

TEACHING AND LEARNING OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES IN TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract – *This study investigates how teachers and students assess curriculum implementation in social studies courses at middle school in Turkey. Through a survey questionnaire, teachers and students were asked to express their perceptions of the curriculum guidelines, course objectives, materials and instructional and evaluation procedures. The results indicated that the curriculum guidelines assist teachers in selection of the topics and their sequence in all social studies courses. However, they do not leave much room for flexibility to the individual teacher in these aspects. Teachers find less help in the guidelines in terms of determining instructional methods, materials and evaluation strategies they use in their class. The curriculum focuses mostly on transmission of knowledge while other significant goals like developing thinking skills, positive attitudes toward the subject are emphasized to a lesser degree, and this orientation seems to be reflected in implementation as well. The most common approach to classroom instruction in social studies is recitation and lecturing followed by student presentation. The use of materials other than the course textbook is very limited, and textbook-related activity (e.g., reading) is the common mode of homework assignment given to the students. Short-answer test and oral exams are the most common mode of student evaluation in social studies classes.*

Introduction

This study is part of a larger research project designed to investigate social studies teaching at middle and high school level in Turkey. The purpose of this paper specifically is to assess curriculum implementation in social studies courses at the middle school level from the perspectives of teachers and students.

Although the literature presents a variety of perspectives about the purpose of social studies, the broad goal of social studies can be defined as follows: "To prepare youth so that they possess the knowledge, values, and skills needed for active participation in society" (Marker and Mehlinger 1992: 832). There seems to be an agreement that social studies education has four major elements: knowledge, skills, values, and participation. The knowledge component includes

relevant facts and data, concepts and generalisations, and explanatory theories; the skills component requires students to acquire, judge and process information; the values component refers to democratic principles and commitment; finally, the participation component helps students gain experience in the practice of citizenship in the society (National Council for the Social Studies, 1979).

Citizenship is the ultimate justification for social studies teaching to many educators. Social studies is viewed as an important part of general education especially in its function in contributing to educating democratic citizens. *"The democratic citizen is not to be understood merely in the classic 'good citizenship' sense of one who is patriotic, loyal, and obedient to the state; rather the good citizen is also a critic of the state, one who is able and willing to participate in its improvement"* (Engle and Ochoa 1988: 3). In this sense, social studies for middle school students is especially critical because they begin to form their own values, life views, and modes of living during that period. In addition, *"social studies is the study of people and their interactions with one another. It focuses directly on human events and human behavior"* (Ellis et al. 1991: 5). So the challenge for social studies teaching at this level is to reach a reasonable accommodation between socialisation of youth and the development of their critical capabilities. To achieve this goal successfully, social studies curriculum should include topics that engage students' interests, respond to their needs in daily life and develop their perspectives in thinking about social issues. In addition, *"learning activities should be varied because of the short attention span of students; they should include both physical and social involvement, such as role playing and simulations, and should involve both inquiry and didactic teaching and learning"* (Hartoonian & Laughlin 1989: 395).

To what degree do we achieve these goals in teaching social studies? What type of instructional environment do we create in teaching social studies and what kind of impact does it have on our students? The literature indicates that teaching of social studies suffers heavily from dull learning environment, routine instructional activities and student misconceptions about the subject matter. Students feel that both social studies subject matter and teaching methods are simply boring because of passive learning and little variety in teaching methods. In addition, students do not perceive social studies as particularly interesting and important because they find little meaning for their future lives. Ellis et al. (1991) attribute this perception to social educators' poor performance in communicating the importance of social studies to young people. Shaughnessy and Haladyna (1985) found in their review of research that one of the least favorite subjects of students in elementary and secondary schools is social studies. Actually, their negative attitudes toward social studies become more prevalent in higher grade levels. Other studies also indicate that students do not view social studies as

particularly important and do not remember any significant activity from those classes, suggesting that the classroom environment and teacher instructional decisions might be at least partially responsible for producing such negative student attitudes. Supporting this view, a large scale study on social studies in the 1980s (Project SPAN-Social Studies Priorities, Practice, and Needs) revealed that active learning methods such as inquiry, discovery, community-based learning, and simulations were rarely used in social studies classes (Social Science Education consortium, Inc., 1982).

