

How Can I Describe Social Studies Curriculum in the First Three Years of Primary School? A Case Study¹

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to determine the opinions of a multigrade class teacher on the nature of social studies lesson, the structure of the social studies curriculum, and the teaching process of social studies lesson. The study was structured in line with a holistic single case design which is contained in the tradition of qualitative research. The teacher participating in the study is 29 years old and has been serving as a teacher for 7 years. The data collection tools used in the study were semi-structured interview form and observation form. In the process of designing the data collection tools, the literature was reviewed and the expert opinions were taken into account. The expert opinion was also considered with regards to the validity and reliability of the questions included in the interview form and the questions on which the experts had a mutual consensus were determined and included in the list of questions. The content analysis was used in the analysis of the findings obtained from the study and the themes were determined after the records of the interviews had been deciphered. Three themes, which are the nature of the social studies, opinions on the social studies curriculum, and opinions on how to put into practice the social studies curriculum more efficiently in village schools, were determined within the scope of the study. The themes determined in this regard were analyzed within the context of the problematic of the study. Based on the findings obtained from the study, the opinions of the multigrade class teacher on the nature of social studies were found to be consistent, social studies were found to be an essential discipline to achieve citizenship skills, and the opinions of the teacher on putting into practice the social studies curriculum were found to be positive. The suggestions provided by the study within the context of the challenges encountered in the process of teaching social studies in village schools include the following: a separate curriculum should be designed for village schools, teacher's guidebooks should be adapted to the village conditions, and particularly, the information technology applications should be developed in terms of quality.

Keywords: Primary school social studies curriculum, the first three years of primary school, multigrade class, village school, case study

Introduction

In the most general sense, education is an intentional enculturation process (Ertürk, 1966; 1972). This enculturation process not only helps individuals adapt to the

¹ In the most general sense, social education in Turkey in the first three years of primary school is introduced by Hayat bilgisi [Hayat bilgisi is a lesson which basis of social studies the first three years of primary school] lesson followed by social studies lesson from the 4th grade to the 7th grade. In this context, hayat bilgisi form the basis for social studies. The main objectives of hayat bilgisi, much the same as social studies, are to ensure efficient adaptation of the individual to the environment and culture in which the individual lives as well as helping the individual to help solve problems encountered throughout life. The term *life science* is used in some studies conducted in Turkey. However, *science* rather connotes natural sciences. In this context, *science* and *studies* reflect two different disciplines of philosophy of science. This distinction is most pronounced in the philosophy of science tradition of Anglo-Saxon and Continental Europe. *Science* mostly describes concepts associated with natural sciences whereas the German word *Wissenschaft* is mostly used to describe the human world. In this context, the author prefers to use the phrase *social studies* instead of *life sciences* due to some philosophical reasons. Within the scope of this text, social studies represent Hayat bilgisi lesson introduced in the first three years of primary school.

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society in which they live, but also aims to ensure that individuals become a productive citizen. Therefore, it is ensured that the citizens constituting the society interlock around common values and live with a common purpose (Baker, 2011; Dewey, 1916; Egemen, 1965; Turhan, 1994). This intentional enculturation process has been implemented by almost all civilizations since the days on which people began to have a communal life (Aytaç, 1992; Kanad, 1963; Monroe, 1901). In the societies of the antiquity, family played the most influential role in the enculturation process whereas the role of the family gradually decreased during the years following the Industrial Revolution and schools began to play this role thereafter. Therefore, school played a main role in this intentional enculturation process by means of the lessons contained in the school curriculum and established its impact as an influential institution day by day. The fact that the governments have explored the influence of education played a significant role particularly in the establishment of this impact (Fraser, 2009; Heater, 2001; 2004; Katz, 1976; Tilly, 1995).

The fact that governments have explored the influence of education also raised some questions. How would this comprehensive enculturation process be organized? How would it be implemented? Most importantly, which information would be used in this process? Addressing these questions was required because the future of the society and the state depended on the new generations to adopt the culture of the society and to become productive members of the society. The answers to these questions were found in the lessons contained in the school curriculum. The culture would be a priority for the development of the school curriculum and the contents of the lessons included in the curriculum would be designed in this scope with an aim to ensure that new generations internalize the culture, adopt the value judgements of the society, and become productive citizens (Günel & Pehlivan, 2015). In this designation process, the lessons that would play the predominant role were determined to be history, geography, literature, native language, and citizenship lessons. Especially during the 19th century and until the beginning of the 20th century, the intentional enculturation process was implemented through the abovementioned lessons. On the other hand, the transformation and industrialization in the USA, the UK, and the Continental Europe towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century have sparked off some debate about social studies based on history and geography. The main reason for such debate was especially due to the change and transformation process taking place in the USA. As a consequence of such debate,

social studies have been recognized as an academic field within the curriculum (Davis, 1981; Hertzberg, 1981; Jorgansen, 2010).

The main objective of social studies was to help individuals adopt the culture in which they live to become a natural part of the society through the socialization process as well as assuming citizenship responsibilities to be productive, to find solutions to various life problems, and to think critically whenever required as the members of the society (Akinoğlu, 2002; Sönmez, 2010). In order for this socialization process to become successful, social studies education was required to be comprehensive. Undoubtedly, the primary and the most fundamental requirement for this type of social studies education was to educate teachers to make them understand the nature of social studies and become aware of the unique characteristics of social studies to distinguish social studies lesson from other lessons. These qualities are especially important for classroom teachers who will instruct social studies in primary school. For an efficient and competent social studies education, classroom teachers should have a clear perspective on the nature of social studies. This perspective will have a positive influence on their skills to put into practice the curriculum as well as their attitudes towards this process. Teacher qualification is an essential factor, which is more instrumental than any other variables, in the academic achievement of the students and the attainment of the objectives of the curriculum (Ferguson 1991; Goldhaber and Brewer 2000; Mayer, Mullens, and Moore, 2000). For a classroom teacher who considers social studies as the foundation of the social structure and the cultivation of citizens, social studies teaching would require a teaching and learning process based on application as well as a number of interactions among various methods and techniques. On the other hand, a classroom teacher who does not share such a perspective would adopt an ordinary teaching process without paying attention to or being aware of such intricate details. From this point of view, providing an efficient teaching service in social studies lesson and achieving the objectives of the curriculum depend on the teacher's perception of the social studies lesson and opinions on the social studies curriculum. It is possible that these perception and opinions would affect the behaviors of the teacher, or in other words, they would affect the behaviors of the teacher on teaching and learning processes. Individuals structure their behaviors based on how they perceive phenomena or their environment (Cüceloğlu, 2004; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2013). Therefore, it can be said that a teacher's perception about the social studies lesson and opinions on the curriculum can be considered to be significant variables to have an influence on the attainment of the objectives of the curriculum. In this context, it can be suggested that the first step to

