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**Burcu Gürkan Ercan<sup>1</sup>, Sakine Hakkoymaz<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Hasan Kalyoncu University,  0000-0003-3942-6407

<sup>2</sup>Hasan Kalyoncu University,  0000-0002-3005-7900

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## The Effect of A Social Studies Course Supported by Stories on Critical and Empathetic Thinking Skills

Burcu Gürkan Ercan<sup>1\*</sup>, Sakine Hakkoymaz<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hasan Kalyoncu University

### Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of a social studies course supported by stories on the critical and empathetic thinking skills of 4th-grade students. The study was conducted according to the intervention design, a method used in mixed-method research. The 10-week study was conducted in two public schools in Gaziantep in the 2018-2019 academic year. The Critical Thinking Achievement Test developed by Eđmir and Ocak (2016) and the Empathy Scale for Children developed by Bryant and adapted to Turkish by Yılmaz-Yüksel (2004) were used to collect quantitative data. Semi-structured interview forms, semi-structured observation forms, and a research diary were used to collect qualitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis and descriptive analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed by Shapiro-Wilks test, *T*-test for unrelated measurements, *T*-test for related measurements, and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. In addition, the effect size of the experimental intervention was calculated using eta squared ( $n^2$ ) for parametric tests and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) for non-parametric tests. The significance level was taken as .05 for statistical analysis. The study results show that using stories in the social studies course significantly impacted the development of students' critical and empathetic thinking skills in the experimental group and the experimental intervention had a high effect size. In addition, the students' opinions suggest that cognitive and affective features, language skills, and content such as empathy, interpretation, deduction, fast and meaningful reading, analyzing, knowledge acquisition, inferring, effective responding, and listening can be developed by enriching the social studies courses with stories.

**Keywords:** Empathetic thinking skill, Critical thinking skills, Mixed method research, Social studies education, Story.

### Introduction

Social studies is an interdisciplinary subject that focuses on people and their lives, aims at effective citizenship education, and uses sources of information formed by social sciences (Almerico, 2013; Dođanay, 2003, p. 16; Engle & Ochoa, 1988, p. 13; Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977, p. 69; Martorella, 1998, p. 7; Wolk, 2003). The primary aim of a social studies course is to make the students knowledgeable and considerate by understanding the local and wider world. The use of thinking skills in this process is also important (Barr, 1997; Tindall, 1996). Social studies courses are cultural laboratories. In designing courses, it is necessary to consider that children make sense of the social world using their cultural knowledge (Jones, Pang, & Rodríguez, 2001). This study emphasizes examining students' critical and empathetic thinking development in a social studies course supported by one literary genre, stories.

All kinds of information and resources related to these fields provide important teaching materials for social studies, including written and oral literary works. The inclusion of literary genres in a social studies course provides the opportunity to share interdisciplinary information (Kaymakçı, 2013); supports students' learning through experience (Coşkun Keskin, & Otluođlu, 2012), provides students with the opportunity to discuss and to develop their reflective thinking, and provides various cognitive and affective benefits. Literary genres such as stories, epics, poetry, fairy tales, folksongs, etc., are powerful materials that enable thematic subjects to be taught, engender various values and authentic experiences, and make connections between the real world and the subject content.

### Literacy in Social Studies Course: Stories and Their Contributions to Learning

\* Corresponding Author: *Burcu Gürkan Ercan, burcu.gurkan@hku.edu.tr*

Stories are formed with artistic creativity and combine elements such as event, setting, time, and character. Stories have a privileged place among different types of knowledge and are carriers of values and knowledge that can be used both at and outside school (Hensel & Rasco, 1992). Stories can also be used in social studies courses because they complete the teaching process and facilitate understanding (Common, 2012; Hwang, 2004). Stories are the essence of communication (Mathis, 2011) and bring meaning to events that textbooks cannot deliver (Tindall, 1996). Stories can be used to explain facts, convey moral values, develop culturally appropriate behaviors, preserve cultures, and solve personal problems (Stein, 1982). Stories allow the discovery of social studies topics, inform about the past, support the present and shape the future (Combs & Beach, 1994; Harris, 2007). Shuyi (2017) states that stories are important in a pedagogical context. In this context, he states that stories can be used to teach all kinds of content, from simple to complex topics, and can be used at every stage of the course.

When stories are used effectively in social studies courses, learners develop their citizenship knowledge and skills and increase their knowledge of concepts and generalizations. Stories can arouse interest in both the past and the present, develop students' self-confidence, link the content and skills to be learned, inspire empathy and cultural understanding, encourage students to query the reliability of sources, and help them to acquire higher-order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, creating, problem-solving, decision-making, etc.) (Alkaaf, 2017; Combs & Beach, 1994; De Young & Monroe, 1996; Demircioğlu, 2008; Godsir & Rowel, 2010; Goodwin & Jenkins, 1997; Hwang, 2004; Sanchez, 2005; Shuyi, 2017; Tindall, 1996). Stories also link old learning and new learning (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991) because, through stories, individuals can gain insights about themselves, humanity, and the world in which they live (Hwang, 2004).

Picken (2000) believes that stories are an effective educational tool because they are credible, unforgettable and entertaining. He also argues that learning stories is about process and product, and that awareness and critical reflection develop in this learning process. Jewett (2007) states that the heart of social studies is questioning and that students can explore multiple perspectives by asking questions about stories, searching for evidence, analyzing findings, and preparing complex answers. Stories are related to cultural understanding, and providing this relationship is a part of critical thinking (Setyarini, Muslim, Rukmini, Yuliasri, & Mujianto, 2018). Critical thinking is an important skill for citizenship education, which is one of the main objectives of social studies courses. It is, therefore, necessary to include teaching practices to develop this skill.

