

Are Seminar Periods Supportive of the Professional Development of Social Studies Teachers?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the efficiency of the seminar periods intended for contributing to the professional development of social studies teachers based on their own perspectives. This study adopts a qualitative approach and is carried out in the form of a case study. Among the purposeful sampling methods, the criteria sample method was used in the study. The sampling consisted of six social studies teachers in Sivas: three males and three females. In the research, semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool. As a result of the analysis conducted in the study, two main themes were identified: 1) findings regarding the seminar period and the activities conducted during that period, and 2) findings regarding the factor of efficiency of the seminar period. Based on the study results, seminar periods are found to be unfruitful for social studies teachers.

Keywords: seminar periods, inservice training, teacher training, social studies, social studies teachers

1. Introduction

Education stands out as a significant concept embracing both the continuous improvement and change. Most of the studies categorizing the successful and unsuccessful strategies regarding the change emphasizes the necessity to perceive the education environments as complex system (Henderson & Finkelstein, 2011). In this respect, Erol (2011) suggests that the need of the changing society for a different kind of education compel the certain functions and structures of education to change. On the other hand, Lamanuskas and Railine (2010) have indicated that, in order to make the right decisions during the dense change process experienced in the education systems, analyses must be carried out by obtaining objective data from different sources.

Education systems are rapidly changing in line with the needs emerging in time (Urooj & Ahmed, 2012). Today, education cannot be defined as an information provision procedure anymore. Its features as developing behavior and socializing individuals are now more important (Yeşil, 2004). The teachers who take charge of transmitting information and changing the behaviors of students in a positive manner, who positively affect the efficiency of the educational process (Şahin & Çokadar, 2006) and who have versatile impacts on the educational activities (Terzi, 2002) must necessarily take their part in this regard. The ability of the teachers to fulfill their responsibilities depends upon their qualification in reponding the rapidly changing needs. Because, as put forward by Yetim and Ceylan (2011), the rapid changes experienced all over the world in recent years compel the organizations and their employees who are the most crucial components of the organizations to change, and this necessity focuses on the development of the human resources, particularly the teachers, in terms of the reform movements in the education system (Çelik, 2001).

The school which is of utmost importance for the development of the human personality in physical, mental, emotional and social terms undoubtedly fulfills its role on the part through the teachers. The success of the educational institutions in attaining the desired targets is directly proportionate the qualifications of the teachers who are the key elements of that institution (Atasoy, 2004). Generally speaking, the teacher is the person who fulfills and then evaluates the educational activities in the educational institutions in an intended, planned and programmed manner (Tanırlı, 2007). In addition to this definition, the teacher is a person who develops different strategies so as to meet different needs of the students and facilitates the compelling educational experiences by regulating the environmental factors for his/her students (Olson, 1999); who is in constant communication not only with the students at the school but also the parents and society outside the school (Çelikten, Şanal, & Yeni,

2005); who shares his/her personal experiences, crucial struggles and achievements (Friel & Brig, 2001); who has an expert in his/her respective fields, cooperates, empowers, acts reflectively, provides flexibility and has leadership qualifications (Swanson, 2000); who has and effectively uses an extensive educational strategies repertoire (Hofstein & Even, 2001) and who puts forward the requirements and processes of the continuous development (Can, 2004). When considered in this context, the schools are in need of effective and leading teachers who have an adequate level of general knowledge, specialized knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, who are talented and love their profession and are aware of the expectations of the people and trying to fulfill them (Bursalıoğlu, 1994).

The teaching profession continues to be a profession whose popularity and strategic importance is ever-increasing. However today, it has turned into a profession which is constantly evaluated, questioned and criticized by the public (Yapıcı, 2007). Such questioning of the teaching profession can be attributed to such reasons as the deficiencies in training the teachers, the failure of the teachers to closely follow the developments in their respective fields, the failure of the national education legislation in enabling the school administrators and teachers to develop themselves and the deficiencies of the in-service training courses in enabling the school administrators and teachers to improve themselves (Aydoğan, 2002). In addition to those put forward by Aydoğan (2002), another issue discussed by the general public and all educational shareholders in terms of its benefits and functionality is the professional works carried out by the teachers at the beginning and end of the school years, also commonly known as the seminar periods.

With regards to these professional works, the Article 98 of the Regulation on Primary Education Institutions stipulates that “*professional works are carried out within the periods starting from the end of the school term up to the first business day of July and from the first business day of September up to the beginning of the school term, and within the periods specified in the annual working plan during the year, in order to increase the knowledge and good manners of school administrators and teachers in terms of their general knowledge, specialized education and pedagogical formation, make them acquire new abilities, put forward solutions for the educational problems, prepare and apply programs and plans in accordance with the needs of the students and the environment*” (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2013).

