“The intense curriculum (in the 7th and 8th grades), the didactic nature of the course content, insufficient discussion, brainstorming, and project work due to crowded classes.” [T6]

“Non-implementation of methods other than instruction and question and answer in the course, insufficient course hours, lack of book reading habits among the students.” [T2]

“Insufficient course hours, the lack of thinking and interpretation skills.” [T11]

According to eight teachers, one of the problems in the social studies course was too long and complex topics. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

Table 2. The problems that affect efficient social studies instruction

Teacher views	<i>f</i>
1. Insufficient course hours and crowded classes	13
2. High number of complex topics	8
3. Student disinterest in the course	5
4. Unemployment of instruction material and lack of material	4
5. Abstract topics	2
6. Rote-based content and lack of practice	2
7. Inadequate curriculum	1
8. Non-chronological presentation of history topics	1
9. Lack of discipline	1
10. Disinterest in reading books	1

“There are too many topics and they are complex. 7th grade textbook is particularly complicated.” [T9]

“There are too many units with extensive content, lack of time.” [T8]

“Since the course hours are limited, we cannot conduct adequate number of activities. The students are bored because there too many topics.” [T12]

Five teachers stated that one of the problems in the social studies course was the disinterest of the students. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Student apathy, inadequate curriculum, unhappy students.” [T15]

“When students arrive unprepared and without conducting the necessary research, the desired outcomes could not be achieved.” [T11]

Four teachers complained about unemployment and unavailability of instruction material. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Lack of material, crappy textbooks.” [T14]

“We experience problems in the social studies course when the textbook content is inconsistent and there is no material. Weekly course hours are insufficient, 7th grade textbook lacks the notion of time, the events are not presented chronologically, etc.” [T13]

According to two teachers, abstract topics were among the problems experienced in the social studies course.

“Problems are experienced in the instruction of abstract topics. Visual material, videos and slides could not be used due to the lack of a smart board in the classroom.” [T20]

“Sometimes, there are problems in the instruction of abstract topics. In these cases, we need to talk much more, and students are bored. They even sleep sometimes in the 7th and 8th grades.” [T5]

According to two teachers, rote-based instruction without practical applications was one of the problems in the social studies course.

“Non-implementations of methods other than lectures and question and answer in classroom instruction.” [T2]

“The students who do not repeat the topic forget even the previous class. I think the biggest problem is the fact that it is a forgotten course. Repetition is necessary in each class hour.” [T10]

In short, the majority of the teachers claimed that insufficient class hours, crowded classes, high number of complex topics, student disinterest, unavailability of instruction material were the most significant problems.

Efficient Social Studies Instruction Based on Teacher Views

Based on teacher views, effective social studies instruction should entail addressing current issues, utilization of technologies, adoption of the knowledge learned in the classroom in real life, and accurate presentation of the topics. Findings on efficient social studies instruction based on the views of the teachers are presented in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, based on the views of seven teachers, efficient social studies instruction should focus on current

Table 3. Teacher views on efficient social studies instruction

Teacher views	f
1. Emphasis on current issues	7
2. Technology use	6
3. Transfer of knowledge to daily life	4
4. Effective presentation of the topics	4
5. Active students	3
6. Criticizing, interpreting and thinking students	3
7. Less number of topics	2
8. Chronological presentation of historical topics	1
9. Sensitivity to social events	1
10. Including student history	1
11. Well-developed textbooks	1
12. Repetition of the topics	1

issues. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Current social studies that exist in life. The knowledge in textbooks should prepare the student for life and represent daily life issues.” [T16]

“Current issues and expressions visualized with concrete examples.” [T5]

According to the views of six teachers, efficient social studies instruction should employ technologies. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Continuous topical summaries, visuals, videos, tests, active and purposive use of the board in the classroom would significantly affect the success of the course.” [T10]

“[The instruction] should include further audiovisual elements that would attract the attention of the students.” [T19]

According to four teachers, efficient social studies instruction that allows the students to transfer the learned knowledge to daily life. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Efficient social studies should include visuals that touch the daily life of the student, and the topics should be narrowed and storified.” [T8]

“A instruction technique related to daily life, about life, learning by doing and living.” [T9]

According to four teachers, efficient social studies should present the topics well. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Continuous topical summaries, visuals, videos, tests, active and purposive use of the board in the classroom would significantly affect the success of the course.” [T10]

“It could be effective as long as it is instructed at the student level. When the student starts to love and understand the course, the course achieves the objectives.” [T13]

According to three teachers, efficient social studies instruction entails active students. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Social studies that the student learns actively and transfer the knowledge to daily life.” [T12]

“An environment where the student is a participant and a researcher.” [T20]

According to three teachers, efficient social studies instruction means students who can criticize, interpret and think. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“I can define it as a curriculum and activity aimed at a student who thinks, gives examples, criticizes, analyzes, interprets and raises student awareness rather than providing information. It also entails practicing the knowledge, providing opportunities to develop exemplification skills.” [T6]

“To train individuals who can think, criticize, comment and apply what they learn in life.” [T11]

According to two teachers, efficient social studies instruction means less topics. Additionally, two teachers stated that if the topics are presented well, the social studies course will be efficient. The views of these teachers are presented below.

“It could be effective as long as it is instructed at the student level. When the student starts to love and understand the course, the course achieves the objectives.” [T13]

“We sometimes experience difficulties in explaining abstract topics, which results in longer lectures which bores the students. 7th and 8th grade students even sleep in the class.” [T5]

According to the teachers, efficient social studies instruction should focus on current issues, employ technologies, allow the transfer of the learned knowledge to life, and the topics should be presented well and the students should be active.