Critical thinking is described as the process of judgment and decision-making about what to believe and what action to take (Ennis, 1991; Fisher, 1995). Paul (1995) states that questioning can be used to develop critical thinking, search for assumptions, evidence and reasons, determine perspective or point of view, investigate results and query the question itself. Stories relating to real life can also help students make sense of course content, make inferences, and to question.

Savage and Savage (1993) state that students can develop empathy by understanding the differences between people with the stories used in the social studies course. Empathy is the attempt to understand another's feelings and thoughts by putting oneself in their place (Kabapınar, 2003, p. 171). Empathetic understanding brings people closer to each other, facilitating communication (Yüksel, 2004) and can be developed through Education in critical thinking. Coşkun Keskin (2016) argues that students can experience the events from the heroes' eyes through the activities, improving empathy skills. Thus, they can actively engage in learning, understand the subject, and eliminate stereotypes by integrating their feelings and thoughts with their knowledge. Stephan and Finlay (1999) refer to two types of empathy, cognitive and affective. They emphasize that empathy has a major impact on behavior and attitudes. Social empathy is used in social studies courses to understand the current situations of today's people and society. A student who has gained social empathy skills can make inferences towards himself and the society in which they live and create a sensitive and tolerant self (Kabapınar, 2003, p. 171-172).

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 2016) states that it will be significant only when a social studies course is blended with information gathering and analysis, questioning and critical thinking, communication, data analysis, disciplinary literacy, and multidisciplinary awareness. Looking at the social studies curriculum being applied in Turkey, it aims to develop critical and empathetic thinking skills. In addition, The Ministry of National Education (2017) state that social studies courses need to be supported by literary works such as folk stories, folk songs, poetry, etc. As a literary genre, building stories suitable for the students' level and preparing them in accordance with the objectives of the curriculum can serve to achieve target attainments. For this reason, stories that will be used as learning resources in social studies Education should be in line with the general objectives of Turkish National Education and the social studies curriculum and directly compatible with target achievements (Ünlü & Ay, 2016, p. 196).

Various studies have been carried out regarding children's literature and the use of literary genres in social studies courses. These studies have been made on women's studies (Styer, 1984); higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, problem-solving and decision-making (Heinly & Hilton, 1982; Riecken & Miller, 1990); determination of teacher views (Beldağ & Aktaş, 2016; İbret, Karasu Avcı, Karabıyık, Güleş & Demirci, 2017); examination of academic achievement (Tekgöz, 2005); analysis of textbooks (Kaymakçı, 2013); the tendency to empathy (Akyol, 2011); and values education (Eryılmaz & Çengelci Köse, 2018; Demircioğlu, 2008). Other studies related to the use of stories in social studies courses have been conducted in the contexts of academic success (Bacak, 2008; Seçgin & Doğan, 2019; Tindall, 1996); value education (Gedik, 2012; Karagözoğlu, 2018); conceptual understanding (Picken, 2012); creative thinking (Bacak, 2008; Şekerci, Doğan, & Kabapınar, 2018); interest, attitude effect and recall level (Akıncı & Gönül, 2016; Tindall, 1996); teacher views (Akin, 2016; Dutt-Doner, Allen, & Campanaro, 2016); and teaching suggestions related to the use of stories (Shuyi, 2017). However, no study with experimental research process has been conducted on the effect of using stories in social studies courses on the development of 4th-grade students' critical thinking and empathy skills. This study assesses the contribution that stories can have on the development of critical thinking and empathy skills. In this context, the study's main question is as follows: "Are students' critical and empathetic thinking skills affected in a social studies course supported by stories?" The main purpose of the study is to determine whether students' critical and empathetic thinking skills develop in a social studies course supported by stories. For this main question, the following sub-questions are posed:

1. Do pre-test and post-test total scores of students' critical and empathetic thinking skills show a significant difference in a social studies course supported by stories?
2. What is the effect of using stories in a social studies course on developing students' critical and empathetic thinking?
3. What are the opinions of the students in the experimental group about the social studies course before and after the experimental procedure?

## Method

### Research Design

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical rules, and Hasan Kalyoncu University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee Decision was taken for this study on 31.12.2020, numbered E - 804.01-2012310005. This study examines the effect of a social studies course supported by stories on 4th grade students' critical and empathetic thinking skills through a mixed method approach. Mixed methods require the collection, analysis, and integration of qualitative and quantitative data in order to understand better the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2017, p. 3; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2018, p. 4). In the study, qualitative and quantitative data on student experiences is collected and interpreted from a broad perspective to provide detailed information. The study was conducted according to the intervention design, a method used in mixed method research. The intervention design aims to work on the research problem by adding qualitative data to the research process through the experimental or intervention program (Creswell, 2017, p. 43). This study included qualitative data in the process of pre-test and post-test experimental intervention. While the quantitative dimension of the study was designed according to pre-test and post-test control group quasi-experimental research, the qualitative dimension was designed according to case studies. The design flow of the intervention mixed study is shown in Fig. 1:

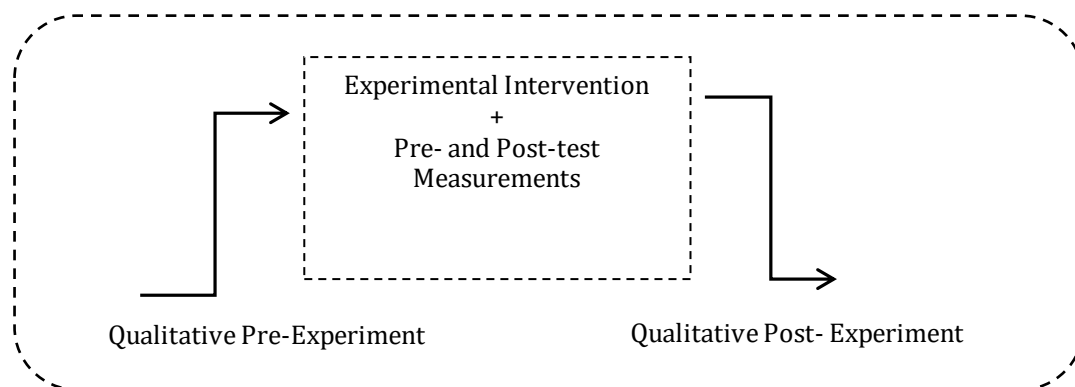


Figure 1. Intervention mixed pattern flow of research

As shown in Figure 1, quantitative and qualitative data were collected before and after the experimental procedure. The following section explains the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the study.

#### *Quantitative Dimension of the Study*

The quantitative dimension of the study was designed according to the quasi-experimental design of the pre-test and post-test control group. Quasi-experimental studies are used in cases where groups are not formed impartially or randomly. This design attempts to match certain variables of two available groups (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014, p. 208; Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018, p. 380). In this study, no impartial selection was made in the experimental and control groups. Potential inequality between the two groups was controlled by equalizing the pre-tests related to the independent variables (see Table 3). The pre-test and post-test control group quasi-experimental design model of the study is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test control group quasi-experimental model of the study

Groups	Pre-test	Procedure	Post-Test
E	M1	Social Studies Teaching Supported by Stories	M2
C	M3	Social Studies Curriculum of Ministry of National Education	M4

(E: Experimental Group; C: Control Group; M1: Pre-test measurements of the experimental group; M2: Post-test measurements of the experimental group; M3: Pre-test measurements of the control group; M4: Post-test measurements of the control group)

In the experimental group, stories were used to support the social studies course, and in the control group, the 4th-grade social studies curriculum was followed. In both groups, pre-test and post-test measurements were taken relating to critical and empathetic thinking skills.

#### *Qualitative Dimension of the Study*

The qualitative dimension of the study was designed as a holistic single case study. Holistic single case studies are used to confirm or refute a theory formulated through a single analysis unit (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 300). This study focused on the situation assessment concerning the impact of the social studies course supported by stories through data obtained from the interviews and a research diary. The holistic single-case design of the study is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Holistic single case design of the study

Group	Qualitative Data	Process	Qualitative Data
Experiment	Pre- Interview	Social Studies Teaching Supported by Stories Qualitative Data: Research Diary	Post-Interview

### **Participants**

This study was carried out with 38 4th-grade students in two public schools in the Oğuzeli district of Gaziantep in the 2018-2019 academic year. Criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling type, was used to determine the study groups. The key criterion was determined as not enriching the social studies courses by stories in the experimental and control group, not having a learning process to bring critical and empathetic thinking skills achievements to the students. As do many schools, the schools selected in the study provide full-time schooling. To prevent students in the experimental and control groups influencing each other, selecting the two groups from two different schools was decided. The experimental group was carried out in one school and the control group in another. Of the 19 students in the experimental group, 11 were female and 8 were male; of the 19 students in the control group, 12 were female and 7 were male.

Before the application of research, the Critical Thinking Achievement Test (CTAT) and Empathy Scale for Children (ESC) were applied to both groups to assess and compare the critical and empathetic thinking skill levels of the students in the experimental and control groups. First, whether there was a significant difference between the students' pre-test scores was checked. Büyüköztürk (2018) assumes that if the sample sizes are 30 and above, the distributions will not deviate too much from the normal range. Non-parametric tests were performed in this study since the sample size was 19 in both the experimental and control groups. *The Mann-Whitney U Test* was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the CTAT and ESC pre-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups, and the findings are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples' results of the CTAT and ESC pre-test average scores of the experimental and control groups

Measures	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
CTAT	Experiment	19	18.21	346.00	156.00	.470
	Control	19	20.79	395.00		
ESC	Experiment	19	19.84	377.00	174.00	.848
	Control	19	19.16	364.00		

\*p&lt;.05

Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference between the CTAT [ $U=156.00, p<.05$ ] and ESC [ $U=174.00, p<.05$ ] pre-test average scores of the experimental and control groups. Therefore, it is possible to say that the students' critical and empathetic thinking skills in the experimental and control groups were equivalent.

During the qualitative data collection process, six students (three girls and three boys) were interviewed. The students were selected according to their low, average, and high academic success in social studies determined by information obtained from their class teachers. The main criterion for selecting the students by their academic success was the research findings showing that academic success was more frequent in thinking-friendly classrooms (Akbiyık & Seferođlu, 2006; Dolapçiođlu, 2019). Since students' critical thinking and empathy skills were investigated in this study, student selection was primarily based on academic success. While three of these interviewed students indicated social studies was among their favorite courses, the other three did not include social studies as a favored course.