understand a teacher's perception includes an analysis of the objectives of the social studies and the role of social studies in this enculturation process.

The main objectives of the social studies lesson are preparing children to life and educating them to become citizens to internalize the culture of the society (Ata, 2006; Binbaşıoğlu, 2003; MEB, 2005; Ochoa-Baker, 2007; Sönmez, 2005; 2010, Tarman & Acun, 2010). The social studies curriculum, which is designed in line with the psychological development of the students based on the organization of the knowledge obtained from such fields as natural sciences and social sciences, has a suitable structure for broad field design (Taba, 1962; Tanner & Tanner, 1975). Broad field design is efficiently used for combining various information especially obtained from specific scientific fields based on the principles of horizontal and vertical coherence (Tanner & Tanner, 1975). From this perspective, social studies accommodate a wide range of information network such as history, geography, sociology, anthropology, and physical sciences (Kenworthy, 1973). Therefore, it can be said that the nature of the social studies lesson is multi-dimensional. The primary requirements for a teacher to make students attain the objectives of the social studies lesson are comprehension of the social studies as a lesson and identification of its structure. Once this structure is identified, the teacher will explore the nature of social studies.

The exploration process of the nature of social studies by teacher is also important for explaining teaching and learning process. Once a teacher comprehends the nature of social studies, s/he may manage teaching and learning process by taking into account the multi-dimensionality of the lesson. This may also be reflected in the teacher's opinions on the social studies curriculum. For a teacher who does not perceive social studies as a multi-dimensional discipline, teaching and learning process would probably become a monotonous process. On the other hand, it is also possible to reduce the lesson to one dimension and teach the lesson in this way. However, comprehension of these multi-dimensional relations may have an effect on various variables from teaching social studies lesson to the teacher's opinions on the curriculum. For a teacher perceiving social studies as a multi-dimensional discipline, social studies lesson would go beyond the boundaries of the classroom to merge with life out there and would be used to find solutions to the students' problems associated with daily life.

Social studies lesson ³was introduced in the primary school by the 1926 curriculum for the first time in Turkey. The main objective of the social studies lesson was defined as ensuring efficient adaptation of the individuals to their environment (MV, 1926). During the following years thereafter, the objectives of the social studies lesson included in the first three years of primary school within the scope of the 1936, 1948, 1962, 1968, 1998 curricula have been developed in line with the general objective stipulated in 1926. Furthermore, the multi-dimensionality of the social studies lesson was emphasized and a comprehensive perspective on the nature of social studies was provided within the framework of curriculum development efforts taking place in 2004 (MEB, 2005). On the other hand, some problems were identified in terms of putting into practice the social studies curriculum. Previous studies demonstrated that classroom teachers especially serving in village schools with multigrade class encounter a number of problems arising from the attainments of the curriculum, lack of classroom materials, failure to fully implement assessment and evaluation activities, and the problems arising from the practice of multigrade class itself (Abay, 2007; Akpınar, Turan and Gözler, 2006; Gözler, 2009; Kuzu and Aslan, 2012; Sınmaz, 2009). In terms of teaching and learning process, similar problems were also encountered in the foreign literature. One of the most important problems in teaching social studies in foreign primary schools is teacher qualifications. It was emphasized that the teacher's qualifications as well as attitudes and expectations played a significant role in academic achievement and social education applications in primary school (Brophy, Alleman, & Halvorsen, 2012). Teachers' opinions on the nature of social studies playing an important role in the context of social education in primary school were found to have an influence on teachers' attitudes adopted during the teaching process (Farris, 2015; Goodman & Adler, 1985; Owens, 1997; Rapoport, 2015). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs on the teaching field can be considered as a significant factor having an effect on putting the curriculum into practice. This proposition is not limited to life sciences or social studies alone. Studies on teachers from various fields demonstrated that teachers' attitudes and beliefs on their respective teaching fields in general had affected their perspectives on the teaching process (Bartos & Lederman, 2014; Cess-Newsome, 1999; Fishman, Konstantopoulos, Kubitskey, Vath, Park, Johnson & Edelson, 2013; Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 1999; Nilsson, 2008; Nilsson & Loughran, 2012). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are significant variables having a wide range of effects on teachers

³ Social studies reflects hayat bilgisi lesson in the first three years of primary school.

from encouraging them to use various methods and techniques to the integration of technology (Funkhouser & Mouza, 2013; Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector & DeMeester, 2013).