The seminar periods constitute significant opportunities for the development of teachers. For this reason, the time allocated for the seminar periods is required to be well planned and managed. However, there has always been criticism for the efficiency of the seminar period. It is possible to sum up the criticisms with the point made by Aytan (2012) “*seminar time or tea time*”.

When we analyze the literature, we cannot see any studies conducted on the efficiency of the professional works other than the study carried out by Tonbul (2006). In the last two years, the Ministry of National Education reaches the teachers via the distance education to increase the efficiency of the seminar periods. This novelty introduced to the seminar periods by the National Education Ministry must be questioned in terms of its efficiency on the development of teachers and on the effectiveness of the seminar periods, and the seminar period must be re-evaluated as a whole. The seminar period is an in-training educational activity joined by all the branch and class teachers, however, this study focuses on the contribution of the seminar periods to the professional development of the social studies teachers rather than the determination of all teachers’ opinions on the seminar periods.

In this context, the aim of this study is examine the efficiency of the seminar period held at the beginning and end of school year during a two-week duration for each and aiming to contribute to the professional development of teachers according to social studies teachers’ opinions. The study is of importance in terms of questioning whether the seminar periods contribute to the professional development of the social studies teachers and determining the efficiency of these seminar periods.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study was carried out using the case study design which is one of the qualitative study designs. The case study is the in-depth description and analysis of a limited system (Merriam, 2013). Within this framework, the study was carried out in accordance with the case study design in order to put forward in entirety the perspectives and views and assessments of the social studies teachers on the seminar periods.

2.2 Participants

Within the study, interviews were made with 6 social studies teachers working at schools operating under the Ministry of National Education in the province of Sivas. The participants include 3 female and 3 male teachers.

Their service times vary between 1 and 8 years. In the determination of the study population, the criterion sampling method has been used (Patton, 2014, p. 236). Two criteria were selected, namely the seminar period experience and being a social studies teacher, and the teachers bearing these criteria were determined as participants in accordance with the easily accessible sampling principles.

All the primary and secondary school teachers participate in the seminar periods. However, since the study seeks whether the seminar period and the activities carried out during this period make any contribution to the professional development of the social studies teachers and the effectiveness of the activities carried out are examined, only the social studies teachers were included in the sampling. In accordance with study ethics, the teachers are nicknamed as P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6. The detailed information about the participants are provided at Table 1.

Table 1. Detailed information on the participants

Symbol	Gender	Branch	Service Time	Place of Duty
P1	Male	Social studies	8	Provincial Center
P2	Female	Social studies	4	District Center
P3	Male	Social studies	6	District Center
P4	Female	Social studies	2	District Center
P5	Male	Social studies	5	Provincial Center
P6	Female	Social studies	4	Provincial Center

2.3 Data Collection Tools and Process

In the study, semi-structured interview form was used in order to determine the views of the social studies teachers regarding the contributions of the seminar periods and in-service activities to their professional development. The semi-structured form was prepared, using open-ended questions, in a way to thoroughly demonstrate the teachers' views.

During the preparation of the interview form, the researches in the literature, particular those carried out by Aytan (2012) and Aydoğın (2002), were utilized. The draft questions prepared were reviewed by 2 lecturers in terms of the language and expressions, their purposefulness and orienting properties. In this context, the concerned specialists were asked to evaluate the 13 draft questions as "appropriate" "partially appropriate" and "not appropriate". Within this scope, 5 draft questions evaluated as "not appropriate" and "partially appropriate" were excluded from the interview form.

During the preparation of the questions, orienting questions were refrained and a special attention was paid to ensure that the questions are clear and understandable. In the next stage, a pilot application was carried out with 2 social studies teachers who were not included in the study participants in order to have an idea about the quality of the interview form and eliminate probable shortcomings. As a result of this application, the questions in the interview form were re-organized in terms of language and expression, and meaning and fluency. After the completion of the pilot application, the study process was commenced using the resulting interview form.

All questions in the interview form were addressed to the participants. In addition, at the end of the interview, additional questions were asked to the participants in accordance with the nature of the qualitative research and semi-structured interview. Before the interviews, the teachers were informed about the purpose of the study all the interviews carried out with a tape recorder.

2.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data

2.4.1 Interview Transcriptions

All of the interviews were recorded by a high quality voice recorder. All of the transcriptions were checked for full agreement. In addition, text search query feature of NVivo 10 software was used to check the agreement of the transcriptions. After this process, all of the transcriptions were stored to internal feature and recordings were stored to external feature of NVivo 10 software.

2.4.2 Coding the Data

All the transcribed data was read line by line by the researchers. In addition, in this phase significant points according to the purpose of the study was determined. Words and concepts used by the participants were used as codes. If the words or concepts used by the participants are inefficient in the coding phase, other concepts which were state the thought or situation best was used as codes. The coding process was implemented considering the causal relations and reciprocal influences. During the coding of data, words, phrases or sentences were form a unit, and open, axial, and selective coding techniques were used in unison.