### Data Collection Tools

While the quantitative data was collected through the Critical Thinking Achievement Test (CTAT) and Empathy Scale for Children (ESC), the qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and research diary. Information about these tools is presented below:

*Critical Thinking Achievement Test (CTAT)*: The CTAT, developed by Eđmir and Ocak (2016) and applied to 5th-grade students, was used to determine the effect of a story-based social studies course on critical thinking skills. The achievement test consisted of 25 items of multiple-choice questions, each with four options. The items in the achievement test were prepared with respect to the sub-skills of critical thinking, such as "understanding the problem, distinguishing subjective and objective judgments, analyzing inferences, asking questions appropriate for the purpose, evaluating inferences, determining the reliability of a source". The results showed the KR-20 and KR-21 values related to the whole test as 0.61 and 0.63; the difficulty index and discrimination index were calculated as 0.37 and 0.32, respectively. These results show that the achievement test is of moderate difficulty and has a good level of discrimination (Eđmir & Ocak, 2016). *Critical Thinking Achievement Test* was applied to a total of 176 students studying at the 4th grade level in schools located in Gaziantep city center. Of these study participants, 100 (57%) were girls, and 76 (43%) were boys. As a result of the analyses made, the KR-20 and KR-21 values for the whole test were .53 and .49, respectively; the difficulty index was calculated as 0.39 and the distinctiveness index as 0.28.

*Empathy Scale for Children (ESC)*: The ESC, developed by Bryant (1982), applied to 4th-grade students and adapted to Turkish by Yılmaz- Yüksel (2004), was used to determine the effect of a story-based social studies course on empathetic thinking skills. Consisting of 20 items, the scale's validity was based on expert opinions, and its construct validity was determined by factor analysis. The reliability coefficients of the whole measurement tool were calculated as Cronbach Alpha .70 (Yılmaz-Yüksel, 2004). Cronbach (1990) states that the coefficients between 0.60 and 0.70 are sufficient for reliability.

*Semi-Structured Interview Form*: Interviews were conducted to determine the students' views on a social study course taught through stories. Interviews were carried out through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. For the semi-structured interview form, expert opinions (from 1 social studies expert, two assessment and evaluation experts, two child development experts, one Turkish language and literature expert, and three curriculum development and teaching experts) were taken. The relevant form was used after checking its suitability regarding the sub-goals, student development period, and language. There were three open-ended questions in the interview form to determine students' opinions before and after experiencing the social studies course. Care was taken to ensure that the questions prepared for the interview form were easy and understandable and did not direct the student. Some of the questions in the interview form are as follows: (1) *What do you think*

and feel about the social studies lesson?; (2) What do you think about the activities you do in the social studies lesson? etc.

*Semi-Structured Observation Form:* The semi-structured observation form was created according to the factor dimensions of the scales of critical thinking skills and empathic thinking skills. In addition, the "other" dimension was added to the semi-structured interview form to encode possible sub-skills related to critical and empathic thinking skills. Expert opinions (two assessment and evaluation experts, and 3 curriculum development and teaching experts) were taken for the semi-structured observation form. Researchers assumed the role of non-participant observer and continued their observations throughout the application. The data obtained from the semi-structured observation form were converted into findings.

*Research Diary:* Researcher diaries are a benefit in the data collection process. Researcher diaries generally include descriptive and reflective notes on researcher's thoughts, opinions, feelings, and the research process (Johnson, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The researchers kept research diaries during the 8-week application. The researcher recorded the experiences, feelings, and thoughts about the learning environment supported by stories in the diaries. Those diaries also involved the atmosphere of every lesson, the whole process, the students' feelings, perceptions, behaviors, and the researcher's feelings and thoughts. The notes in the researcher's diary were used to support the data analysis and interpretation process.

### Application Process and Data Collection

The teachers, who carried out the practices in the control and experimental groups, carried out the processes independently and unaware of each other, and were followed throughout the process. The primary school teacher carried out the control group's teaching process and followed the applied social studies curriculum. The primary school teacher of the control group taught the lesson with the strategies, methods and techniques that she determined in accordance with the education and training programs. The student continued the normal teaching process with the activities in the textbook. In the experimental group, eight story-based social studies activities developed by the researchers concerning learning domains were applied. The classroom teacher also carried out these teaching activities. Demir & Akengin (2014, p. 11-12) states that stories used in social studies courses should connect with the learning domains and serve the goals of the learning domain. In this context, the stories used in the study were prepared by taking expert opinions in line with the general aims, learning domains, and achievements of the social studies course. This process aimed to reflect all the subjects in the learning areas well, not to support a single learning area with stories. The topics selected from the learning areas were used as the subject of the Story. Therefore, an activity supported by stories was written as an example of every learning area. Applications towards critical thinking sub-skills and empathetic thinking, such as "understanding the problem, distinguishing subjective and objective judgments, analyzing inferences, asking questions appropriate for the purpose, evaluating inferences, determining the reliability of a source" were included in each activity. The researchers informed the classroom teachers of the content of the activities and their application in class and were present as observers during the lessons. The program carried out during the experimental process is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Weekly content distribution of the study related to the experimental process