The Aim of the Study

Identification of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions is essential for understanding the problems associated with teaching in multigrade classes and especially for the determination of the teachers' perspectives in small village schools providing education for the first four grades of primary school. This is due to the fact that these schools are deprived of many facilities and opportunities compared to other larger schools. The difficulties encountered by the teachers, who are considered as the direct practitioners of the curriculum, on putting the curriculum into practice are also included among the factors that may affect the quality of the teaching service. Teachers' opinions on putting the curriculum into practice may shed light on the efforts to create a quality teaching environment as well as ensuring the attainments of the teaching objectives of the social studies lesson. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of social studies are equally important. It can be suggested that teachers' perceptions of social studies have a wide range of effects on teachers from the teaching methods and techniques they use to the teaching style they adopt in the class. If the teacher perceives social studies lesson as a multi-disciplinary approach as well as a lesson helping students internalize the culture of the society, become a productive citizen, and providing means to overcome problems encountered throughout life, then the teacher would possibly have a novel approach towards the social studies lesson. Understanding how the conditions in which teachers serving in village schools find themselves affect putting the curriculum into practice and how teachers deal with such conditions may also contribute to classroom teachers who have problems especially in terms of practice. Another objective of the study is to reveal how classroom teachers feel when they put the social studies curriculum into practice. Some of the most crucial variables having an influence on the teacher's efforts in terms of practice are the teacher's dedication to the curriculum and attitudes towards practice. It is observed that the level of dedication of a teacher to the curriculum and positive attitudes towards practice are two significant factors having an effect on the teacher's performance in the classroom (Kelly & Carbonaro, 2012). In this context, the aim of this study is to determine the opinions of a teacher serving in a village school with multigrade class on the nature of social studies, the

social studies curriculum, and the teaching process of the social studies lesson to provide suggestions in line with these opinions.

Method

In this section, details of the research model, participants of the study, data collection tools as well as the techniques used in data collection and data analysis are provided.

Research Model

The aim of this study is to identify the opinions of a classroom teacher serving in a multigrade class on the nature of the social studies lesson, the structure of the social studies curriculum, and the teaching process of the social studies lesson. Due to the fact that the conditions to be analyzed have an idiosyncratic structure and the requirement for an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the problem, case study method contained in the tradition of qualitative research was used in the study. In the literature, case study is defined as a research method studying a current phenomenon within its real life environment, where the boundaries between the phenomena and its environment are not conclusively defined, and multiple sources of evidence and/or data exist (Yin, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Merriam (1998) emphasized that case studies were valuable as it allowed for accounting for phenomena and events in their respective contexts. In this study, a holistic single case design model was used. This is due to the fact that the aim of the study is to determine the opinions of a classroom teacher, serving in a multigrade class for around 5 years, on the nature of social studies, the structure of the social studies curriculum, and the teaching process of the social studies lesson based on her experiences (in the form of observations and interviews), and that the case in question has idiosyncratic conditions.

Participants

Holistic single case design is especially useful in the analysis of the problem in a comprehensive manner under its idiosyncratic conditions. Only one teacher was selected to participate in the study since the case has idiosyncratic conditions and for the purpose of analyzing the problem in depth and in more detail. Therefore, the said classroom teacher employed in a village school with multigrade class is the only participant of this study. In other words, the unit of analysis in this study is single. The teacher, who provided her

opinions within the scope of this study, is 29 years old (Teacher A is abbreviated as TA in this study). Ms. TA has been working as a teacher for seven years. In her occupational carrier, TA has worked in larger schools as well as small village schools. The teacher, a graduate of classroom teaching of the faculty of education, has a five-year experience in terms of teaching a multigrade class.

Data Collection Tools

Within the scope of qualitative studies, data collection tools and data collection process are crucial for the validity and reliability of the findings obtained. The main problem as well as the relevant sub-problems associated with the problem of the study have been taken into account in designing the appropriate data collection tools for the study. Semi-structured interview form and observation form were determined to be the most appropriate data collection tools for the analysis of these sub-problems. The sub-problems of the study have also been taken into account in preparing the semi-structured interview form. Accordingly, the main sub-problems of this study are the nature of social studies, the structure of the social studies curriculum, and the teaching process of social studies. The relevant questions for these sub-problems were directed to the teacher based on a literature review to identify such questions. Upon the approval of the questionnaire form by an academician specialized in linguistics, the questionnaire form was presented to five academicians specialized in pedagogy and qualitative research. These experts reviewed the relevance of the questions to the problem and sub-problems of the study and assigned a score for each question accordingly. The forms scored by the experts were analyzed in accordance with Davis (1992) content validity index (CVI) and the items whose average are 0.80 and above were included in the questionnaire. The questions included in the semi-structured form are as follows.

- 1- What is the place of the social studies lesson in the curriculum according to your opinions?
- 2- How do you describe the social studies lesson? Which dimensions of the social studies lesson are different from other lessons according to your opinions?
- 3- What are your opinions on the attainments of the social studies lesson?
- 4- What do you think about the content of the social studies lesson?

- 5- How do you evaluate the activities included in the social studies curriculum?
- 6- How do you teach the social studies lesson? Can you describe, please?
- 7- What do you think about the evaluation activities in the social studies lesson?
- 8- What are your opinions and suggestions for a more active and efficient teaching of the social studies lesson?

Another data collection tool used in the study is observation. The observations in this study are based on participation. The teacher participating in the study was observed especially in the social studies lesson twice weekly. The author prepared an observation form to keep the observation records. Expert opinion was requested for the conformity of the observation form and the observation form was revised to its final form in line with the relevant criticism from the experts. All activities and behaviors of the teacher during class were accurately recorded in the observation form by the author. This observation form was used as a promoter within the scope of data analysis. In addition to the observation process, another data collection tool is casual unstructured conversations. Conversations with the teacher took place in a casual manner during the break times and lunch breaks, and these data were also analyzed in combination with other data obtained during the process of the study.

Procedures

The study had continued for approximately 3 months. First of all, the participant teacher was provided with the aim of the study and the author proceeded with the procedures upon the consent of the teacher. Questions included in the semi-structured interview form were directed to the teacher within a period of approximately 75 minutes in a session that took place outside the school hours. Before asking the questions, the author explained to the teacher that voice records would be kept and whether the teacher gave consent thereof, and the interview process took places after the required consent was given by the teacher. The observations were performed for two class hours (40x2=80 minutes), one hour (40 minutes) for each, twice weekly. The observations records were approximately accounted for a total of 24 class hours during the period of 3 months. The observation form kept at the end of each class was also shared with the teacher. On the other hand, casual conversations took place outside the class hours and completely

developed in a natural and casual manner. The main theme of these conversations was the sub-problems related to the process of the study.