The 1984 NCSS Bulletin (No: 72), *Citizenship and the Critical Role of the Social Studies*, provided an extensive list of recommendations to create an active learning environment in social studies classrooms and to have a positive impact on students' citizenship skills. They included carrying out social-political action projects (e.g. becoming involved in political campaigns and working with legislators), community projects (e.g., student work in health clinics), student volunteer services (e.g., work in day care centers), community study (e.g., survey of attitudes on current issues), and internships (e.g. time spent with prosecutors, welfare workers). In addition, the Bulletin suggested that teachers should assess their own teaching methods and plan to incorporate a new technique each year, provide students with at least one term learning experience each year that requires initiative and active participation, focus on skills involving active acquisition of information, organising and using it, and increasing interpersonal relationships and social participation, take advantage of programmes and projects that require active involvement, and involve students in recruiting and using community resource people (Parker and Jarolimek: 1984). These recommendations show that there are a variety of ways to make social studies instruction more active and meaningful for the students.

In Turkey's middle schools, social studies are organised separately around three academic disciplines, namely History, Geography and Civics. History is taught for three years (grades 6-8) while Geography for two (grades 6 and 7) and Civics for one (grade 8). There is no specific programme training Civics teachers; Civics is a minor for Geography and History teachers. However, in practice, since the teaching load is heavy for History teachers, Geography teachers generally are given the responsibility to teach Civics.

Until 1984, an integrated approach was used in designing the curriculum and teaching in social studies in middle schools. However, in 1984, the Ministry of Education adapted a separate organisation for social studies courses because of the belief that it allowed a rigorous and intellectually demanding focus during instruction. This approach has allowed the strict control of the process and contents of subject matter, and textbooks have served as the major element of structure in curriculum (Yildirim 1994).

Clear, detailed and well-organised curriculum guides having curricular validity in the eyes of local educators may be an effective tool for teachers in social studies instruction (Archbald 1994). The curriculum for any social studies course in all primary and secondary schools in Turkey is prepared and approved by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). All teachers have to use the centrally designed curriculum in their respective area. Their course plans and implementation in the classroom are checked on a regular basis each academic year by the MONE inspectors to oversee the teachers' compliance with the standard curriculum. Although the curriculum guidelines vary in terms of their length, detail and approach, any curriculum includes at least the goals and objectives of the course and the list of units and topics to be taught.

A typical middle school social studies curriculum guideline outlines the objectives, explanations about the implementation of the guideline and the major topics. There is a separate curriculum guideline for each social studies course (History, Geography, and Civics). In the objectives section, the curriculum guideline specifies the related knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be developed in students. For example, in the History curriculum guidelines which have a total of nine general objectives, the first objective states that "*students should understand the significance of Turkish Nation in World History, its honorable past and status, the service to humankind and developing world culture and civilization*" (Ministry of National Education, 1984). The guidelines do not specify behavioral objectives for instruction as it is done in some primary school level curriculum guidelines. In the explanations section, the teacher is provided with some suggestions and directions as regard to instruction, assignments, evaluation of students success. In this section, links are made to course objectives, and ways to reach them are outlined in general terms. For example, in the History curriculum guidelines, teachers are urged to take their students to the museums or historical sites to establish connection between the content and the related historical artifacts and documents. Finally, in the topics section, topics and sub-topics are listed for each middle school grade. The content outline is very much like the table of contents of a textbook. No content explanations or directions are provided in this section. These characteristics apply to most curriculum guidelines at middle school level.

The standardised curriculum has an immense impact on teaching practices since it controls the scope and sequence, and does not allow much flexibility to the teacher. In the past few years, there have been intensive discussions at the MONE level on relaxing this strict control over the course curricula to allow more teacher flexibility, adaptation, input and creativity in practice, but it appears that it is unlikely to put this idea into practice in the near future.

