

The evaluation of the Applicability of the 2005 Social Studies Curriculum in Multigrade Teaching in terms of Teacher Views (A Qualitative Research)

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Abstract

As a qualitative study, the aim of this study was to evaluate the applicability of the 2005 Social Studies Course Curriculum in multigrade teaching according to teacher opinions. The data of the research were obtained by interview method applied to 58 teachers teaching in multigrade classes in 2008-2009 academic year. The data obtained in the research were analyzed and evaluated in accordance with qualitative research methods. In the analysis of the data, Nvivo 7 software has been used. As a result of the research, it has been seen that the teachers of multigrade classes found Social Studies curriculum qualitatively positive. However, it was found out that some kind of defects and difficulties have been encountered concerning skill/acquisitions, content, teaching-learning process, measurement and evaluation aspects, in terms of the implementation of the Social Studies curriculum in multigrade teaching having more different conditions, which was indeed prepared to be used in independent classrooms. In addition, taking into account the views of multigrade classroom teachers, practical suggestions have been made about the changes that can be made in the curriculum.

Key Words

Social Studies, Multigrade Teaching, 2005 Social Studies Syllabus.

Before coming into the primary education, the world of children is limited to the opportunities that their families and immediate surroundings offer. The school offering new experiences to students, enables them to have a broader world. The first and the most important lesson to undertake this duty is Social Studies (Hereafter SSC). According to Özdemir (1998), the child entering through the school gate, who promoted from infancy to childhood, meets with a new society, new authorities, new rules, and new roles. The child starts to share the life, which she/he begins to learn along with his/her family, with teachers. A planned, scheduled, and organized education takes place of the unplanned and unscheduled family education. The most important goal of this education is to enable children to adapt the natural and social environment in which they live.

This education that Özdemir has explained can be firstly given by SSC in primary schools. In addition with SSC a systematical adaptation service is given to the child, against life. Another function of SSC is to form the basis of Social Sciences, and Science and Technology courses which will be taught in the years ahead. From this point of view, SSC has a prior and different place from other courses.

In recent years, the educational understandings in many countries have shown a change from traditional approaches to modern approaches. These changes have also affected the education system in our country and have brought along innovations. A change compatible with the age has begun in the learning environments in schools, teachers, students and learning materials (Küçüközer, Bostan, Kenar, Seçer, & Yavuz, 2008). The SSC curriculum put into practice in 2005 was prepared considering the principles that give importance not to teaching, but to learning. It considered learning as a process, supported the curiosity and research of the learner, took the intelligence differences according to multiple intelligences theory into account, sup-

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ported co-operative learning, enable the learner to form new knowledge, and provided the opportunity to derive meaning from real experiences. The principles mentioned correspond to the principles of constructivist education approach (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2005).

Whereas this course has been taught with the name SSC since the Unification of Education Law (Kafadar, 1997), it is separated into two as village and city applications in some primary education curricula (1939, 1997), it has been taught with the application of the same program all across the country in some others (1948, 1968, 2005) (Arslan, 1997). The conflict created by the opinion that the same curriculum should be taught all across the country in terms of the unification of the National education and the difficulties that can be created by the implementation of the curricula, which are suitable to be taught in cities, in villages, can be seen as the reason for these differences in the curricula. In Turkey, in 2000-2001 education year, the same curriculum was used in both independent classes and multigrade classes. If Multigrade schools are equally treated with other schools, they cannot be expected to achieve their educational goals (Birc & Lally, 1995). Mason and Burns(1996) report that their research and review of the literature have led them to conclude that multigrade classes have a slightly negative effect on student achievement. High-achieving students in monograde schools are significantly more successful than high achieving students in multigrade schools. In the study which aimed to specify the problems encountered in multigrade classes which was done by Kılıç and Abay (2009), the teachers who have experiences between 1-5 years perceive the problems of “the opportunities of the school” and “the structure of the schedule” more negative than the teachers who have 6-10 years and 11-15 years experience. As it is understood from the studies, multigrade classes applications, which are applied to solve problems, in fact have adversity application process in the world and in our country.

The Multigrade schools, as a reality of our country, constitute nearly one-third of all the schools. According to Köklü (2000), education in multigrade schools is going to continue as long as the village exists as a settlement. Multigrade classroom application is not unique to our country. This is an education practice applied in many countries on earth. Multigrade school organization is as likely to occur in remote areas of Canada or Australia (Veenman, 1995). Among the reasons why multigrade classes

occurred in our country; the student, the teacher, and the insufficient number of the classrooms in schools can be put forward (Berry, 2001; Çınar, 2004; Erdem, Kamaçı ve Aydemir, 2005; Köksal, 2005; Şahin, 2003)

In 2005 curriculum, there is not detailed information about the course procedures in multigrade classes. The tactics and methods that teachers can use in lessons have not been specified, but only the sharing of classes and lessons has been indicated.

