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Teachers and students' views on the teaching and learning process of the social studies course

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Abstract

This study aims to determine teachers and the students' views about the implementation process of Social Studies Course programme. In the study, qualitative methods were used as well as survey method. The study includes 200 third grade students and 20 teachers teaching third grades in 5 primary schools from different socio-economic classes in the city of Eskişehir. A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 16 open ended questions was used to collect data, and the teachers were interviewed as well. The survey analysis technique was used to interpret the data. The results of the study show that the teachers use the Constructivist Theory while instructing and they don't come across any problems except the measurement and evaluation. Another conclusion of the study is that the students like the course, and they point out that they use methods like creative drama and discussion.

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1. Introduction

Education is the main factor that affects and directs a society. (Öztürk and Tuncel, 2008). However, the education is affected by the various developments and changes happening around the world. Accordingly, it is necessary to arrange the education programmes parallel to these developments in order to train individuals depending on the requirements of the society (Yaşar et.al. 2005). Today, it is required to have not only the individuals who have the basic knowledge but also the individuals who can think, do researches, produce projects, and solve problems (Gültekin, 2008). To that end, new education programmes based on the constructivist approach were set up by the Ministry of National Education (Yaşar, 2005). One of the renewed programmes is the Social Studies curriculum whose aim is to enhance students' basic life skills and personal qualities (MEB, 2005). The Social Studies Course in primary education is considered as a lesson that takes on the responsibility to prepare the students for the life and for the higher levels of the education, which is the primary aim of the education. The course is based on the consolidation principle of the education (Akınoğlu, 2002). By the Social Studies Course which is in the curriculum

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of the first, second, and third grades, it is aimed that the students become the members of a democratic society, and that the students can make decisions relating to variety of problems (Belet, 1999). Moreover, this course has a crucial part in a child's life, and it enables the child to have a complete development as a whole (Deveci, 2008; Özden, 2005). In this lesson, the individual develops a multidimensional character by recognising himself and the environment, and acquires some skills such as creative thinking and problem solving (Deveci, 2008). The Social Studies Course requires a teaching-learning environment in which the students participate actively, the students' opinions are appreciated and the knowledge is related to life (Köken, 2003; Gündüz and Ocak, 2006). Therefore, in order to reach the aims of the Social Studies Course, the teachers have to know and interiorize the programme, and they have to carry out the activities required in the programme effectively (Yaşar et.al. 2005a).

Although some studies about the implementation of the Social Studies course have shown that the Social Studies programme of 2005 was more beneficial than the former programme (Ocak and Gündüz, 2006), and it was more effective in practice (Gömleksiz and Bulut, 2007), some studies have shown that the content of the Social Studies course is not up to date (Arıbaş and Yılmaz, 2004), the content is complex, and there are some problems about the measurement and evaluation (Özden, 2005), the teachers don't have adequate information about the programme and they have some problems concerning the implementation (Yaşar et.al., 2005b), the teachers are not sufficient enough about the programme aims to make the students gain the necessary skills (Acat et.al. 2005).

The success of the Social Studies programme depends not only on the effectiveness of the teachers who implements it but also on the effectiveness of the students who will use the knowledge they learn in this course in the future. For this reason, it is necessary to determine the students' views as well as the teachers' views, and to determine if the negative opinions observed in the studies about the programme in the former years has changed or not. Therefore, this study aims to determine the students and teachers' vies on the implementation of the Social Studies Course which has been taught since 2005-2006 education year.

2. Methodology

This study, which aims to determine the students and teachers' views on the application of the Social Studies Course, uses qualitative method and survey model. The survey model is an approach which describes the present or past situation with its existing characteristics (Karasar, 2005). The study includes 200 third grade students and 20 teachers teaching the third grades in 5 primary schools, from different socio-cultural classes (high-middle-low socio-cultural levels) in the city of Eskişehir. A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 16 open ended questions was used in order to collect data. The teachers were interviewed and asked 16 questions. The interviews were recorded. Each data collection instrument was formed after preparing the related questions and asking for the experts and teachers' opinions on the questions. According to the experts and teachers' opinions, the final draft of the questionnaire to be used in the study was formed. Descriptive analysis technique was applied in order to analyse data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2003). During the descriptive analysis, the data collected were summarized and interpreted based on the topics determined before. Data concerning the students opinions are presented in tables with the percentages and frequencies, and direct quotations taken from the students and teachers' own sentences are given.