All the coding was done through NVivo 10 which is a commonly used software for qualitative data analysis. As there is no free coding and tree coding oriented ready-made coding list of the subject, grounded theory based coding process was implemented.

2.4.3 Interpretation Techniques

During the interpretation process of open-ended questions, the analyses carry out inductive descriptive analysis, content analysis. For descriptive analysis, direct quotes were used to reflect the views of the participants respondents, During content analysis, codes created based on free coding contexts was combined under common headings to create a coding structure. In other words, the coding process was governed by an inductive approach to qualitative analysis.

In the final phase of the coding process, the data was interpreted based on the unified meaning of the themes, which was emerged in the qualitative data. The data was illustrated with the help of patterns and concept maps that visualize the relationships between the themes, so that readers was able to gain an overall sense of the data analysis and interpretation. Throughout the coding process, each transcript of the interviews was coded by coders, and inter-coder reliability was calculated by running coding comparison queries. The coding process was proceeding based on a reflexive approach, and accountability was considered as the basic issue.

Finally, all the qualitative data was quantified and presented in tables. As the final steps of the analysis, various queries were carried out on the data by using NVivo. So that the readers were able to visualize it in their minds. Furthermore, the analysis was also include such data mining tools as text search query, coding comparison query and compound query, and it was present the findings in a coherent way. This study was incorporate four main components of trustworthiness in qualitative research; that is, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability along with all ethical principles and processes.

3. Findings

As a result of the analysis of the interview data, two main themes were attained, including 1) Findings related to the seminar period and the activities carried out during this period, 2) Findings related to the factors affecting the efficiency of the seminar periods. These two themes are directly related to each other. Themes models are presented at Figure 1.

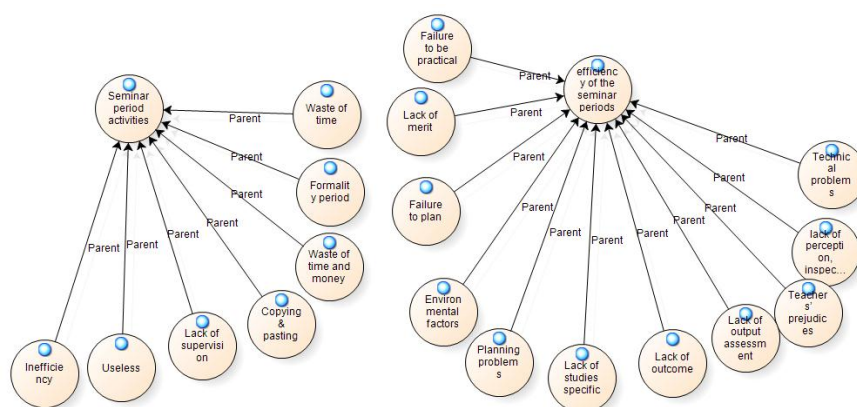


Figure 1. Themes models

3.1 Findings Related to the Seminar Period and the Activities Carried out during This Period

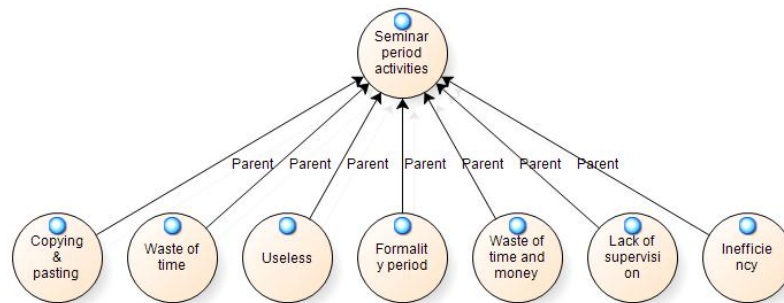


Figure 2. First theme model

The participants were asked what they thought about the period carried out 15 days before the opening of the schools and defined as the seminar period by the teacher themselves. The participants directly expressed their perceptions regarding the seminar periods with such answers as “time loss” by P-1, “tea time” by P-2, “waste of time” by P-3, “unnecessary and waste of time” by P-4, “aimless and chatting” by P-5 and “formality, useless, waste of time and waste of money” by P-6.

Throughout the interviews, while describing the seminar period, all participants used such expressions as useless, aimless, formality, chat time, an aimless period, unnecessary and waste of time, tea time, and day of pastry and waste of money. When the participants were asked why they regarded the seminar periods as a waste of money, they stated that they were paid a daily fee equal to the fee paid for two or three additional courses for the seminar period, they took part during this period only in the distance-learning programs and seminars held throughout the province and they prepared the documents to be completed at the beginning or end of the term. They raised serious concerns about the paper-work and the efficiency of the in-service trainings.