Week/ Month	Application
1. Week/ February	Pre-test application of Empathy Scale for Children and Critical Thinking Achievement Test and pre-interview
2. Week/March	The Cost of Wrong Anger (Learning Domain: Individual and Society)
3. Week/March	The King is Always King Anywhere (Learning Domain: Effective Citizenship)
4. Week/March	Compassion Comes to the Light (Learning Domain: Effective Citizenship)
5. Week/March	From Museum to Electronic Mail (Learning Domain: Culture and Heritage)
6. Week/April	Baby Bat (Learning Domain: Production, Distribution, and Consumption)
7. Week/April	Message from a Factory in Space to Humans (Learning Domain: People, Places, and Environments)
8. Week/April	Şehat (Learning Domain: Global Connections)
9. Week/April	Free Robot (Learning Domain: Science, Technology and Society)
10. Week/May	Post-test application of Empathy Scale for Children and Critical Thinking Achievement Test and post-interview

The experimental process was carried out in 10 weeks with the pre-tests and post-tests. The data collection tools were applied in the first and last week and the experimental study was performed in the remaining 8 weeks. The measurement applications were simultaneously applied to the experimental and control groups.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data was analyzed by content analysis and descriptive analysis. The researchers determined the codes for content analysis through selective coding and themes were created. The data were transferred to the computer environment and a 12-page data set was obtained. While presenting the findings, direct quotations were made and students were represented as (P1), (P2)... (P19).

The quantitative data was analyzed using the IBM SPSS 23 package program. Descriptive statistics related to the students' total scores from the CTAT and ESC tools were interpreted on the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, standard error, kurtosis, and skewness values. An appropriate statistical technique was determined to calculate the significance between the difference scores obtained from the measurement tools before and after the application. No missing values were found in the data sets, and Z standard values were found in the range of [-3, +3].

Since the sample sizes were less than 30, *Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test* for related samples and *Mann-Whitney U Test* for unrelated samples were performed to measure the significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. For non-parametric tests, the effect size was calculated through the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ), and  $r$  values were interpreted as small for .10, medium for .30, and large for .50 as the effect size (Field, 2009, p. 570). A significance level of 0.05 was used for statistical analysis.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2015, p. 246) state that mixed-method research is used in many studies because it allows multiple data collection techniques and thus removes the blur between qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies of the data triangulation. Data triangulation is accepted as a validation procedure, as Creswell and Miller (2000) state. In this study, validity was strengthened by using quantitative and qualitative data collection tools such as achievement tests, scale, interview forms, observation forms, research diaries, and the subject of the study was investigated thoroughly. It is suggested to support the quantitative data with qualitative findings, which would increase the validity of the research. The consistency of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews with the students and the researcher's diaries reinforces the qualitative findings and predicts the quantitative findings.

Expert opinions were obtained regarding the validity, comprehensibility, and applicability of the activities and interview questions used in the study. A minimum significance rate of .75 can be sought for content validity when the opinions of 9 domain experts are taken (McKenzie, Wood, Kotecki, Clark, & Brey, 1999). In this study, it was determined that the opinions of the domain experts had high validity values of between .80 and .90.

The data obtained from the interview was examined through content analysis. The coder reliability among the researchers was controlled by the formula of "P (Reconciliation Percentage%) = [Na (Consensus) / Na (Consensus) + Nd (Dissensus)] X 100" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64). The fit was found to be .90. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), at least 80% fit should be sought for coder reliability. The results of the study regarding coder reliability have indicated that a good fit was achieved. The views obtained from the interview and research diaries of the prospective teachers were used as direct quotations and the students were given symbols such as P1, P2... P6.

### **Ethics in the Study**

Before starting the study, researchers obtained permission from the relevant institutions; teachers and students were informed and their consent was taken. Since most schools in the province and district where the application was carried out provide full-time schooling, experimental and control groups were selected from different schools to prevent the groups from being influenced by each other. Social studies activities supported by the stories were developed by the researchers, shared with the classroom teacher every week before the application, and discussed the activities. The researchers were the non-participant observers and regularly visited the classroom for two weeks until students got used to the activities. Classroom teachers conducted activities in the study in the experimental and control groups, and the researchers did not interfere with the applications. The researchers provided the worksheets of the activities used in the study and no financial support was requested from the students and teachers.



**Results**

**Results of the Quantitative Data**

The analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the CTAT and ESC are presented respectively.

*Critical Thinking Achievement Test Pre-test Post-test Findings*

Descriptive statistical values of the total scores of the applied CTAT to the students before and after the experimental procedure are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics results of CTAT

G	Measures	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min.	Max.	SE <sub>Skewness</sub>	SE <sub>Kurtosis</sub>
E	Pre-test	19	6.10	2.66	2	11	.406 (.524)	-.864(1.014)
	Post-test	19	9.36	2.94	6	15	.337 (.524)	-1.076(1.014)
C	Pre-test	19	6.73	3.17	2	16	1.140 (.524)	3.005 (1.014)
	Post-test	19	6.89	3.03	3	16	1.298 (.524)	3.501 (1.014)

(G: Groups; E: Experimental Group; C: Control Group; Min.: Minimum; Max.: Maximum; SE:Standart Error)

As shown in Table 5, the critical thinking achievement scores increased in the social studies course post-test results supported by stories applied to the experimental group. In the control group where the current social studies curriculum was applied, the critical thinking achievement scores were in favor of the post-test. *The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test* was used to check whether the differences between both groups' pre-test and post-test scores were significant. The analysis results are presented in Table 6 and Table 7, respectively.