The goals of social studies instruction fall into four categories: knowledge, skills, values and participation. All these goals are more or less evident in the curriculum guidelines for all three social studies courses. In addition, the guidelines recommend the use of various instructional materials and strategies to involve students in their learning more actively. However, it remains unclear as to what degree social studies teaching leads to achieving the main goals stated above. It is also unclear about how the curriculum is perceived and actualised by both teachers and students. Despite a long standing commitment to social studies education in middle schools in Turkey, relatively few researchers have examined the substance of classroom life, teachers' and students' experiences, and the outcomes of actual curriculum implementation for students. In this sense, the perceptions of teachers and students in social studies courses might be important in understanding the social studies teaching and learning process, and their possible impact on students.

Methods

The study design included 88 middle schools in 22 provinces representing the seven geographic regions in Turkey. These schools were selected by the Ministry of National Education's Educational Research and Development Directorate randomly by taking into consideration the criteria given by the researcher. The criteria included representation of all seven geographic regions, 2-4 provinces in each geographic area, and 3-6 schools in each province. The selected schools were considered representative of the middle schools in Turkey. The main data sources were History, Geography and Civics (referred to as social studies hereafter) teachers and students taking any of these courses at all three grade levels. While all social studies teachers in the selected schools were asked to participate in the study, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select students representing all grade levels and different social studies courses.

Two separate questionnaires were designed for these two groups to explore their perceptions of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses. The teacher questionnaire had two closely parallel versions: one asked the History teachers to evaluate History courses while the other asked the Geography teachers to evaluate Geography and Civics courses together since Geography teachers generally taught Civics as well. The student questionnaire had six parallel versions designed for each social studies course at each grade level, asking students to evaluate a specific social studies course they were taking.

The questionnaires included both open- and close-ended questions on the quality of the curriculum guidelines, the degree of success in achieving curriculum

goals through teaching, the perceptions of course objectives, content, materials and instructional and evaluation procedures.

The questionnaires and were mailed to one social studies teacher in each sampled school. This person administered both teacher and student questionnaires and sent them back to the researcher. As a result, a total of 262 teacher (out of 360 mailed) and 1203 student (out of 1600 mailed) questionnaires were secured for analysis. This represented a 73% return rate for the teacher sample and 75% for the student sample.

The study sample represented both History and Geography teachers almost equally (49% and 51% respectively). Teachers formed three main groups in terms of their field of study during their pre-service education programs. More than one third (36%) studied Geography; 33% Social Studies and 27% History. A minority (4%) were educated in other subjects like Theology, Mathematics and Geology but somehow were hired to teach social studies courses as a result of lack of sufficient number of subject specific teachers available. Since History, Geography and Civics were taught together under Social Studies until 1984, there had been programmes training social studies teachers before 1984. Later, they were converted to subject specific programmes like History or Geography. As a result, it has become a reality for Turkish middle schools to have both social studies and subject specific teachers under the same roof teaching similar courses.

Both female and male teachers were almost equally represented in the study (51% and 49% respectively). More than half of the teachers had 11-20 years of teaching experience (59%) while 21% had 1-10 years and 20% more than 20 years of teaching experience. The majority of teachers (67%) had a four year undergraduate degree in a subject area, while close to one third (30%) graduated from a three year teacher training institute. Only few (3%) had master's or doctoral degrees. More than four-fifths of the teachers (81%) taught more than 25 hours per week, indicating the heavy teaching load on a typical middle school teacher. Of those, 55% indicated more than 30 hours of teaching load per week. The number of students in a class also influences the quality of teaching and learning process to a certain degree. Close to two thirds of the teachers (64%) had more than 40 students in their class while 28% had between 31-40 and only 8% had less than 31 students.

The student sample represented different social studies subject areas: History covering all three middle school grades were represented by 610 students, Geography covering 6th and 7th grades by 418 and Civics at the 8th grade by 175. Of the whole student sample, 47% were female and 53% male. In terms of the education level of students' parents, the mothers had an average of primary and the fathers had an average of middle school education.

Descriptive (mainly percentages and means) and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data collected through close-ended questions. Both separate and combined analyses were conducted on teacher and student questionnaires by subject area to see whether there were subject specific differences in their responses. The responses to the questions were more or less consistent across all social studies subject areas, therefore, combined analyses were used to reach the results for this paper. In addition, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyse the differences in the responses based on certain background variables, and the results indicated that most of the background variables did not cause any significant difference in the subjects' perceptions. Thematic categories were established to analyse the open-ended data. In this process, a sample of questionnaires (approximately 30 from each group) were selected randomly, and responses were categorised according to the main themes identified. Then all open-ended data were coded and analysed according to these categories.