When they were asked what the paper-work they did during the seminar periods was about, they said that they occasionally prepared the minutes of teachers’ committee meetings and they sometimes held the teachers’ committee meetings. In response to the question regarding the efficiency of the teachers’ committee meetings, all participants replied that they downloaded the minutes of teachers’ committee meetings as ready-to-use on the internet and that the teachers of the same branch did not convene to hold the meetings and they completed the procedures by making some small name-related and other amendments on the documents readily downloaded. When they were asked why they prepared these minutes of teachers’ committee meetings which they define as unnecessary, they intimately responded that they prepared these documents in order not to face any difficulties during the inspections and manage the process by complying with the rules set by the school administration. P-1 and P-6 also stated without hesitation that they even did not know how the teachers’ committee meetings were held, they were submitting these documents for years and they always made use of the internet in the preparation of the documents. In response to the question of what other activities were carried out during this time, they stated that there had been some amendments after 2010.

The participants told that, before 2010, a list on “what the seminar periods were” was sent to them by the school administration and the Provincial Directorate of National Education and the list was given to them by the school administration, and that they used to choose an appropriate subject in the list, looked for information on the internet, prepared a document by copy-paste method, printed out the documents and submitted them to the administration, and thus, they completed the formality. During the interview, P-2 and P-5 did not expressed their opinions on downloading from internet and then preparing the seminar topics given by the school administration before 2010; however, this question was asked to them at the end of the interview. Like other participants, the relevant participants stated that they downloaded and printed out the documents from the internet and submitted them to the school administration and hence, they completed the formalities and eliminated the problems that may occur in case of an inspection or supervision.

In response to a question on what has changed after 2010 in terms of the applications during the seminar periods, the participants stated that there was an amendment in relation to the distance in-service educational activities

carried out by the National education Ministry (MEB); they used to spend time only at school and joined, if any, in the seminars held throughout the province for all the teachers in the past but, presently, they participated in the seminars held both through the distance learning and actually throughout the province. In the face of these negative perceptions regarding the seminar periods, when the participants were asked if there were any positive sides of the seminars, they specified in a shy and sometimes carefree manner that they had a lot of free time so they had an opportunity to better know the teachers and administrators at the school thanks to this free time of themselves, they established intimate relations with the other stakeholders at the school through the conversations held while eating pastry or cake, they had the chance to become acquainted with the new teachers, the seminar period enabled the establishment of strong relationships among the teachers at the school, they shared a lot and knew each other better during this time, but they did not have such opportunities during the school year as they did not have any free time. The quantitative scheme of the qualitative data in relation to the first theme is presented at Table 2.

Table 2. The quantitative scheme of the qualitative data

Theme	Category	F	%
Seminar period and the activities carried out during this period	Waste of time and money	6	100
	Waste of time	6	100
	Inefficiency	6	100
	Free time	6	100
	Useless/pointless	6	100
	Downloading the minutes of teachers' committee meeting from the internet	4	66,6
	Lack of supervision during this term	4	66,6
	Copying & pasting the seminar reports	5	83,3
	Formality period	6	100

3.2 Findings Related to the Factors Affecting the Efficiency of the Seminar Periods

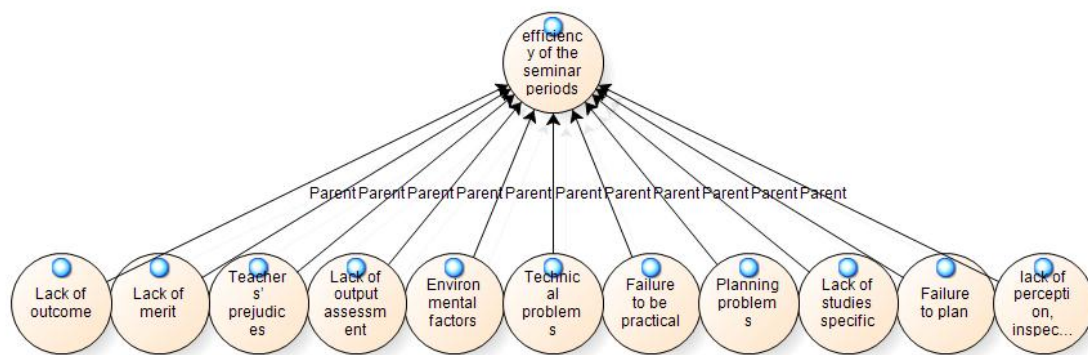


Figure 3. Second theme model

Based on the other questions asked in connection with the first sub-theme of the study, it has been found that there is an overall perception that the distance-learning and face-to-face in-service training during the seminar period are insufficient. When asked why they described the seminar periods as insufficient, they categorized the reasons for the insufficiency of the seminar periods by specifying that the seminars were not for specific branches, there was a shortage of perception, supervision and inspection towards the distance-learning seminars

and face-to-face seminars, there was a shortage of output assessment, the seminars were in theory not in practice and these were all because of the environmental factors, prejudices, scope and nature of the seminars.