Table 6. The Wilcoxon signed rank test results of the experimental group CTAT pre-test and post-test average scores

Post-test/Pre-test	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	z	p
Negative Rank	0	.00	.00	-3.734*	.000**
Positive Rank	18	9.50	171.00		
Equal	1				

\*Based on negative ranks \*\*p<.05

Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of students' critical thinking skills achievements [ z = -3. 734, p <.05]. To examine the practical significance of this statistically significant difference, the *Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)* was calculated, and the result of 0.60 was reached. In this context, it can be said that the social studies course supported by stories greatly affects critical thinking skills.

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the average scores of the CTAT pre-test and post-test applied to the control group. These results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results of the control group CTAT pre-test and post-test average scores

Post-test/Pre-test	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	z	p
Negative Rank	3	4.67	14.00	-.586*	.558**
Positive Rank	5	4.40	22.00		
Equal	11				

\*Based on negative ranks \*\*p<.05

According to the findings in Table 7, no significant difference was found between the control group's average scores of critical thinking in the pre-test and post-test [z = -. 586, p> .05]. *The Mann-Whitney U Test* for unrelated samples was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the critical thinking skills post-test scores in the experimental and control groups. The findings are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U Test for Independent Samples' results of the CTAT post-test average scores of the experimental and control groups

Measures	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
CTAT	Experiment	19	23.87	453.50	97.500	.014*
	Control	19	15.13	287.50		

\*  $p < .05$ 

The findings in Table 8 show a significant difference in favor of the experimental group in the post-test scores of critical thinking skills [ $U=156.00, p < .05$ ]. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the social studies course supported by stories improves students' critical thinking skills.

#### *Empathy Scale for Children Pre-test and Post-test Findings*

The descriptive statistical values of the total scores of the ESC applied to the students before and after the experimental procedure are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics results of ESC

G	Measures	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min.	Max.	SE <sub>skewness</sub>	SE <sub>kurtosis</sub>
E	Pre-test	19	12.15	3.33	5	18	-.374 (524)	-.376 (1.014)
	Post-test	19	14.15	3.04	8	18	-.724 (524)	-.079 (1.014)
C	Pre-test	19	11.94	3.35	6	18	-.146 (524)	-.796 (1.014)
	Post-test	19	11.78	3.40	6	18	.013 (524)	-.791 (1.014)

(G: Groups; E: Experimental Group; C: Control Group; Min.: Minimum; Max.: Maximum; SE: Standart Error)

Table 9 shows that the empathetic thinking skills scores of the students in the experimental group before and after the experimental procedure are in favor of the post-test in the social studies course supported by stories. In the control group where the current social studies curriculum was applied, the empathetic thinking skill post-test scores were lower than the pre-test scores. The differences between the pre-test and post-test scores of both groups were statistically analyzed to determine whether these differences were significant or not. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the average scores of the ESC pre-test and post-test applied to the experimental and control group, and the results are given in Table 10.

Table 10. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results of the experimental group ESC pre-test and post-test average scores

Post-test/Pre-test	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Z	p
Negative Rank	1	7.50	7.50	-3.154*	.002**
Positive Rank	15	8.57	128.50		
Equal	3				

The findings in Table 10 show a significant difference between the average scores of the students in the experimental group's critical thinking pre-test and post-test achievements [ $z = -3.154, p > .05$ ]. Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) statistic (effect size) was calculated in order to examine the significance of this statistically significant difference in practice, and it was found to be .57. In this context, it is possible to say that the social studies course supported by stories has a significant effect size on empathetic thinking skills. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the ESC pre-test and post-test average scores applied to the control group. The results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results of the control group ESC pre-test and post-test average scores

Post-test/Pre-test	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Z	p
Negative Rank	5	4.60	23.00	-.061*	.951**
Positive Rank	4	5.50	22.00		
Equal	10				

There was no significant difference between the empathetic thinking pre-test and post-test average scores of the students in the control group [ $z = -.061, p > .05$ ]. *The Mann-Whitney U Test* for unrelated samples was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between the empathetic thinking skills post-test scores of the students in the experimental and control groups, and the findings are given in Table 12:

Table 12. Mann-Whitney U Test for Independent Samples' results of the ESC post-test average scores of the experimental and control groups

Measures	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
ESC	Experiment	19	23.47	446.00	105.00	.027*
	Control	19	15.53	295.00		

\*  $p < .05$

The findings in Table 12 suggest a significant difference in favor of the experimental group in the empathic thinking skills post-test scores [ $U=105.00, p<.05$ ]. Thus, it can be said that the empathic thinking skills of students improved after the social studies courses supported by stories.

*Results of The Quantitative Data*

Interviews were carried out with the students before and after the experimental procedure, and a researcher's diary was kept during the procedure. The related findings are as follows.

*Perceptions About Social Studies Course*



Figure 2. Social studies perception before the application

Before the application, the students' opinions of their social studies courses were collected. After the analysis, the students' opinions were classified into two themes, affective and cognitive features. In terms of affective features, students' opinions indicate that the social studies course is fun (P1), makes them feel happy and positive (P1, P2, P3, and P6), makes them feel strong and prevents stress (P4). In addition, in terms of cognitive features, the social studies course is related to life (P5). The following are example quotes related to these findings:

*"When I choose to study in this course, I am happier. I think it is because this lesson is more fun than the others." (P4)*