Education in multigrade classes is one of the realities of our country. It seems impossible for our country to give up this application because of many reasons such as student scarcity and transportation problem.

The Aim of the Research

The main aim of this study is to evaluate and analyze the applicability of 2005 SSC curriculum in terms of the opinions of teachers teaching in multigrade classes in Afyonkarahisar and to contribute to th

The Model of the Research

This study is a qualitative research intended to analyze the views of the teachers of multigrade classes and to identify the difficulties they face in lessons because of the fact that this study includes deep questioning and definitions about the implementation of the new (2005) curriculum in multigrade classes. The case study method as one of the most commonly used qualitative methods is employed in this research. Yin (1984, p. 23 cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003, p. 290.) defines the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”

Study Group

The basic factor to determine the quality of the data acquired is the quality of the source. As a result, the people to be interviewed are supposed to be the professionals of the topic being studied, or are to be in decision-making positions (Baş & Akturan, 2008, p. 111). Thus, the research was carried out with 58 multigrade classroom teachers teaching 1st . 2nd . and 3rd . or 2nd . and 3rd grades together in central Afyonkarahisar and in its districts, in 2008-2009 academic year.

These people were selected using the maximum diversity sampling, one of the methods of purposeful sampling methods. The purpose in the selection of maximum diversity sampling, according to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2003), is to create a relatively small sample, and to reflect the diversity of the individuals who can be a part of the problem studied to the utmost. In this study by choosing maximum diversity sampling, it was aimed to get richer data about the handling of SSC in multigrade which schools have different facilities (transportation, social environment, school facilities etc.).

Data Collection Tool

In the study, interviews were carried out using Teacher Interview Form, developed as semi-structured by the researcher in order to receive the views of multigrade classroom teachers and Personal Information Form to get information about the teachers.

It is aimed that participants remain within the subject matter by means of semi-structured questions. However, these questions shouldn't be in a restrictive manner for the participants' ideas about the topic. Furthermore, the purpose of the use of these kinds of forms is to secure the coverage of all the aspects and questions about the research problem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003; Kuş, 2003). The interview form consists of 7 main questions and their sub-articles. The Teacher Interview Form was presented to the lecturers of Afyon Kocatepe University, Faculty of Education Primary Education Department and experts opinions regarding the form were taken into consideration and necessary corrections/additions were accordingly made. In order to explore and identify the problems that can be confronted during the application of the form in advance, 9 teachers randomly selected among multigrade classes in Afyonkarahisar to carry out a pilot study. After this pilot study, a few errors concerning the validity of the form language were identified and corrected. As a result of all these stages, Teacher Interview was redesigned as a final form.

Analysis of the Data

In the research, descriptive analysis and content analysis on the qualitative data gained from the interviews with teachers teaching in multigrade classes were carried out. In order to explain the existing case by reflecting the views of the teachers

about SSC curriculum, descriptive, the analysis of the data was done and to interpret more detailed findings, content analyses were performed. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2003), descriptive analysis is done in order to present the acquired data to the reader in an edited and interpreted way. In this study also, descriptive analysis was preferred due to the fact that it was tried to reflect the problems faced in multigrade classes more effectively by means of direct quotes from participants' opinions.

The data summarized and interpreted in descriptive analysis, are subjected to a deeper procedure and the concepts and themes that might have not been realized, can be explored as a result of content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003, p. 162). In this study, in the process of content analysis, words and sentences were organized and interpreted, thus, codes were reached, and themes were created by interpreting and constructing the relations between these, as well. Teacher views have been tried to be organized, the practical problems and the expectations have been tried to be made more understandable with this macro configuration process. In performing the mentioned processes, one of the computer programmes used in qualitative data analysis (QSR Nvivo 7) was used. After the organization of the codes and themes, the analysis of the data, acquired by means of definition and interpretation of the findings, was completed. In addition, personal information obtained from the teachers was quantitatively analyzed by number and percentage calculations.

Validity and Reliability

One of the most important criticisms directed to qualitative research is the absence of definitions, methods and tests as widely used in quantitative researches, especially on the issue of reliability. There are some precautions taken about either reliability or validity in qualitative researches, though (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003, p. 76).