Results

Results are organised in two parts. First, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum guidelines they use in teaching History, Geography and/or Civics are examined. Then, both teachers' and students' assessment of the teaching and learning process in social studies courses in terms of teaching/learning activities, instructional materials, types of assignments and evaluation methods used are presented.

Teachers' perceptions of curriculum guidelines

As mentioned above, instruction in Turkish primary and secondary schools is greatly affected by the centralised curriculum design and inspection by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). Every teacher is supposed to follow the standardised curriculum guidelines at both planning and instruction stages. Recent curriculum guidelines produced by the MONE allow a certain level of flexibility in determining the content, method and evaluation of instruction in order to meet the contextual needs and give the teacher a certain level of freedom in creating an effective teaching and learning environment.

In the first section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to evaluate the course curriculum guideline prepared by the MONE in terms of its contribution to determining the scope and sequence, preparing yearly and unit plans, choosing appropriate teaching strategies, course related materials and evaluation strategies. Table 1 presents their responses.

TABLE 1: Impact of Curriculum Guideline on Teacher Planning and Instructional Activities

ACTIVITIES	VH (5)	H (4)	SH (3)	LH (2)	NH (1)	MEAN	N
Determining the topics to be taught	35.6	23.5	30.0	2.8	8.1	3.76	247
Deciding on the sequence of the topics	37.1	22.9	29.0	2.9	8.2	3.78	245
Preparing yearly plans	49.2	26.6	20.1	1.6	2.5	4.19	244
Preparing unit plans	30.6	20.9	29.1	4.6	14.8	3.48	196
Choosing/using appropriate teaching strategies	–	6.6	35.8	32.1	25.5	2.24	243
Choosing/using course-related materials	.8	3.3	41.0	28.3	26.6	2.23	244
Choosing/using evaluation strategies	1.2	2.0	46.1	31.0	19.6	2.34	245

VH=Very Helpful, H=Helpful, SH=Somewhat Helpful, LH=Of Little Help, NH=Not Helpful.

In this table and the following ones, the data are presented in percentages and means, and N's for each item vary due to missing responses.

The responses indicate that the teachers find the curriculum guidelines prepared centrally helpful in certain respects but not very helpful in others. The guidelines appears to be assisting the teacher in determining the course topics to be taught and their sequence at a certain grade level. The curriculum guidelines are found most helpful in preparing the annual plans which every teacher must design and seek approval for from the school principal at the beginning of the academic year. The teachers also receive a good amount of help from the guidelines in preparing unit plans but not as much as in the case of the annual plans. One reason might be that the curriculum guidelines are usually not very detailed in terms of objectives and classroom activities. Such details must appear in every unit plan. The teacher may therefore not depend entirely on the guidelines in preparing the unit plans.

The respondents find the curriculum less helpful in choosing and using appropriate teaching strategies, course-related materials and evaluation strategies. These results indicate that the curriculum guidelines draw the boundaries of instruction in terms of the scope and sequence, but do not contribute much to classroom activities. This has been the traditional approach to centrally guided teaching. The content is controlled strictly in terms of what will be taught and in what sequence, and how much time will be spent on each topic. However, the questions of how this content is taught, what kinds of support materials should be

used and how, and how student learning of the content should be evaluated are not dealt in the curriculum guidelines to the degree that they assist the teacher in increasing the quality of teaching.

With regard to the use of curriculum guidelines, the teachers were also asked to comment on the extent to which it allowed flexibility in carrying out the same activities mentioned above. The results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Flexibility Provided by Curriculum Guideline in Teacher Planning and Instructional Activities

ACTIVITIES	VF (5)	F (4)	SF (3)	LF (2)	NF (1)	MEAN	N
Determining the topics to be taught	–	2.1	47.1	21.4	29.4	2.22	238
Deciding on the sequence of the topics	1.2	10.2	56.6	18.3	13.6	2.67	235
Preparing yearly plans	.4	10.1	42.8	29.6	17.0	2.49	229
Preparing unit plans	1.6	14.3	39.0	23.1	22.0	2.51	182
Choosing/using appropriate teaching strategies	14.0	24.2	39.0	7.2	15.7	3.14	236
Choosing/using course-related materials	9.5	22.0	42.7	10.8	15.1	3.00	232
Choosing/using evaluation strategies	14.0	17.9	41.0	9.2	17.9	3.01	229

VF=Very Flexible, F=Flexible, SF=Somewhat Flexible, LF=Limited Flexibility, NF=Not Flexible.