Data Analysis

In this study, the content analysis was used in the analysis of data. Within this scope, firstly, the interview records were deciphered and transcribed. Following the descriptive analysis of the observation form(s), the descriptive analysis of the interviews in the form of conversations was also performed. Following deciphering of the interview records, encoding was performed based on the themes determined. The themes determined in the study are as follows: opinions on the nature of the social studies lesson (the place of the social studies in the curriculum, can you describe social studies? What is the difference of social studies lesson from other lessons?), opinions on the social studies curriculum (opinions on the attainments, opinions on the content, opinions on teaching conditions, opinions on the evaluation activities), opinions on the more efficient application of the social studies curriculum in village schools (opinions on the more efficient application of social studies in village schools). The findings of the interviews in the form of conversations and the analyses obtained from the observation form were also processed in line with these themes with an aim to support the analysis. Interviews in the form of conversations were abbreviated as (IFC). Likewise, the data obtained from observation forms were abbreviated as (OF), interview records were abbreviated as (IR). In the analysis of data, (TA) abbreviation was used to represent the teacher.

Reliability and Validity of the Study

In qualitative research and particularly in case studies, reliability is of great concern. One of the most efficient way to address reliability and validity issues is to extend the period of data collection and observation. This study has been completed after a period of approximately 3 months. The total planned observation period was 24 class hours consisting of 2 class hours each week. In addition, casual conversations continued during the period of the study and the records of these conversations were kept in a study logbook. Another method recommended to ensure the validity and reliability of the study is an approach called triangulation or trivet method. Triangulation or trivet method can be described as investigating the case in question using different methods (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). In reference to the literature on qualitative research, it was remarked that

using different methods had a positive effect on the quality of qualitative researches (Patton, 2002; Poggenpoel and Myburgh, 2003). Three main methods have been used in this study with an aim to ensure reliability. The first method is interview. The form intended for the interview was structured in line with the problematic of the study and revised, as required, following the review of a group of academicians specialized in the field. The assignment of the scores to the questionnaire by a group of specialized academicians as well as the calculation of the forms based on the formula of the Davis content validity index (CVI) were also crucial for the determination of the structural validity of the data collection tools used in the study. Following the interview process, determination of the themes and encoding process were completed and the process related to theme and encoding was repeated by an academician specialized in the field. Any section was revised in case of difference of opinions, and the encoding was performed to reflect the highest level of consensus based on the common perspective. Following deciphering of the observation form, the deciphered form was reviewed by another expert for control purposes. Another method used in the study is observation. The author has shared the same environment with the teacher participating in the study. Thus, Teacher A was observed both in various environments within the school as well as the classroom environment. The results of the observations were compared to the text obtained from the deciphered interview form and put into writing. Another method is the interviews in the form of conversations. The author conducted casual and open-ended conversations with Teacher A at break times and lunch breaks, and he was engaged in note-taking during these conversations. All records obtained from the data collection process were put into writing after reviewed in terms of consistency among each other during data processing. Based on the review, all data obtained from the interviews, observations, and casual conversations were found to be consistent among each other. Another effort for the purpose of ensuring the reliability of the study was made in collaboration with Teacher A. The analyses performed were shared with Teacher A and her opinions were received. In this regard, utmost care was taken to avoid any potential error during the analysis process. Regarding the validity of the study, the process of the study was described in detail and an explicit framework of the process was intended to be revealed as much as possible.

Findings and Commentary

Findings and commentary chapter of the study includes the interpretation of the opinions based on the themes determined. Three main themes have been determined within the scope of the study. These themes are *the opinions on the nature of the social studies lesson, opinions on the social studies curriculum* and *opinions on the efficient application of social studies curriculum in village schools*, respectively.

Opinions on the nature of the social studies lesson

Firstly, the opinions of TA on the nature of the social studies lesson were determined within the scope of the study. For this purpose, questions about this theme were asked to her in the question form. The objective of these questions was to determine how TA makes sense of social studies. In this section, the data obtained from both the recordings of the interviews and the interviews in the form of conversations were used. The recordings of the interviews were coded as (RI) and the interviews in the form of conversations were coded as (IFC). The numbers next to IFC and RI show the question number and the letters next to the numbers show the respective orders of the answers given to the related questions. In this context, the following questions were asked to TA: *What is the place of the social studies lesson in the curriculum according to your opinions? How do you describe the social studies lesson? Which dimensions of the social studies lesson are different from other lessons according to your opinions?* The answers for these questions provided by TA are as follows:

“In my opinion, social studies lesson is in the center during the first three years of the primary school curriculum (IFC, 1 /A).”

“Social studies lesson is different from other lessons in that social studies lesson includes a process to help students to define the properties of their character during the first three years of the primary school education (RI, 1 /A-IFC1/A).”

“This lesson is definitely different from other lessons as it prepares students for life, providing a basis to understand the society in which they live and to acquire awareness, thus, this lesson is in the center of the curriculum because our main objective in primary school education is to help individuals to adjust to the society in which they live and to form a character with good nature (RI, 1/ B).”

“In my opinion, the social studies lesson covers the curriculum as a whole. I think that all the other lessons should be taught in parallel with this lesson (RI, 1 /C-IFC, 1/C).”