The participants stated as the reasons decreasing the efficiency that they worked as social studies teachers, they were in need of seminars held that would enable them to develop their skills related to their respective branch, however, the seminars held were not branch-specific and the fact that the seminars held for all teachers were directly unrelated with their own branches decreased the interest in the seminar periods. P-1 stated that he was a social studies teacher but he was once compelled to take part and thus participated in a math seminar and he did not listen to what was being told at the seminar and he walked out after signing the attendance papers. The most senior social studies teacher among the participants, P-3, however stated that he had not, to date, participated in any seminar regarding the social studies teaching and the lack of seminars for teachers in a specific branch had a direct adverse effect on the efficiency of these seminars.

When asked about the in-service seminars provided by the Ministry of National Education (MEB) and held after 2010, the teachers acknowledged that there were still some problems in relation to the in-service training given via distance-learning method. P-3 put forward his/her opinions that there were some technological infrastructure problems in connection with the distance-learning system, and he could not listen to what was told at a seminar he participated at the beginning of the school term by stating *“The problem is that even a central school could not establish a connection to the EBA system. The connection could not be achieved. The seminar would have started at 9 am but it started at 10 am”*. P-6 said, on the other hand, that the internet connections were often disrupted and they couldn't hold efficient seminars at their school due to the internet problems by stating *“The seminars are carried out in an ostensible manner, the TVs are on but nobody actually listens to what is being told. Most of the time, the internet connection is disrupted. We have been experiencing problems in relation to the internet connections at schools. The screens of the school computers suddenly freeze. And we have to wait for minutes before the reconnection”*.

In response to a question regarding the environmental factors at where the distance training is held and the conditions of the distance training, P-2 stated *“In Ankara, an expert is speaking at a seminar via distance learning and the teachers are pretending to listen to the seminar. However, they were not listening to the expert. The teachers are chatting with each other and even if I want to listen to what is being told there, I cannot do this due to the noise”*. As another problem in relation to the seminars held via distance learning, the participants stated that these programs were not interactive despite being held in a live and synchronized media, there did not have any mutual interaction with the person speaking at the seminar and they could not provide any feedback or they could not ask the questions they wish to ask to the expert speaking at the seminar. In response to a question on whether the teachers were active or passive at the seminars held via distance learning, another participant, P-4, stated that *“Due to the straight narration style used at the seminars, the teachers were not active; to the contrary, they slept during the seminars”*. In addition, it is found that the participants question the eligibility of the experts who speak at the seminars held via distance learning. However, as this perception is similar for the seminars held via both distance learning and face-to-face interaction, it is presented under a sub-category as the problems resulting from the person providing the seminar.

In response to the question on whether the problems faced during the seminars provided via distance-learning were also experienced at the seminars held via face-to-face learning, all participants stated that they participated in the seminars together with at least one hundred people but they could not understand anything due to the noise and the seminars held with a large number of teacher audience were not practical. The participants also specified that they encountered problems resulting from such factors as the voice, lightning, noise etc. and these problems resulted in a decrease in the efficiency of the seminar periods. The most significant problems cited by the teachers in relation to the seminars held via face-to-face learning is the factors resulting from the person speaking at the seminar. Adding that the seminar period causes their efficiency to decrease, the participants expressed that the seminar period might be given importance by the teachers but this might be as well abused by some teachers. However, the participants specified that there were not any organized inspection or supervision mechanisms prepared neither for supervising nor increasing the efficiency. When the participant were asked whether they would show more interest in the seminars or listen to them eagerly if an organized supervision and inspection were carried out, they did not hesitate to say that they would not listen but would actually pretend to listen to the seminars. When asked under which circumstances they would show interest to the seminars, a participant summarized the situation by clearly expressing that he/she would listen to the seminars which he/she thought meaningful for himself/herself and which he/she was sure to benefit from; however, in the face of such a great number of problems, nobody could expect himself/herself to listen to the seminars.

The participants stated that they did not know the output of the in-service activities carried out during the seminars and they did not have any interest in learning them. When asked what she gained as a result of the seminars, P-4 has asked *“as a result of which seminar?”* and this perception was shared by other participants, too. The participants expressed that the seminars held via distance learning or face-to-face interaction were theoretical but not practical and the theoretical seminars were boring, and they exemplified this situation using such clear statements throughout the interview as *“The expert is speaking about the constructivist approach at the seminar but he was presenting the subject in a behavioral approach and was placing utmost attention to the significance of communication while he was dictating it to us. He advised us to use different teaching methods but he himself did not use them. He is giving the seminar using a straight narration. He is talking about the importance of using the technology but he himself cannot not turn on the computer”*. The participants clearly stated that no seminars were held on how to use in the classroom the theoretical knowledge given in the seminars and their relationship with the real life, the practical knowledge were already known by teachers and were not paid much attention by those who did not know, and no seminars were held through learning by practicing on how to use in the classroom the knowledge based on the activities performed by practicing and these had negative effects on the efficiency.