How to Ensure More Efficient Social Studies Instruction Based on Teacher Views

According to the teachers, when the social studies knowledge could be transferred to life, when technological tools and equipment are employed, the textbooks are simplified, the topical inconsistencies are eliminated, the students are active, and more efficient social studies instruction could be achieved. These findings are presented in Table 4.

As seen in Table 4, more efficient social studies instruction is possible when knowledge is transferred to life

Table 4. Teacher views on how to ensure more efficient social studies instruction

Teacher views	<i>f</i>
1. Knowledge could be transferred to life	7
2. Technological tools should be employed	6
3. The textbooks should be simplified and the topics should be consistent	4
4. Students should be active	4
5. Research and interpretation skills should be developed	2
6. Teacher instruction should be effective	2
7. Instruction should be at student level	1
8. Class hours should be increases	1
9. Class size should be reduced	1
10. History and geography topics should be	
11. Included in different courses	1
12. Drama method should be utilized	1
13. Social studies should be applied fully at schools	1

according to seven teachers. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“The textbooks should be revised, and the learned knowledge should be applicable.” [T16]

“It will be more effective when the students are actively involved and (the course) is associated with daily life.” [T9]

According to six teachers, more efficient social studies instruction would be possible when technological tools are employed. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“It should be a program where current tools are employed, and it should be sensitive to social events.” [T15]

“I can state that the participation should be high in classrooms, where all narrative techniques and technological tools are used in addition to the textbooks.” [T5]

According to four teachers, textbooks should be simplified, and topics should be consistent. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Textbooks should be simplified”. [T19]

“There should be plenty of examples, activities, and topics should be connected.” [T4]

According to four teachers, more efficient social studies instruction is possible when the students are active. Examples of teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“A curriculum with fewer units is preferred, leading to a more effective social studies instruction by further involving the students in the process.” [T3]

“For a more efficient course, it is necessary to leave the old patterns behind and make the course more enjoyable. For example, the last favorite is to put questions on the board, to conduct a quiz show with these questions and to reward the students based on the results; the students love and demand this application.” [T10]

According to two teachers, more efficient social studies teaching is possible when the research and interpretation skills of the students are developed. Teacher views on this topic are presented below.

“Research and interpretation skills should be developed”. [T11]

“The instruction should focus on research...where the students are active.” [T12]

According to two teachers, more efficient social studies instruction is possible when the teacher instructs the course effectively. An example teacher view is presented below.

“Although the instruction is student-centered, course success is not possible unless the teacher instructs it effectively.” [T17]

According to the teachers, more efficient social studies instruction was possible when the course knowledge could be transferred to real-life situations, when technological tools and material are used, books are simplified and include consistent topics, and when the students are active.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to determine the problems experienced in social studies instruction and the criteria for efficient social studies instruction based on the views of the teachers. According to the majority of the interviewed social studies

teachers, the most prevalent problem they experienced in social studies course was the insufficient course hours. The present study findings were consistent with those reported by Kırtay (2007) and Koçak (2017).

One of the problems experienced in social studies instruction that was determined in the present study based on teacher views was the high number and complexity of the curriculum topics. They suggested to simplify the textbooks. The study findings were consistent with the findings reported in the research conducted by Dinç and Doğan (2010). Furthermore, in the present study, students' disinterest in the course was another problem experienced in the social studies course.

In the study, teachers included unavailability or lack of instructional material as one of the difficulties experienced in the social studies course. The study findings were consistent with the studies by Önen et al. (2011), Kahriman (2008), Çelikkaya (2011), and Kuş and Çelikkaya (2010).

According to the teachers, efficient social studies instruction entails a focus on current issues, technology use, transfer of learned knowledge to life, active student participation, training students who can criticize, interpret, and think, lower number of topics, and good instruction. The present study findings were consistent with the findings of the research conducted by Wright and Grenier (2009) and Şimşek (2016).

A study was conducted by Curry and Cherner (2016) with two well-trained social studies teachers who employed technological pedagogical content. According to the teachers, effective social studies teachers were those who prioritize instruction and students and conduct an effective, planned, well-prepared and organized instruction. Furthermore, technological pedagogical and field knowledge are also necessary for an active instruction. Even when teachers have good pedagogical and field knowledge, they should not neglect technological components. Furthermore, literacy skills are also important. Less successful students could be supported by literacy training.

Technology literacy is significant for contemporary education and social studies instruction. In a study conducted by Sarı and Kartal (2018), it was observed that individually innovative pre-service social studies teachers adopted a more positive attitude towards technology use. Similarly, the findings of the study conducted by Çöl and Karaca (2020) revealed that technology use in the social studies course improved the academic achievements of the students, led to permanent learning, and increased the number of active students. In a study conducted by Karaman and Akbaba (2020) that aimed to determine the fantasies of middle school 5th grade students about information technologies in the social studies course, the findings demonstrated that the students dreamed of using technological tools and equipment in the classroom while the robot teachers instructed the course.

The present study findings demonstrated that knowledge could be transferred to daily life, textbooks should be simplified, and topics should be consistent, the student could participate actively in the class, and research and interpretation skills of the students could be improved for more efficient social studies instruction. Based on the study findings, the following recommendations could be suggested:

1. Weekly course hours could be increased, or course content could be reduced.
2. School material inventory should be improved as soon as possible, and further studies should be conducted to improve the availability of instruction material.
3. Instead of the rote-based examination system, systems that focus on thinking and interpretation skills should be studied.
4. Instruction methods that would ensure active student participation in the classroom should be developed.
5. An education system, where students not parents research, internalize and interpret knowledge, is required.

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