“Social studies lesson provides a basis during the first three years of the primary school to help students adjust to the society in which they live and teach them about the culture, providing useful information and skills to solve problems they encounter in life (RI, 2 /A)”

An analysis of the opinions of TA on the first question indicates that TA clearly thinks that social studies lesson is different from other lessons. This is due to the fact that TA perceives social studies as a lesson that helps students form a character with good nature and helps them understand the society in which they live and internalize the cultural values. Suggesting that the main objective of the other lessons contained in the curriculum is to achieve the objectives of the social studies lesson, TA thinks that social studies is a special and privileged lesson for the primary education level. In this perspective, TA has a significant integrity in her opinions on the nature of the social studies. An analysis of the social studies curriculum from past to present (1926, 1936, 1948, 1968, 2004) shows that the main emphasis and objective of the social studies lesson is the adaptation of the individual to the culture in which they live, acquisition of values, and thus becoming an individual with a good character.

Opinions on the social studies curriculum

The opinions on the social studies curriculum were mainly analyzed by five questions contained in the interview form. In addition, the data obtained from the observation form were used within the context of this section. The first emphasis under this heading is the attainments of the social studies lesson. Subsequently, the dimensions of the context, activities, teaching and learning process as well as assessment and evaluation have been analyzed, respectively.

Social Studies Curriculum and Attainments

The concept of attainment contained in the curriculum emphasizes the qualities to be acquired by the students at the end of the teaching process. An analysis of the social studies curriculum implemented in primary school shows that a total of 86 attainments distributed in 3 themes in the first grade, a total of 95 attainments in 3 themes in the second grade, and a total of 111 attainments in 3 themes in the third grade can be identified. Attainments contained in the scope of the social studies curriculum essentially aims to help students acquire certain skills. TA thinks that the attainments contained in the social studies curriculum are suitable for the comprehension level of the students and in compliance to the nature of the social studies lesson.

“The attainments contained within the scope of the social studies lesson are basically about certain skills to be acquired by the individual. For instance, the main focus of the social studies lesson is about attainments providing for proficiency on such issues as critical thinking, self-care, self-confidence, gaining experience, learning about the society and culture in which the individual lives, etc. (RI, 3 / A).”

TA thinks that the quality of attainments is of great importance. She emphasizes that the attainments especially contained in the first grade are quite simple and more applicable to daily life compared to previous curriculum. This feature plays a major role in achieving the attainments of the social studies curriculum in a more efficient fashion.

“The most beneficial feature of the new curriculum is perhaps the close relations between the attainments of the social studies lesson and the students’ lives. For instance, if we discuss a subject in class about family, students are able to give direct examples from their families. Likewise, students can easily provide examples during the lesson about their life and the environment in which they live. This is quite important for me because it allows for the attainments to be achieved in a more efficient way (RI, 3/B).”

On the other hand, this perspective is not applicable for the entire curriculum and thus certain attainments are rather difficult to be achieved by students especially those growing up in a village environment.

“I’d like to state that some of the attainments provided in the social studies curriculum are not suitable for children who grow up in a village environment. I mean that they are not associated with the student’s life. However, I should note that this is not the case in most of the attainments contained in the curriculum. (RI, 3/ C).”

It was also emphasized that the attainments are quite possible to be achieved by using a variety of teaching methods.

“We make use of various methods such as acting and drama in our lessons and after learning a subject, the students immediately warn their friends if they behave in a wrong way. I observed this in a number of occasions this year. Although we may not observe this in every student, I still think that it is very successful. The attainments seem to be more practical to make use of various active learning techniques (RI, 3 /D).”

The fact that the attainments contained in the curriculum are associated with each other and that they have an interdisciplinary nature enable the curriculum to have an integrated perspective and since an attainment supports another attainment, the learning process becomes richer and more efficient by means of the integrity of these attainments within the curriculum.

“The association of an attainment contained in a theme of the social studies lesson with other themes and attainments are indicated. This feature contributes positively to the learning process especially in terms of the review of a lesson as well as associations with other subjects contained within the scope of the lesson. (RI, 3/E)”

Furthermore, the fact that the attainments contained in the curriculum are presented at a simple and elementary level is considered significant according to TA.

“These attainments (contained in the social studies curriculum) are brilliant. That is to say, the curriculum is not like a crash program. The attainments are quite simple. I am able to teach an attainment within 4 hours. Students efficiently associate these attainments with their life within these 4 hours and thus, I observe very positive results about it (RI, 3 /F).”

Social studies curriculum and content

One of the four components of a curriculum is content (Demirel, 2007). It is important to design the content as it is an essential factor for achieving the attainments contained in the curriculum. Designing the content in compliance to the pedagogical characteristics of the students and their life experiences plays an essential role in achieving the attainments. TA emphasized that the content of the social studies program is simple.

“In my opinion, the number of the attainments is not much but it is enough. Primary school education requires introduction of less attainments and more time for teaching them. In other words, the number of the attainments provides teachers with enough time to teach them. Perhaps, the curriculum could be simpler. It may be better for educational activities. Nevertheless, I think that the new curriculum is simple and plain in terms of the content. Consequently, it is possible to engage in more activities and devote enough time for each attainment (RI, 4 /A).”

Another dimension about the content is textbooks. TA thinks that the textbook designs and illustrations clearly reflect the content and attainments of the curriculum.

“The textbooks are essentially based on illustrations. What I most like in the textbooks is that two pages are completely composed of pictures and subject is summarized by one sentence. This helps the students actively participate in discussion during the lesson and the students simply interpret what they see in the illustrations. How does this work? If the illustrations are about something that the student has not seen in his or her immediate surroundings, we close our textbooks and dream about it. What else can we do? We can give examples from our village or

from our environment. In general, the illustrations in the textbooks are quite enough in terms of the context.” (RI, 4/B).”

The design of the textbooks and the fact that the context of the lesson is presented in a simple fashion are also significant contributors to the efficient management of the teaching and learning process by the teacher.

“I like the design of the textbooks very much. They are quite practical for teachers. Because, we open our textbooks and the students interpret these pictures. The teacher ensures active class participation as much as possible and students take the floor to talk about the subject during the class. This facilitates the teacher’s function and the teacher provides guidance to the students. As we make use of the materials around us, the teacher does not encounter any difficulty to find resources about the lesson. In my opinion, the fact that the context is designed in this way is very helpful to the teacher (RI, 4 /C).”