The fact that there had been an agreement that one of the factors that contributed to the decrease in the efficiency of the trainings carried out during the seminar periods was the fact that the environmental conditions were neglected by the Ministry of National Education led us to ask questions to the participants in this regard. The participants particularly expressed that the in-service training carried out during the in-service seminar period was not planned in accordance with the physical, cultural and social conditions of the school and region; in other words, they were not planned in a way that would bring about solutions to the problems faced by the school or the region. P-5 stated *“A planning from local to the center, rather than from center to local is needed; thus, the needs will be analyzed and amendments should be made in accordance with these needs and if the teachers have any ideas in relation to the solutions to the problems, they should be taken into consideration and the required interventions should be made”* and P-2 added that *“During the seminar periods, the environmental, socioeconomic and cultural conditions of each school are different. Different activities can be carried out, taking into consideration the conditions of the school”*. In response to a question on whether they meant that the seminars were not for solving the existing problems, all participants expressed that there had never been any seminars held aiming to detect the problems, carry out an analysis of needs and solving the problems faced by the teachers in respect to the meeting expectations of the institution and the cultural needs of the society and expectations of the students, and they claimed that’s why the efficiency of the seminars were not at the desired level. Especially, the participants were asked whether their opinions were listened to when planning the seminars, P-1 has expressed *“Who listens to us?”* while P-2 stated *“Never have I heard anything like that before!”* and P-4 stated *“This is the Ministry of National Education. The orders come from the top levels and the implementation is left to the lower levels”* and P-5 answered *“I cannot even dream of such a thing happening”*.

During the interviews, in response to the questions posed to the participants based on the observation that they had negative feelings and perceptions in relation to the seminar periods, all participants clearly put forward their dissatisfaction with these periods. They expressed their existing prejudices that the problems could not be solved in this way saying *“I have no expectations”* (P-4), *“I wish the seminars would immediately finish and I can go home”* (P-6), *“I wish I right now sign the attendance papers and go home”* (P-3) and *“The same old, same old”* (P-2). P-1 stated that he used to go to each seminar hoping that, that time, there would be good activities but he was always disappointed. P-3 and P-6 stated, on the other hand, that the teachers who had a feeling of exhaustion in themselves and those who, in their own words, *“hanged up their hats”* showed a serious negative attitude in relation to the seminars.

In response to the questions on how these negative attitudes and behaviors could be avoided or what could be done, the participants stated that the teaching profession was not a career profession, and that since there was nothing such that *“if I attend the seminars and better myself, I get promotion”* or *“self-development will help me to advance in my career”*, this fact contributed to the negative attitudes demonstrated during the seminar periods. P-6 stated that, during the periods when the career promotion was possible, those in-service seminars draw more interest and added that *“These kinds of seminars were once a reference point when the teachers wanted to be promoted in their respective fields and I even remember that those of my friends with the certificate of the seminar attendance were advantageous than those who did not have any certificates. The more seminars he/she participated, the higher grades he/she got. That was a good attempt and the interest in the seminars got stronger then, but now this is not the case anymore and the teachers who showed a higher level of interest in the seminars thought that they would be promoted in their career and their salaries would be higher”*.

It has been found throughout the interview that the most significant factor that affects the efficiency of the seminars is related to the performance of the person who lectures at the seminars. The most important point as a factor resulting from the person who lectures at the seminar is the contradiction between what the lecturer tells the teacher and what he actually does, and this has caused a negative perception in connection with the seminars. In response to a question about what factors result from the lecturer and the examples and experiences in this regard, P-2 stated that once she participated in a seminar and the lecturer was speaking about different ways of teaching but he was using a straight narration while lecturing and P-5 told that he once saw a lecturer who did not make himself listened but he kept talking about the communication and P-3 expressed that, in more than one occasions, he saw a lot of experts and branch managers at the seminars. P-6 smiled and sarcastically said that *"They tell us something but in practice they do not implement them either, I would easily do a better job than them"*. Another factor resulting from the person who lectures at the seminars is the lack of merit. When asked what they meant by merit, they responded that the lecturer himself did not know the subject but he prepared a PowerPoint presentation and presented it at the seminars by stating *"The lecturer brings us together and he talks about the drama via a PowerPoint presentation. He is not well-informed of the subject. I do not remember whether he is a branch manager or inspector or a professor... I do not care about his title. I would like to listen to somebody who makes himself listened to during the seminars"*. Another participant stated that the lecturers were not selected among those who had a good command of the topic and a good usefulness level and the Ministry of National Education itself did not know what those seminars given by the seniors such as branch managers, inspectors and MEB (Ministry of National Education) managers were for.