3. Findings

The students and teachers' opinions about the implementation of the Social Studies course are given below.

Table 1. Methods and Techniques Used in the Social Studies Course (SSC)

<i>Applications in the Learning-Teaching Process of the SSC</i>			<i>Applications in the Learning-Teaching Process of the SSC</i>		
	f	%		f	%
Question-Answer	41	20.5	Instruction	41	20.5
Presentation of the Project Tasks	13	6.5	Test solving	16	8
Discussion	30	15	Reading-Writing	19	9.5
Studying the course book and the workbook	40	20			

As seen in Table 1, the most used technique in the Social Studies course is the question-answer and instruction in connection to the course book and the workbook. Some of the students' explanations supporting this are given below.

Student 2: Our teacher explains the subject, and then we answer the questions. *Student 10:* Our teacher explains us the subject. We can ask questions if we haven't understood some of the subjects our teacher presented. We can utilize the Social Studies course book. We complete the activities in the workbook. *Student 11:* Our teacher asks questions and we answer. Sometimes we ask questions and he answers. *Student 13:* Our teacher explains the subject and we give our opinion, and we answer his questions. *Student 26:* We study the subjects. Teacher asks questions and we answer them.

The teachers joined to the study indicated that they used the question-answer technique in the Social Studies course in order to get the attention of the students and make them participate effectively. They also indicated that they use the discussion method, and they give examples in order for the students to relate the subjects to daily life. Some of the examples showing teachers' own expressions are given below.

Teacher 6: I use examples from everyday life in the lessons. I use visuals if there are. *Teacher 9:* We discuss the subject with the students. We share the information they find in the class. *Teacher 14:* I make a review of the previous day's lesson in the warm-up stage briefly. After that I give examples from their environment in order to get the attention of the students for that day's lesson. For example; We study the subject: "Where do the animals live?" for the theme "My Unique Home". *Teacher 15:* I give examples from the students' daily life. I ask questions in order not to distract their attention, I use interesting examples. *Teacher 20:* I give emphasis on the attention and motivation a lot because it affects the effective participation and arouses students' attention. For example; to get the attention, I play puppet relevant to the lesson and ask an open-ended questions to start the lesson.

Table 2. Activities preferred in Social Studies Course (SSC)

<i>Activities/Methods and Techniques Preferred in SSC</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Activities/Methods and Techniques Preferred in SSC</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Drama	25	12.5	Poster and picture activity	25	12.5
Question-Answer	10	5	Brainstorming and research	15	7.5
Discussion	31	15.5	Activities in the book	25	12.5
Group work	29	14.5	Experiments	40	20

As seen in Table 2, discussion is the most preferred and liked activity in the Social Studies Course by the students. Furthermore, the students state that they like group work and drama activities in the following quotations:

Student 14: I like the drama activity very much because acting a piece of event makes me happy. *Student 18:* Group work is the activity I like the most because people produce more ideas and do beautiful things. *Student 30:* I like the drama because I learn when I act. *Student 121:* I liked the group work because it was really enjoyable to do a research and prepare a file.

The teachers also pointed out that the students liked the drama and group work in the following quotations:

Teacher 9: Students enjoy the drama activity very much. They always want to perform it because it becomes a lesson in the form of a game. They always want to perform drama activities in the other lessons. I make use of drama activities in which a lot of students can act on the variety of subjects. *Teacher1:* The Students like activities including group work.

Table 3. The Equipment Used in Social Studies Course

<i>Equipment Used in Social Studies Course (In addition to the course book and the workbook)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Equipment Used in Social Studies Course (In addition to the course book and the workbook)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Colour pencils, scissors, glue, colour pasteboards	30	15	Map, Earth	28	14
Compass	20	10	CD	14	7
Computer and projector	45	22.5	Newspaper	25	12.5
Television	30	15	Experiment equipments	8	4

Table 3. shows that the students use computer and projector in the Social Studies course in addition to the course book and the workbook.

Student 14: We use computer, CDs, projector and the casebook. *Student 45:* We use maps, a globe, and equipment for experiments. *Student 76:* We use the course book, note-books, the Internet and the projector.

The teachers stated that they benefited from the web-sites, educational CDs and auxiliary books. They say:

Teacher 3: In addition to the course books, I make use of the Internet and the in class activity books when I'm planning the activities. I try to make the lesson as visualised as possible. *Teacher 4:* In addition to the guidebook, I examine the sites on the Internet.