Teachers find little flexibility in the curriculum guidelines in determining the topics to be taught, deciding on the sequence of the topics, preparing yearly and unit plans. In particular, flexibility is very limited in the selection of topics. Teachers find a little more flexibility in doing the yearly and unit plans as well as determining the sequence. Flexibility is greater in the areas of teaching strategies, selection of course-related materials and determining evaluation strategies. These findings are in line with those discussed in Table 1. Since the curriculum guidelines do not provide much help in these areas, teachers feel they enjoy somewhat more flexibility in deciding and using appropriate teaching activities, materials and evaluation methods. Furthermore, since the guidelines strictly control the determination of the topics and their sequence, it gives a limited flexibility to the teachers in these respects in addition to preparing yearly and unit plans.

Any curriculum has a certain emphasis in terms of content, skills, attitudes and other areas in teaching. Some curricula attempt to establish a balance among different purposes while others give priority to one or more of them and ignore others to a large degree. Within this context, teachers were asked to indicate the level of significance the curriculum guidelines placed on different kinds of purposes. As summarised in Table 3, teachers perceive that the curriculum guidelines mainly focuses on transmission of subject specific content, and all other purposes are attended to a lesser degree in the guidelines. This perception may have important implications for instructional practices in the classroom. The teaching process may focus mainly on presenting knowledge and asking it back in the exams, and ignore other important goals like developing positive attitudes toward the subject area, improving thinking, study/research skills, and social skills which we need to contribute to social life and lead a productive life. These are the areas almost any educational system emphasises in its general education goals, however, they seem to be less stressed in the specific subject curriculum.

TABLE 3: Level of Significance Placed on Different Purposes by Curriculum Guideline

PURPOSES	VS (5)	S (4)	SS (3)	LS (2)	NS (1)	MEAN	N
Teaching of knowledge (e.g., facts, principles)	35.1	32.2	31.4	.8	.4	4.01	242
Developing positive attitude toward subject area	4.2	15.8	48.8	19.6	11.7	2.81	240
Promoting thinking skills (e.g., analysis)	1.2	16.2	52.7	16.2	13.7	2.75	241
Improving study and research skills	1.7	14.3	47.9	18.5	17.6	2.64	238
Developing social skills (eg, participation)	2.1	13.2	42.3	16.7	25.6	2.61	234

VS=Very Significant, S=Significant, SS=Somewhat Significant, LS=Limited Significance, NS=Not Significant.

The balance among these areas is of special importance to social studies teaching because knowledge, skills, values and participation components work most effectively in helping the student socialise and develop critical capabilities at the same time. The level of attention these goals receive in the curriculum guidelines is significant because it will probably influence what goes on in the classroom. In relation to this question, teachers were asked to what degree these purposes are promoted through classroom instruction. The curriculum guidelines

may not emphasise certain goals but the teachers themselves may somehow be able to address them through their teaching. Table 4 displays the responses of the teachers.

TABLE 4: *Level of Promotion of Different Purposes Through Instruction*

PURPOSES	HP (5)	P (4)	SP (3)	LP (2)	NP (1)	MEAN	N
Teaching of knowledge (e.g., facts, principles)	13.7	32.6	50.6	2.1	.9	3.56	233
Developing positive attitude toward subject area	4.3	16.0	53.7	18.6	7.4	2.91	231
Promoting thinking skills (e.g., analysis)	1.7	15.5	48.1	20.6	14.2	2.70	233
Improving study and research skills	1.7	11.3	54.5	18.2	14.3	2.68	231
Developing social skills (e.g., group work)	1.8	9.6	46.1	16.2	26.3	2.44	228

HP=Highly Promoted, P=Promoted, SP=Somewhat Promoted, LP=Little Promotion, NP=Not Promoted.