P-4, P-5 and P-6 stated on the other hand that bearing a title did not come to mean having a good command of the topic or did not mean that the bearer of the title would present the topic effectively or in the form of a meaningful activity even if he/she had a good command of the topic and that, having a title such as professor or assistant professor would make no sense if the bearer of such titles did not know how to teach the topic or how to demonstrate the topic by practicing. The participants complained that the lecturers were not experts in the field and they did not know what the sources of the problems were and that was why they did not make themselves listened to, and they proposed that these kinds of seminars ought to be given by lecturers who had an experience of teaching at schools and who had a good command of the subject and their titles ought not to be a reference point in the selection of the lecturers. While P-1 and P-4 said that even the lecturer did not believe the usefulness of the seminars, P-6 told that she had seen many lecturers who were not planned and eager and who only lectured at the seminars to get an extra fee and he expressed the following statement to describe the situation: *"One of the lecturers was 60 years old and he shared details of what the questions were like 25 years ago when he took the exams. However, he does not even know how to turn on the computer. And he preferred a straight narration during the lecture"*. Based on the belief that the seminar periods are not efficient enough and in response to a question on what should be done to increase the efficiency of the seminar periods, all participants said that, the first and the foremost, the needs ought to be determined and the problems faced by the teachers ought to be eliminated. The needs ought to be analyzed and the seminars ought to be held in order to address these issues. All participants also said that they would prefer the branch-specific seminars.

The participant added that the supervisions and the evaluation and assessment processes for the seminars to be held in line with the analysis of the needs ought to be carefully planned and organized, and the implementation ought to be practical and demonstrations ought to be used during the seminars. They recommended that the seminar subjects ought to be chosen in such a way that the subject would be interesting, useful in real life situations, easy to reflect at the class and they also expressed their belief that when these conditions were ensured, the efficiency of the seminars would undoubtedly increase.

The participants told that teachers' opinions ought to be asked when determining the needs and they added that, up until then, they had never been asked what their needs were and that was why the efficiency of the seminar period was not at the desired level. The seminars to be held should be in accordance with the contemporary teaching methods, they ought to be well-planned and well-organized and fit for the intended purpose and they ought to be planned taking into consideration the listening and comprehending process of the teachers. The face-to-face seminars ought to be held with a smaller attendance and the factors such as the light and voice ought to be taken into consideration, and the problems related to the technological infrastructure ought to be eliminated and the conditions through which the teachers would be active during the seminars ought to be ensured. The most significant issue raised by the participants was that the title of the lecturers was not so important; what matters was that they ought to have merit and necessary qualifications, they ought to be open to communication and make other people listened to himself, they ought to have communication skills and they ought to be chosen

among the most suitable candidates. The quantitative statements of the qualitative data in relation to the second theme are presented at Table 3.

Table 3. Quantitative scheme of the qualitative data in relation to the second theme

Theme	Category	F	%
Findings related to the factors effective on the efficiency of the seminar periods	Lack of studies specific to the branches	6	100
	Distance and face-to-face training seminars, lack of perception, inspection and control with regard to seminars.	6	100
	Lack of outcome and output assessment	6	100
	Failure to be practical	6	100
	Environmental factors	4	66.6
	Teachers' prejudices	4	66.6
	Failure to plan the seminar periods in a problem-solving manner	4	66.6
	The scope and nature of seminar	6	100
	Technical problems experienced in distance education	6	100
	Lack of merit of the person who lectures at the seminars	5	83.3
	Problems related to the environment in which the seminars are held	4	66.6
	Planning problems faced during the in-service training	6	100

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been concluded within the study that the seminar periods are perceived by a waste of money and the activities carried out during these periods were considered as a waste of time by the participants. The basic reason for this belief of themselves is the inefficiency of the seminar periods.

It has been determined that the operations and activities carried out during the seminar periods thought to be inefficient and useless by the participant are just for fulfilling the formality. It has also found out that the paperwork were done and the teachers' committee meetings were held with the logic "*for the sake of appearances*" and only for fulfilling the formalities. Especially, it has been understood that the documents prepared during these periods such as the minutes of teachers' committee meetings and other documents are directly downloaded from the internet. It was also stated that by the participants those paperwork was regarded as useless, pointless and meaningless and were prepared using the copy-paste method. In addition, it has been concluded that the study topics and reports prepared by the teachers during this period are completed using the same method. For this reason, rather than the efficiency of the seminar periods, their inefficiency should be discussed.