Table 4. Difficulties that Students Encounter in the Social Studies Course (SSC)

<i>Difficulties that Students Encounter in the SSC</i>	f	%	<i>Difficulties that Students Encounter in the SSC</i>	f	%
Solving problems	40	20	Having exams abruptly	25	12.5
Answering the teacher's questions	26	13	In some of the other activities	13	6.5
Writing too much	14	7	I have no difficulties.	82	41

As seen in Table 4, most of the students indicated that they have no difficulties. Some of them indicated that solving problems, writing too much, having exams abruptly, and some of the other activities are difficult for them.

Student 12: I have difficulties in solving problems. Student 34: I have no difficulties in the Social Studies Course. Student 78: Nothing is difficult for me. Everything is easy.

On the other hand, most of the teachers indicated that, they experience difficulties in using the evaluation forms, lack of equipment, families' apathy:

Teacher 2: I see that the acquisition does not occur since the values we are trying to establish are not being considered important by the families. For example: "It is a bad behaviour to drop litter." The student have difficulties in internalizing this behaviour because s/he only sees and hears this from the teacher in the school. Teacher 3: We have difficulties in covering all the subjects in the lesson if we lack the necessary technological equipment and if the student does/can not complete the activities at home. Teacher 8: I have difficulties in evaluation and using the evaluation forms.

Table 5. Measurement-Assessment in the Social Studies Course (SSC) and Other Issues

<i>Measurement-Evaluation instruments in the SSC</i>	f	%	<i>Products put into "Portfolio" formed in the SSC</i>	f	%
Paper pencil exam	77	38.5	We do not put anything since we do not form Portfolio	62	31
Multiple choice exams	65	32.5	Project-performance Tasks.	40	20
Evaluation Forms	25	12.5	Tests (multiple choice exams), photo stats.	24	12
Oral examination	10	5	All of the activities we've done.	40	20
Project and Performance Tasks	10	5	Our drawings.	13	6.5
Tasks given in the SSC			Self evaluation forms.	21	10.5
Project-performance task	128	64	Measurement-Evaluation forms used in the SSC		
Project	50	25	Not being used	80	40
Performance	22	11	We use all of them	120	60
Forming Portfolio in the SSC					
We form	138	69			
We do not form	62	31			

According to the table 5, the students state that they are evaluated by the paper-pencil exams, multiple choice exams and project-performance tasks. It is seen in the table that the majority of the students form a portfolio and these portfolios include the project-performance tasks, their drawings and activities. Some examples supporting this fact are given below.

Student 10: The exams may be oral or written. Student 23: We are sometimes given performance or project tasks. Student 56: Our teachers evaluate us by the exams. Student 98: We use self-evaluation form, group form and peer evaluation form.

The majority of the teachers state that they evaluate the students by the paper and pencil exams and their participation. They point out that they use the evaluation forms but they find them ineffective. The teachers explain that their students form portfolios and the portfolios include visual works, research tasks, students' photos, their drawings, and the tasks the students like.

Teacher 1: Sometimes I make a paper and pencil exam. I use the evaluation form in the course book. I use student participation in the evaluation. Teacher 3: All of these forms are too much. I use some of them when necessary because in my opinion they are waste of time. There is not an allocated time for forms in the curriculum, so it takes one lesson time to fill a form. Teacher 20: I observe the behaviour changes that my students should demonstrate. In addition to this, I evaluate them by some questions, and I give them tests. I also use evaluation scales (self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, student evaluation).

As seen in Table 6, the majority of the students indicated that do not correlate the information they learned in the Social Studies Course to the other lessons. However, the ones who correlate pointed out that they made use of the information in the Turkish and Math courses. On the other hand, the majority of the students expressed that they utilize the information and concepts they learn in the Social Studies Course in everyday life. The followings are some of the examples that the students give.

Table 6. Students' ability to correlate concepts and knowledge learned in the Social Studies Course, to the other courses and everyday life.

Correlating the knowledge learned Social Studies Course to everyday life			Correlating the knowledge learned Social Studies Course to everyday life		
	f	%		f	%
Being a conscious consumer.	25	12.5	Balanced nutrition.	25	12.5
Planning the day and applying it.	47	23.5	Being prepared for the earthquake.	25	12.5
Complying with the traffic rules.	18	9	Not dropping litter	10	5
Respecting the elderly.	15	7.5	Using the natural resources economically	15	7.5
Using the directions.	15	7.5			

Student 43: For example; after we studied the subject about earthquakes, I went home and prepared an "earthquake bag" immediately. *Student 55:* When I do shopping in a supermarket, I check the production date, expiry date and its price.