Validity, briefly, takes the accuracy of the research results as its subject. *The external validity* is about if the used data collection tool causes similar results with similar groups, *internal validity* is about if the researcher can actually measure the data that s/he wants to measure with the tool or the method used (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003, p. 76). Kuş (2003) also explains external validity as the degree of generalization of the data to the except the study field. In this study related to the provision of external validity, the

views taken from the study group and the views of the teachers out of the study group were compared.

In order to provide internal validity of the research, the data collection tool was ensured to cover the subject with its general aspects. The curriculum of SSC consists of four structural dimensions. 1) Objective (Target), 2) Content, 3) Teaching Learning Process, 4) Measurement-Evaluation. In the Teacher Interview Form, the current questions were ensured to inquire these dimensions and give ideas about each one.

One of the ways to provide the reliability of the qualitative research is more than one researcher to join the research as well (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003). This study also has been carried out with a co-observer.

In order to determine the consensus between the researchers, the reliability formula determined by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used.

$$\text{Reliability} = \left[\frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{Consensus} + \text{Dissidence}} \right] \times 100$$

In this study, in order to determine the coherence values between the observers, the percentage values of the codings on themes were compared. Because, these codings are the basic factors providing the explanation of the research findings. From this point of view, it is thought that they will reflect the coherence between the observers best.

Results

In this part of the study, the findings were handled comparing with the negative and positive views under the themes of "Skills and Outcomes", "Content and Activities", "Measurement and Evaluation", "Constructivism", "New Ideas and Recommendations", which were created by coding.

Teachers perceive the compliance of the skills and achievements in multigrade classes more negative at a rate of 58%. When the negative views about skills and achievements have been examined, it is found out that it stems from multigrade classes to be in villages in general, and limited opportunities as a result of this fact. In another research which was made by Kılıç (2009) it is stated that in the "method-technique, activities, warnings and suggestions, materials and equipments" main categories, they are the items that are needed to take place in SSC teachers' guidebooks. A lack of diversity of life in the village poses problems for achieving acquisitions by teachers. Most of the teachers (59%) who joined the research think that the acquisitions

of SSC corresponds to the content. It was emphasized by most of the teachers (59%) that the acquisitions consisting of environmental, social and family conditions aren't likely to be encountered in real life for multigrade class students. The level diversities in multigrade classes are seen as a big problem from the point of reaching acquisitions (88%).

Teachers see the compliance of the content and activities in multigrade classes more negative at the rate of 69%. The most repeated view about the topic is, 2nd and 3rd grade students to get bored with 1st grade subjects and get distracted, and the courses of upper classes to be hard for 1st grade students who are illiterate. Most of the teachers joined in the research (84%) think that activities are insufficient. As a result of this it is seen as a need to add extra activities. Another topic seen more negatively by teachers (73%) is the difficulty in the application of the activities.

The compliance of measurement and evaluation studies in multigrade classes are seen negative by the most of the teachers (70%). The main reason behind the teachers to give negative views is the assessment to be meaningless because of the level diversities. In addition to student levels, the views of teachers finding the forms too many in terms of numbers and invalid in terms of quality: "I cannot implement all of them. Because of the facilities, (the lack of photocopy at school and the lack of stationery in the village)I sometimes cannot reproduce these." (HCA). In the research which Uğur (2006) made, the similar results were found; the students don't evaluate themselves with assessment and evaluation means and techniques, the assessment and evaluation activities don't meet the dimension of the evaluation of the programmes completely. Also in the study which was made by Küçükahmet (2005), it was suggested that assessment and evaluation was the weakest link of the new programme (2005). In the research which was made by Gündoğar (2006) it is stated that the assessment and evaluation forms that the teachers are asked to apply in the new programme are too many for the multigrade classes and there are difficulties during the application.

The applicability of constructivist approach in multigrade classroom is seen negative by most of the teachers (57%). The teachers link the fact that SSC cannot be taught properly in accordance with the constructivist approach in multigrade classes to the facts of students' being under the needed cognitive level and level diversities in multigrade classes.

Yıldırım (2006) found the similar results; and concluded that the subjects in SSC books don't guide the students to discover and the methods and strategies which are used partially make the students ready to learn.

The themes desired to be changed/corrected in SSC curriculum, are coded as; 14 for Skills and Acquisitions theme, 37 for Activities theme, 13 for Measurement and Evaluation theme, 2 for Constructivism theme.

Discussion

In multigrade classes; problems such as the lack of tools and physical conditions, the students with different developmental characteristics being together, health, transportation and communication problems in the villages, make it difficult for primary education to achieve its goals. Furthermore, it has been stated that because of the fact that students are taught the SSC above their grade levels, it is not possible to reach the acquisitions specified for the course.