*"When I take this course, I feel stronger and less stressed." (P4)*

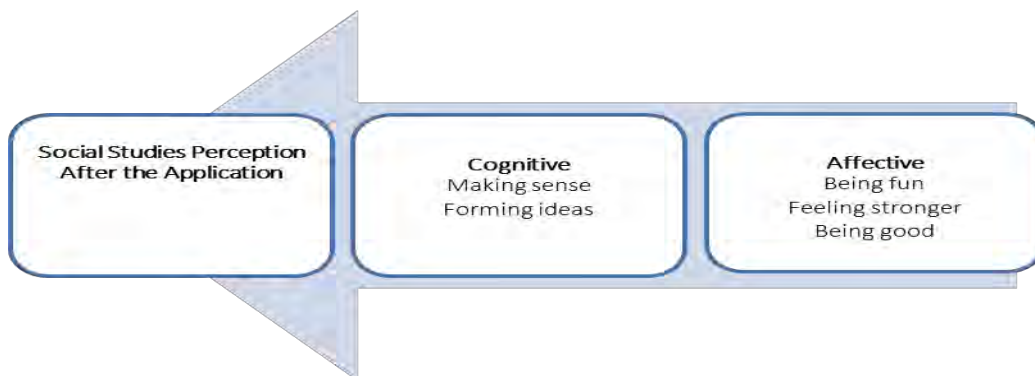


Figure 3. Social studies perception after the application

After the experimental procedure, the students were again asked their opinions about their social studies course. The findings obtained were classified as affective and cognitive features. The analysis found that the story-based social studies course is more fun (P1, P2, P6), making students feel happy and positive (P2, P3, P4), good (P5), making sense and forming ideas (P4, P5). The quotations from students regarding the findings are as follows:

*"The activities were good. They gave me ideas. They brought new things to our minds." (P5)*

*"I think the social studies course is very good and fun. The activities were very nice, thank you. There were pleasant texts." (P6)*

*Social Studies Teaching Process Taught Through Stories*

The students were asked their opinions about the contributions of the social studies course teaching process supported by stories after the experimental procedure. All of the participant students stated that they liked the use of stories in their social studies course. According to the views of the students, the contributions of this teaching process were gathered in the categories of critical thinking, empathetic thinking, language skills, and content.

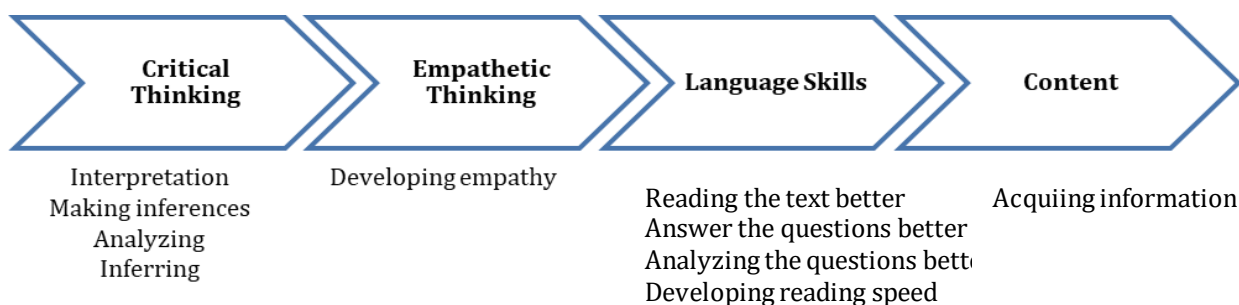


Figure 4. The effect of the stories on student development

Analysis shows that the stories *increased the empathetic thinking skills* (P4); *enabled making interpretations of the events* (P5) and *making inferences* (P6) *made the texts more readable* (P1, P4, P6); *enabled carrying out analysis* (P1); *enabled answering the questions better* (P1); *enabled giving better answers to questions* (P1); *provided information* (P4, P5); *allowed students to take a lesson from the result* (P3); *improved the speed reading* (P4, P5); *allowed students to become effective listeners* (P1). The following are quotations of the students and the research diary regarding the findings:

*"It improved our reading skills. We began to understand better what we read. For example, it developed someone who reads slowly and made him/her read faster. It helped us read the questions in the exams faster and give more accurate answers."* (P3)

*"As a researcher, I was glad to see that the students were positive about the applications and attended the course in the following weeks. It also strengthened my faith in our work. After reading the story Story, I saw that immigration often led students to empathize. I realized that the students were trying to understand the thoughts and feelings of the person in the Story, thinking that these situations could have happened to me. I must say that the students are affected by these activities, and social sensitivity about migration was apparent in the classroom. After the application, I wanted to get the students' ideas about the study and ask what they thought about it. The students expressed their ideas comfortably."* (Research Diary, Week 8)

## Discussion

People, places, social events, and cultural elements created by people form the real-world context and authentic experiences of social studies courses. Social studies are not culturally agnostic; they are influenced by cultural contexts (Jones, Pang, & Rodriguez, 2001). Literature is a valuable resource to convey cultural elements, and using literary products in the social studies course brings the curriculum to life. Such literary products include folk songs, lullabies, poems, legends, and tales. Literary products such as novels, mythology, biography, and drama can also enrich citizenship education in the social studies courses (McGowan & Guzetti, 1991). One of the literary products used in social studies courses is stories (Öztürk & Otluoğlu, 2003). Literature is a valuable resource for carrying cultural elements, and the use of literature in a social studies course puts the curriculum into practice. The use of stories, which is a literary genre, brings joy to learning social information (Tindall, 1996). Stories support students in seeing and interpreting the learning process (Picken, 2012); it also allows students to relate the values that make up the character of an effective citizen (Sanchez, 2005). An effective citizen is expected to gain the skills of questioning, critical thinking, understanding others, etc. This study aims to examine the effect of a social studies course supported by stories on critical and empathetic thinking skills.