Based on the findings, there are serious concerns about the seminar periods. The most significant concerns are related to the fact that the documents are directly downloaded from the internet, the documents are prepared to complete the formality and the teachers' committee meetings are not held. In his study, Tonbul (2006) states "The professional study topics prepared by the teachers in a report and then submitted to the school administration are not discussed among the colleagues and they are directly put into the files", and this observation is similar to the outcome we have reached in this study.

It has been concluded in the study that there are several factors contributing to the inefficiency of the seminar periods and the in-service training activities carried out during these periods. Particularly the failure to hold

branch-specific in-service training activities aiming at contributing to the professional development of social studies teachers is seen as the most important outcome taking into consideration the aim of the study.

The participants also emphasized as a reason for the decrease of the efficiency that no branch-specific seminars were held and they could not improve their competences in their respective branches and thus, the interest in the seminars was decreased. The teachers also underlined that the seminar subjects were not directly related to their respective fields and they were for general audience and the seminar subjects were thus not drawing attention.

It has also been found in addition to the lack of branch-specific seminars that the lack of supervision and inspection at the end of the in-service training periods as well as the lack of aim-outcome assessment is another main factor affecting the efficiency of the seminar periods.

As of 2010, in order to increase the efficiency of the seminar periods, the Ministry of National Education started to embark on activities via the distance learning. However, it has been observed that the technical problems experienced during the distance training constitute another problem adversely affecting the efficiency. The participants also complained of the lack of supervision and inspection as well as the technological problems such as voice, noise and connection problems experienced during the distance training seminars (held through Educational Information Network-EBA and Distance Training Center-UZEM). It was also stated that the crowded teacher audience groups was another factor decreasing the efficiency of the seminars. Some seminars are held by bringing a large number of teachers from various schools together in a crowded and noisy environment. At the same time, there are some criticisms that the distance learning seminars do not ensure the interactivity that will ensure an active participation.

There have also been criticisms that the topics were described theoretically, a straight narration style was adopted generally and they lacked practical applications. They stated that the teachers generally had a knowledge about the theoretical topic; what matters was that the subjects ought to be practical and useful in real life situations and the subjects should be told with various kinds of demonstration method.

It is possible to express that the activities are carried out without taking into consideration the environmental conditions and, the first and the foremost, without determining the needs of the teachers, and thus, they were not carried out purposefully. Another point mentioned by participants is that the seminars should be oriented towards the cultural and social aspects of the region and specific problems encountered in the school taking into consideration the environmental conditions. In his study, Tonbul (2006) states that the professional study topics should be determined in accordance with the requirements of the teachers, schools and regions and this observation bears resemblance to the findings of our study.

Another outcome of the study is that the theoretical in-service activities constitute a factor affecting the efficiency of this period and the in-service training seminars should be done in a practical and application oriented way. In addition, it has been found that the problems resulting from the environment in which the seminars are held and the lack of merit by the lecturers are the factors directly rendering the process ineffective. It has been concluded that the most significant factor affecting the efficiency is the problems resulting to the expert or lecturer of the seminar. The fact that the topic which must be addressed by practicing are taught with a straight narration and a monotonous voice tone has led to the formation of negative perceptions and attitudes about the seminars. The fact that Aytan (2012) shows that the seminars during which purely theoretical documents are presented over PowerPoint using a straight narration will not be beneficial is parallel with the conclusion drawn in this study. Based on the findings, the participants generally are of the belief that there is problem of merit on the part of the lecturers who give the seminar. By merit, they mean that titles such as professor, expert or inspector bore by the lecturers do not guarantee that the lecturer is well informed about the subject; instead, the lecturers who have a good command of the subject, who is useful and listen to his/her addresses while making himself/herself listened to and who have effective communication skills should give the seminars.

The scope of the seminar periods and the content of the activities to be carried out during this period have been severely criticized by the participants. Within this scope, it is thought that the decision makers should take radical steps as regards to the purpose of the seminar periods and the nature of the activities to be carried out during this term.

Based on the findings of the study, the following additional recommendations have been presented:

- 1) During the seminar periods, seminars which are directly branch specific should be held.
- 2) At the seminar, the practice should be given priority.

- 3) While planning the seminars, an analysis of the needs should be carried out and the seminars should be oriented to problem solving.
- 4) Supervision and control should be ensured at the seminars.
- 5) Rather than the title of the lecturer, a full command of the topic should be taken as the basis.
- 6) The opinions of the teachers should be heeded at the seminars. Feedbacks should be taken in line with the views of the teachers.

Taking into consideration the philosophy and purpose of the qualitative study, the findings and outcomes of this study cannot be generalized and they are limited to the study population and, in this regard, the subject of this study must be re-studied through researches designed with mixed methods.

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