In the application of the content and the activities of 2005 SSC, it is seen that environmental factors and the diversity in multigrade classes constitute problems. It was found out that the students have difficulties in doing activities which are not appropriate for their levels and they have difficulties in understanding the content. Moreover, it is seen that the teachers have to do extra activities appropriate for the level of the multigrade class students. Because the students have to do the activities of the next level before they have the SSC acquisitions belonging to the previous class. By its nature, multi-grade teaching encompasses teacher development, curriculum reform, language issues, learning, support materials and tutor pedagogic awareness. It is clear that there is a strong need for training how to work effectively in multigrade schools to improve learning (Thomas & Shaw, 1992). Another problem in the application of the content and activities is the fact that students cannot obtain the equipment for the activities due to the lack of places from where the stationary materials can be obtained. In addition to these, it is seen that there is not sufficient time for the activities which are used in order to understand the content and reach the acquisitions in multigrade.

Due to the fact that the students are evaluated with measurement and evaluation studies which are not appropriate for their level in multigrade, it is seen that measurement and evaluation studies do not reach their goals. In addition, it is observed that,

the measurement and evaluation studies in the multigrade classes are hard for the levels of the students, measurement and evaluation studies to be too much, the measurement and evaluation studies are to be too difficult to carry out in time in multigrade classes. In the multigrade classroom, the teacher's shortage of time to devote to any grade within her class is a major difficulty. In the multigrade classroom, therefore, the teacher has a more urgent reason to consider a variety of assessment possibilities, which enhance learning directly. The multigrade teacher may choose to use supplementary methods to the endofgrade examination so that she can keep a constant check on the various achievements of the pupils in each of the grades she teaches (Hargreaves, 2001). The research which was made by Yıldız and Köksal (2009) shows that when the participating multigrade class teachers' arithmetic average of the answers to the expressions about the "the concerning situations of the application of the independent classroom environment programme in multigrade classes" is considered, with 1,68 of the total average. In other words, teachers' views are very close to "I strongly disagree level". The parallelism in the result of the two studies shows that according to the implementers' point of view, there is a problem in the curriculum which is applied in the multigrade classes. The lack of the necessary conditions to apply the constructivist education in multigrade classes has been found out to prevent the implementation of this approach. The results such as, although the SSC curriculum was prepared in accordance with the constructivist education approach, the education according to this approach couldn't be realized in multigrade class; the level diversity of the students in the multigrade classes is not compatible with the constructivist education approach; physical inadequacy of village schools hinders the application of the constructivist education approach were reached. It was seen that the teachers who attend the research couldn't train suitable for constructivist approach because of various reasons. In their research Gömleksiz and Bulut (2007) stated that, in the application of SSC programme the supervisors think that the teachers ignore individual differences, prefer the expression methods, and teaching activities and materials are not adequately taught. In the example of multigrade classes applications in the world, the same problems are seen. Because this kind of programmes are not prepared for the multigrade classes, the work load of the multigrade class teacher is heavier than the teacher who has one class (Joubert, n.d.).

The positive impacts of multigrade teaching include: Expansion of Access, Cognitive achievement effects on learners, Social and personal effects on learners (Little, 2004). Students have a chance to form relationships with a wider variety of children than being possible in the traditional same-age classroom. More secure teacher-student relationships may be established as the student remains with the same teacher for two or more years. (Veenman, 1995). All the countries, from less-developed to developed, have these types of classrooms. According to the study which was made by APEID (Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development) (2003), 40% of the classes of Australian northern borders, 20% of France, 35% of Sweden and 30% of Wales are multigrade classes (Aghazadeh, n.d.).

To use SSC books in the multigrade classes more effective, the activities can be arranged in defiance of the village circumstances and held to the philosophy of the new programme. The activities appropriate for the level of each grade and measurement and evaluation studies can be given place in order to resolve the difficulties in SSC stemming from the level diversity in multigrade classes. Gümüş and Aykaç (2010) who had the similar results about the subject, in their research for the evaluation of SSC curriculum item concluded that most of the teachers find it difficult and complicated to make evaluation with the new assessment instruments and the allocated time for a lesson in schools is not enough to make this evaluation. Özden (2005) in her research for the SSC curriculum, stated that the most difficult part of teachers is measurement and evaluation. For the multigrade class teachers to make the lesson more productive, SSC teacher guide books may be re-arranged for multigrade class teachers and the instructions in the guide-books can provide methods to be followed appropriate for the levels of the students, taking the level diversity into consideration.

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