The majority of the teachers indicated that their students correlate the information and concepts they've learned in the Social Studies Course to the Turkish and Maths courses, and they use the knowledge in everyday life. This shows that the students and the teachers' views are alike. There following examples support the idea.

Teacher 1: I observed that the students are warning each other after a lesson about the classroom and school rules. *Teacher 6:* For example, about being more economical, I emphasize being more economical in maths course or using less paper in an art course. *Teacher 15:* What I particularly want is that the students use the knowledge in everyday life. For example; I observed that they became more conscious after we studied the water and electricity saving. *Teacher 20:* I observe that my students utilize the knowledge they've acquired in the Social Studies Course especially in the Turkish course. I sometimes observe that they repeat the drawings they did in the Social Studies Course in the Visual Arts course.

Table 7. Skills and qualities that Students Acquire in the Social Studies Course

Skills and Qualities that Social Studies Course make students acquire	f	%	Skills and Qualities that Social Studies Course make students acquire	f	%
Self confidence	45	22.5	Rhetoric	33	16.5
Ability to search	35	17.5	Reading habit.	10	5
Ability to debate	20	10	The sense of success	20	10
Setting up good relationships with friends.	37	18.5			

In Table 7 it is clearly seen that by means of the Social Studies Course the students gain self-confidence, ability to search, debate, and rhetoric and reading habit and the sense of success. It also shows that they set up good relationships with their friends. For example;

Student 88: I learned how to produce beautiful sentences. *Student 102:* I learned how to get along with my friends, and how to speak well. *Student 176:* I had self-confidence and learned how to do a research.

The majority of the teachers participated in the study stated that their students' self-confidence has improved; they gained some qualities such as personal care skills and cooperation with their friends. The teachers also explained that the students can express themselves more easily with the help of the Social Studies Course. Here are some examples that the teachers give:

Teacher 1: Students learn to share, work cooperatively, and they can express themselves easily in the Social Studies Course. *Teacher 13:* In the Social Studies Course, the students gain the ability to work cooperatively and to express themselves. Moreover, they learn practical knowledge for everyday life.

3. Discussion

This study showed that the teachers participated in this study liked the implementation of the Social Studies Course, they performed the activities required in the programme and they do not have any difficulties except the measurement and evaluation, which is the weakest link of the programme (Küçükahmet, 2005), and the apathy of the families. The students like the Social Studies Course as well, and they gain the acquisition of the lesson by means of variety of activities. Özpolat et. al. (2007) emphasize that the activities in the programme enables active participation of the students.

It is stated both in the students' and the teachers' expressions that the students correlate and make use of the knowledge and the concepts they learn in the everyday life. Yel et.al. (2009) also found similar results.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The results showed that the teachers use the Social Studies course-book and the Social Studies Course guidebook during the planning stage. In the practice stage they follow the activities like group work, creative drama, and discussion required in the Constructivist approach. They make use of the computers, newspapers, maps, and CDs as educational tools; they use the alternative measurement and evaluation instruments such as student observation form, group evaluation form, and portfolio in addition to the paper – pencil exams or multiple choice tests in the evaluation stage; however, they consider those alternative evaluation instruments as waste of time. The students correlate the knowledge and the concepts they learn in the Social Studies Course to other courses and to the everyday life. The study also puts forward that the students gain some qualities and skills like self-confidence, debate, and research skills in the Social Studies Course. Additionally, the study suggests that the students like the Social Studies Course.

Furthermore, it was found out that the students enjoy the activities such as group-work, discussion, and creative drama, and they learn better with these activities. The study shows that the students don't have many difficulties in the Social Studies Course, and they use alternative evaluation forms such as peer evaluation form, self-evaluation form, and portfolio. They utilize the knowledge and the concepts they learn in the Social Studies Course in everyday life. The Social Studies Course provides the students with the skills such as self-confidence, effective communication, and doing research. Finally, it can be concluded that in the practice stage of the Social Studies Course is handled properly with regard to the Constructivist Approach, and the teachers come across no difficulties except the measurement and evaluation.

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