“We usually do not prefer literal verbalism in social studies lessons. The lesson is primarily based on the interpretations of the illustrations by the students. In other words, the interpretations of the students determine how the lesson will continue. We focus on the themes chosen by the students associated with the illustrations they interpret (RI, 4/ D).”

The data shows that TA emphasized that the content dimension of the social studies curriculum is presented quite simple and plain. She also stated that these characteristics as well as the design of the textbooks contribute to teaching and learning process to be more efficient through student-oriented activities.

Social studies curriculum and teaching & learning activities

Based on the constructivist approach which accounts for the philosophy of the new social studies curriculum, playing an active role in the learning process by student-oriented activities is a significant variable that has an influence on the teaching and learning process (Çalışkan, 2015). For this purpose, students make use of activity books in addition to textbooks. Thus, it is possible to carry out activities about the attainments following the associated lesson. Another useful instrument is the teacher’s guidebook. Whereas TA thinks that the activities contained within the scope of the curriculum and the teacher’s guidebook are quite helpful, she brings forward some criticism about the context of the teacher’s guidebook.

“With regard to the activities contained in the guidebook, it is not possible to apply them all in exactly the same way. Although the attainments are simple, the activities are not economical and they include some activities that are impossible to carry out in a village environment. For this reason, we sometimes modify the activities based on our available resources. For instance, if the activity requires us to buy some materials from the stationery shop, we rather prefer to use available materials (RI, 5/A).”

TA emphasized the significance of the perspective set forth by the teacher’s guidebook with regard to carrying out teaching and learning activities in class and she described the process of teaching social studies lesson as follows:

“Students have textbooks and workbooks about the social studies lesson. The first page contains questions about familiarization. Firstly, we ask these questions to the students and the students answer the questions based on their life experiences. Then we look at the illustrations in the book. We discuss about the illustrations. The lesson is completely based on speaking and answering the questions. We make use of acting and drama especially about certain subjects. After completing a subject, we follow the activities contained in the workbook (RI, 5/B).”

The observation records about the lesson confirm the description provided by TA about teaching of the lesson. Based on the observations, TA carried out various activities in the beginning of the social studies lesson with an aim to draw the attention of the students to the lesson in addition to using question and answer teaching method and she made use of student-oriented activities as much as possible within the scope of teaching and learning activities. In consideration of teaching and learning activities, TA is of the opinion that both the curriculum and the teacher’s guidebook overlook village schools.

“Honestly, village schools are overlooked within the framework of activities contained in the curriculum. Although the attainments have been presented in a simple fashion, the activities have been intended for urban schools. If the teacher focuses on the attainments and designs the activities individually, there is no problem. However, if the teacher focuses on both the attainments and activities and attempts to carry out these activities, he or she would encounter a number of problems. In other words, we ask ourselves what do we intend to provide students with this attainment? We comprehend the answer to this question and then we intend to find examples about these attainments from our lives and immediate environment to include in the teaching and learning process. Otherwise, most of the activities are not suitable for the students in general because these students did not experience anything like these in their life before. On the other hand, I think that the

attainments are simple enough and they are fine but teachers in village schools should make more efforts than teachers in urban schools. (RI, 5/C)."

Social studies curriculum and evaluation process

One of the four main elements of the curriculum is evaluation (Demirel, 2007). Assessment and evaluation activities have a crucial place in the determination of the achievement of the attainments during the teaching and learning process and also decision making about the quality of this process. Evaluation within the scope of the social studies lesson especially for the first 3 grades bears a number of differences compared to the subsequent grades. The social studies curriculum emphasizes that the evaluation in the first 3 grades should be based on the participation of the students to the learning process rather than written examinations and multiple-choice tests (MEB, 2009). TA adopts this emphasis provided by the social studies curriculum.

"In general, active participation of the students to the discussion of the subjects is very important for me with regard to evaluation. In my opinion, it is more important to evaluate students based on their participation to the discussions taking place during the class rather than evaluation based on written exams. I observe students during class. I pay attention to class participation in my observations. As a matter of fact, it is almost impossible for a student to avoid class participation within the scope of this lesson because the examples are based on their environment and their families. In addition, evaluation is also possible based on the scales contained in the teacher's guidebook for social studies. However, I think observation and active class participation are more important (RI, 6 /A)."

According to TA, the most important factor to determine students' success is based on their active class participation. TA considers class participation, playing an active role during the learning process and assuming responsibilities during the class are efficient criteria for evaluation. On the other hand, TA emphasized that some evaluation activities contained in the teacher's guidebook are not suitable for village schools.

"Although the teacher's guidebook is quite useful, some dimensions of evaluation as well as teaching and learning processes overlook the conditions of village schools (RI, 6/B)."

"Whether such applications as product file or scaled grading key contained in the curriculum may be applicable for village schools especially for the first three grades was not taken into account. In my opinion, the most efficient evaluation within the scope of the social studies lesson during the first three years of primary school should be based on the observations of the teacher (RI, 6/ C)."

An analysis of the opinions of TA on evaluation in general shows that although TA knows about the forms and scales contained in the curriculum, she considers that the level of class participation of the students is more important for the evaluation process. Another problem is that some evaluation activities contained in the curriculum may not be applicable for village schools.

Suggestions for more efficient application of social studies curriculum in village schools

The final theme of the study deals with the questions with regard to the problems encountered in the social studies lesson and these questions are as follows: What can be done for an efficient teaching of social studies lesson? What kind of suggestions can be put forward? TA points out that the drawbacks of the conditions of village schools are one of the most significant problems for the teaching process of social studies lesson.