Shuyi (2017) states that stories improve citizenship qualities and skills, provide value and empathy, support cultural understanding and help to acquire thinking skills such as assessing the reliability of sources. Demircioğlu (2008) states that children can gain important skills such as historical imagination, using evidence, establishing cause-effect relationships, and understanding different perspectives thanks to stories. He also states that students learn to be tolerant of others, communicate more easily, and understand other people's feelings by analyzing stories emotionally. The quantitative data from this study show that there is a significant difference in critical thinking

and empathetic thinking skills in the experimental group that attended social studies classes supported by stories, and that the effect size is high. In this context, it is possible to say that stories in social studies courses are a powerful resource for developing critical and empathy skills.

The use of stories for educational purposes is very critical for offering both Education and entertainment. They also facilitate students' learning in-depth and critical thinking. Children who develop the habit of reading and reading well-written stories at a young age develop high-level thinking skills and become more aware of themselves and their surroundings (Calp & Calp, 2019). According to Sever (2008), the story characters' emotions, thoughts, and actions and their solutions to the problems help readers create role models for them. Thanks to stories, the readers meet characters with different personalities and worlds and strive to recognize and understand these characters. Thus, they empathize with the characters by putting themselves in the character's shoes and predicting their acts. The child recognizes different human characteristics and perspectives through the story heroes and respects differences. The use of stories in social studies Education helps children grasp the multicultural structure of the world and realize the fact that all people have various needs and wishes, and, unfortunately experience famine, flood, or earthquake, which makes them realize that they may also confront such problems (Savage & Savage, 1993).

Social studies courses are intertwined with life, enabling students to understand what has happened or what happened in real life. Students gain various attitudes toward social studies courses due to their personal characteristics and environmental factors. According to Akengin and Demirsoy's (2011) research on the perceptions of 4th-grades in a Turkish primary school, students found the social studies curriculum engaging, the course's learning processes enjoyable, and the curriculum's connections to daily life meaningful. Students in this study reported that they enjoyed their social studies class, that it made them feel good emotionally, that it had real-world applications, and that it helped them relax before the experiment. During the study's experimental process, the social studies course was supplemented with stories from various literary genres. Examining the relevant literature suggests that the use of literary genres in social studies courses is beneficial in terms of critical thinking, developing empathy, encouraging effective use of language, gaining multiple perspectives, developing positive attitudes, etc (Edgington, 1998; Gilding, 1997; Kaymakçı, 2013; Tindall, 1996). As Karagözoğlu (2018) states, using literary texts in learning environments improves students' understanding, interpretation, different perspectives, and empathy skills. Also, Ersoy and Papatğa (2015) say that stories' literary genre support children's language development, contributes to their socialization, and makes the subject enjoyable and attractive. Alkaaf (2017) states that students develop confidence in learning through stories, and it helps students develop positive attitudes to expressing, writing, listening, and action skills. Based on what the students in the experimental group thought, this study also found that adding stories to social studies lessons helped students develop cognitive and emotional skills, language skills, and content like empathy, interpretation, deduction, rapid and meaningful reading, analysis, knowledge acquisition, reasoning, effective responding, and listening. Similarly, Güney's (2003) case study on story-based learning in social studies courses showed that stories contribute to attitude development and knowledge acquisition and the perception of the learning environment as fun and relaxing. Sanchez (2005) states that stories encourage students to analyze problems and choices and to realize how other people make the right choices in the face of dilemmas. In this context, it can be said that the students can draw conclusions about the causes and results of the events mentioned in the stories and recognize different perspectives. It also shows that they are able to put themselves in the person of the event and interpret their feelings.

## Conclusion

This study shows that the use of stories in a social studies course promotes the development of critical and empathetic thinking skills, and that the effect size is substantial. According to the students, it is possible to develop cognitive and affective characteristics, language skills, and content by incorporating stories into social studies courses. These characteristics include empathy, interpretation, deduction, fast and meaningful reading, analyzing, knowledge acquisition, inference, effective responding, and listening.

This study contains various shortcomings that are inherent to it. The only measurement methods that were used for the research were the interviews with the students who were a part of the experimental group, and the data that was acquired from those interviews. In this regard, further research will produce more robust findings by taking these constraints into consideration.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions have been developed:

- Workshops or in-service training can be organized for teachers and teacher candidates to help them prepare stories for educational purposes.
- Therefore, the short-term and long-term effects of the courses supported with stories and similar materials can be investigated.
- Only stories were used in this study. Other literary genres, such as poetry, fairy tales, and legends, can also be used in future studies.
- The use of stories in social studies courses to improve students' critical and empathic thinking skills was investigated in this study. Future studies can address the effect of stories on students' other high-level thinking skills.
- The examinations concerning the sub-skills of critical thinking, such as "understanding the problem, distinguishing subjective and objective judgments, analyzing inferences, asking questions appropriate for the purpose, evaluating inferences, determining the reliability of a source" are done in this study. Different studies may focus on the development of other sub-skills of critical thinking.
- The study was carried out in a public school with students from a low socio-economic background. Similar or comparison studies can be conducted at schools with different socio-economic levels.

### Author (s) Contribution Rate

The authors equally contributed for the article.

### Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between researchers.

### Ethical Approval

Ethical permission (31.12.2020, numbered E - 804.01-2012310005) was obtained from Hasan Kalyoncu University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee for this research.

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