“The new social studies curriculum is a big step. It put forward a new philosophy and a new perspective however village schools have been rather overlooked in this curriculum. In particular, the application of certain teaching and learning activities contained within the scope of the teacher’s guidebook and the curriculum is either quite difficult or quite impossible. As far as I understand, the curriculum has been designed based on urban schools. In other words, the curriculum is intended for students going to urban schools. This condition leads to certain problems during the learning process (RI 7/ A).”

According to TA, another problem is the level of readiness of students. Although TA emphasizes that the new curriculum is remarkably a significant step to contribute to rather restricted dream world of the village students, she states that some problems arise with regard to the application of teaching and learning methods as well as the evaluation activities introduced in the curriculum.

“To be honest, I am very upset about the fact that the comments of the students after they have looked at the illustrations are rather limited. This is a common situation in general especially as far as the students in village schools are concerned. Dream world of the students in village schools is not much developed and thus the students are often unable to interpret the illustrations efficiently. Nevertheless, they are still able to make some comments provided that we focus on the illustrations and discuss about them in detail and at length. I also think that the level of the evaluation activities provided in the new curriculum is higher than the level of the students in village schools. (RI, 7 /B).”

In the context of the aforementioned problems, TA brings forward some suggestions intended for a more efficient teaching of social studies in village schools. She suggests that

the efficient use of information technologies and the Internet would be a significant step in this framework.

“Although our school has Internet access, we have some problems about connection speed and quality. In my opinion, we could make efficient use of the Internet for the resolution of the problems encountered in the social studies subjects especially in the teaching and learning process (RI, 7 / C)”.

Emphasizing that the activities and evaluation processes provided in the curriculum and the teacher’s guidebook could be reviewed for adaptation, TA thinks that designing a curriculum intended for village schools would be a significant step.

“The philosophy of the curriculum is based on student-oriented teaching. This is quite important. On the other hand, a curriculum taking into account the conditions of village schools with multigrade classes could be designed. A life in the village could be more emphasized and thus the students would be able to give more examples from their environment during teaching activities (RI, 8 / D).”

TA thinks that introduction of activities encouraging students to participate more actively in teaching and learning process and providing activity books in this respect would be more useful than allocating time for some unnecessary bureaucratic procedures contained in the scope of the curriculum.

“The curriculum requires certain evaluation scale forms to be filled. We are also required to fill up other documents. For instance, a supervisor visits the school and asks whether I filled up a certain form or performed a certain task. As a teacher, we are required to carry out these tasks but it would be more efficient to allocate time for various teaching activities instead of these bureaucratic procedures. For instance, I think that additional activity books could be designed and provided to teachers (RI, 8 / E).”

Amongst the suggestions put forward by TA for more efficient teaching of social studies lesson, the following suggestions are significant: the curriculum should also take into account the conditions of village schools, the quality of internet access should be increased and learning environment with the Internet support should be provided. In addition, the conditions of village schools with multigrade classes should be considered and more comprehensive activity books should be provided to be used in these schools.

Conclusions

In this case study, the opinions of a classroom teacher instructing in a village school with multigrade class on the nature of social studies and the social studies curriculum were analyzed and identified based on the questions designed within the scope of three main

themes titled as *the nature of the social studies lesson, opinions on the social studies curriculum* and *opinions on more efficient application of the social studies curriculum in village schools*.

Based on the findings obtained from the study, the teacher participated in the study maintained a consistent perspective about the nature of social studies. TA perceives social studies as a lesson that helps students acquire a good character and provides an insight to understand the society in which they live. In particular, TA makes a good point by emphasizing that social studies as a lesson which helps students build a good character and make sense of the culture of the society in which they live is the core component and focus of the primary school curriculum as a whole. Within the scope of the issues emphasized in the social studies curriculum and in consideration of TA's emphasis on the contributions of the social studies lesson to an individual to become a productive and capable citizen among the society, TA indeed displays a comprehensive perspective on the nature of the social studies lesson. Based on the literature review of the descriptions of social studies, the perceptions of TA about the nature of social studies have also been found to be consistent. For instance, Sönmez (2005) described social studies as a process of association based on proof provided by environmental and social reality whereas Öztürk and Dilek (2005) described it as a lesson that enables primary school students during the first three grades to acquire basic behaviors required to become a good individual and a good citizen in addition to adapting to their environment as a productive individual with good nature. The fact that the teacher comprehends the nature of social studies or more precisely the fact that the teacher has a consistent and realistic perspective about the objectives, development process and the function of social studies has a crucial effect on the perception about teaching of the lesson. Based on the process of interview with TA and class observations, the student-oriented activities carried out by the teacher in the social studies lesson and the fact that she pays attention to the attainments result from the teacher's perspective about the nature of social studies. As a matter of fact, this issue was greatly emphasized in the interviews with TA during the analysis process. The fact that the teacher had a full grasp of the nature of the teaching field was also a crucial variable for the expectations and attitudes of the teacher towards the lesson (Fishman *et al.*, 2013). In this context, this finding obtained from the research was also consistent with the literature (Bartos & Lederman, 2014; Cess-Newsome, 1999; Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 1999; Nilsson, 2008; Nilsson & Loughran, 2012).

The opinions on the social studies curriculum have been obtained within the context of the elements of the curriculum. In this scope, the opinions of the teacher on the attainments have been obtained in the first place. TA thinks that the attainments are in the core of the social studies curriculum. TA stated that although most of the attainments are applicable for the intellectual level of the students, she considered that some attainments were designed without taking into account village schools and schools with multigrade classes. A review of various studies on the social studies curriculum indicates similar findings to those included in this study. The findings of the studies conducted on this subject indicate that the attainments contained in the new curriculum overlook the conditions of multigrade classes and village schools (Gür, 2009; Sınmaz, 2009; Kazu and Aslan, 2012; Kudal and Altun, 2012).

An analysis of the opinions on the social studies curriculum and its context indicates that the teacher participated in this study has positive opinions on the contextual structure of the curriculum. In particular, TA emphasized that the design of the textbooks and workbooks clearly reflects the spirit of the curriculum whereas she stated that it is very important in terms of teaching purposes that the curriculum has been designed in a simple and straightforward fashion. This finding of the study is also consistent with the findings of other studies on this subject. Kazu and Aslan (2012) also stated in their research that teachers in general favor the contextual elements of the curriculum and textbooks whereas Gözler (2009) has also obtained similar findings. In addition, Voltz, Sims & Nelson (2010) also emphasized that the textbooks, interactive applications, and workbooks used during the teaching process had a positive contribution to the students with regards to focusing on the lesson.

An analysis of the opinions on teaching and learning activities within the scope of the social studies curriculum indicates that TA adopted student-oriented activities in line with the principles stipulated in the curriculum. On the other hand, TA stated that she was unable to make efficient use of some activities contained in the teacher's guidebooks since these chapters of the curriculum were designed based on urban schools in general. Nevertheless, she points out the fact that the textbooks and workbooks intended for the students are quite practical and useful in terms of teaching and learning activities. Kazu and Aslan (2012), as well as Gözler (2009) stated in their studies that teachers are often unable to make efficient use of some activities contained in the new curriculum although

they consider such activities would be beneficial. As a matter of fact, Dursun (2006) and Dalka (2006) stated that the activities contained in the new primary school curriculum were not efficiently applicable for schools with multigrade classes. In this context, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of the previous studies. The findings obtained under this heading were also consistent with the foreign literature. In a study in which the integration of the information technologies to teaching and learning process was discussed, Buabeng-Andoh (2012) emphasized that environmental factors had both positive and negative effects on the teaching process undertaken by teachers. This condition is also considered to be influential in the motivation process. The students in the classrooms with relatively better environmental conditions compared to those of other classrooms were found to have higher motivation levels for their lessons. In this context, the methods and techniques used during teaching and learning process were also considered to be crucial variables (Dinç & Doğan, 2010; Entwisle, 2013; Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2012).

Based on the analysis of the answers provided under Social Studies Curriculum and Evaluation Process, it was found out that the evaluation activities of the curriculum are in line with the constructivist approach but such activities are often inapplicable for village schools with multigrade classes. Some of the possible causes of this case are composed of factors such as class structure (at least two classes are instructed in one classroom), conditions of the village, and lack of class equipment for teaching and learning purposes. A review of literature indicates similar findings have been obtained in previous studies (Gündoğar, 2006; Kazu and Aslan, 2012; Özden, 2005; Yıldız, 2009). As a matter of fact, the literature demonstrated that the conditions surrounding teachers had an influence on the quality of the applications during the practice of the activities included in the constructivist evaluation applications and the curriculum. Windschitl (2002) emphasized that the challenges encountered by teachers emerge as an important problem in practice. Onosko (1991) stated that any problem encountered by teachers was a challenging obstacle against the achievement of high-level thinking skills and indicated that this obstacle resulted that the lessons focused on lower cognitive products. Furthermore, Killen (2012) indicated that unfavorable classroom size and technological incapacity could be considered as significant disadvantages to hinder an effective teaching and learning process.

The final question of the study is associated with suggestions about more efficient application of the social studies curriculum in village schools and schools with multigrade classes. The findings related to this question indicate that the teacher's guidebooks and some of the attainments contained in the curriculum have been designed without taking into account the conditions of village schools. Furthermore, it is also suggested that evaluation activities could be designed in a simpler fashion and the number of bureaucratic documents required to be filled with regard to the teaching process could be reduced so as to enable the teacher to focus on the teaching process in a more efficient way. Other suggestions include more efficient provision of the Internet access and improvement of the Internet connection speed with an aim to deal with the problems encountered during the teaching process. Designing a new curriculum intended for village schools and provision of more equipment to village schools for the purposes of teaching and learning process would contribute significantly to more efficient teaching of the social studies lesson. A review of literature with regard to this question of the study indicates that similar findings have been found in previous studies (Özden, 2005; Kuzu and Aslan, 2012; Özden, 2005; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Woods, Dooley, Luke, & Exley, 2014).

Suggestions

- 1- Teachers should be educated in an efficient way prior to serving as a teacher in order to have a sound perspective on the nature of social studies since comprehension of the nature of social studies plays an important role in teaching activities.
- 2- The social studies curriculum and the materials required in association with the curriculum should be reviewed in order to take into account the social and economic conditions of village schools.
- 3- Improvement of the Internet access facilities, connection speed and quality in village schools would contribute significantly to the teaching quality of the social studies lesson. For this reason, the Internet access facilities in village schools should be improved.
- 4- The bureaucratic procedures such as evaluation forms and filling up documents required within the scope of the curriculum should be minimized to help teachers dwell on the problems of teaching and focus on such problems encountered during the teaching process.

- 5- Workbook sets containing further activities in addition to textbooks and activity books could be designed and provided to village schools with a view to significantly improve the quality of teaching service.

Recommendation for Further Studies

This study was conducted in a small village school with idiosyncratic conditions. In this context, the level of generalization of case studies can be considered to be lower compared to that of quantitative studies; however, they may provide guidance to quantitative studies through the extensive and comprehensive information they obtain. From this point of view, conducting a study on a larger sample and conducting a survey on the teachers instructing in a multigrade class may significantly contribute to the generalization of the findings throughout the world. Similarly, qualitative research on the teachers and school directors may also contribute to the analysis of various aspects related to the subject matter. For example, problems such as teachers' opinions on the technology integration in the social studies lesson, or the effects of constructivist evaluation applications on the academic achievement and attitudes towards the lesson may positively contribute to the quality of teaching of social studies. Moreover, analyses of classroom teachers' perception about the curriculum as well as their commitment to the curriculum and their ability to efficiently apply the curriculum may also contribute to deepening the perspective provided in this study.

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