The responses indicate that knowledge transmission is achieved to a large degree while other goals like improving thinking skills, promoting study and research skills, developing positive attitude toward subject area and developing social skills are only addressed in a limited way. These responses are consistent with the curricular emphasis as discussed above. Teachers perceive that the curriculum guidelines, by their heavy emphasis on content, do not leave much room for addressing other important goals. There may be several reasons for this result. Teachers may feel constrained in terms of time by the topics listed in the curriculum, and they may not be able to find sufficient time to have discussion, group work, research projects and other activities which are likely to promote thinking, study, research, social skills and positive attitudes toward subject area.

Given these characteristics, it is important to understand how teachers perceive the overall adequacy of the curriculum guideline and the reasons for it. In response to a close-ended question, teachers say that the guideline is only somewhat adequate in assisting them in their teaching (Mean = 1.97 on a scale where 1 = 'not adequate at all', 2 = 'somewhat adequate', and 3 = 'quite adequate').

In response to a related open-ended question, teachers explain the deficiencies about the curriculum guidelines. Most of their complaints focus on the lack of assistance in teaching activities, materials and evaluation ideas and the

inflexibility in choosing the topics and deciding about their sequence. They say they need more help from the curriculum guidelines in planning their lessons, deciding on teaching strategies, materials and a certain level of assistance in measuring student achievement. In these respects, the curriculum is found to be very general and not practical. A number of teachers perceive that the topics in the curriculum are overloaded when the time they have to teach them is taken into consideration. Some teachers find problems in the curriculum in terms of the sequence of the topics since the current sequence is not very helpful in forming a meaningful whole. Others complain that the topics in the curriculum are not selected according to the interests of the students, resulting in an undesired attitude on the part of the students toward the course in class. They suggest that the curriculum needs to be redesigned in order to better respond to the level of the students and the needs of the environmental characteristics of the individual school. In addition, the teachers prefer a certain level of flexibility in deciding on the topics and their sequence according to the student body they serve.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning activities

A major challenge in social studies teaching is to provide a reasonable balance between the three goals of promoting knowledge, study and thinking skills, and values and participation objectives, and to use these goals in support of each other. In order to achieve that, the social studies teacher should vary learning activities to allow active student involvement in the learning process. Deductive approaches (like lecturing and recitation) should be balanced with inductive strategies (like

TABLE 5: Frequency of Different Teaching Strategies Used in Class (Teachers' Responses)

TEACHING STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	MEAN	N
Lecturing	14.9	34.0	33.2	15.3	2.6	3.43	235
Question-answer (Recitation)	56.6	38.2	4.8	4	-	4.51	249
Discussion	10.3	15.6	46.1	21.4	6.6	3.02	243
Group activity	5.0	8.6	35.3	31.2	20.0	2.48	221
Student presentation	16.6	25.1	38.3	17.0	3.0	3.53	235
Quiet reading from textbook	-	2.3	14.3	34.3	49.1	1.70	175
Role playing/Simulation	3.1	5.2	23.1	32.3	36.2	2.07	229

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

discussion, role playing) so that students develop both social and critical capabilities together. To explore what goes on in social studies classes in this respect, both teachers and students were asked to indicate the frequency of different teaching strategies they use/are exposed to in class. Table 5 presents teachers' and Table 6 presents students' responses to this question.

According to the teachers, the most frequent teaching strategy used is recitation, through which the teacher asks students questions to check their understanding of the content. Student presentation is the second most frequent teaching strategy, and lecturing is the third. It is interesting that student presentations are used frequently as a mode of teaching and learning. These findings are somewhat contrary to the assumption that lecturing is the most common mode of teaching in social studies. Teachers appear to rely heavily on recitation in their teaching while they also use lecturing and student presentations noticeably. Discussion is used sometimes, and the frequency for group activity is ranked somewhere between 'sometimes' and 'rarely', indicating that both strategies are not commonly used in class. Other activities like role playing/simulation and quiet reading from textbook are used rarely.

TABLE 6: Frequency of Different Teaching Strategies Used in Class (Students' Responses)

TEACHING STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	MEAN	N
Lecturing	61.1	25.1	9.1	2.7	2.0	4.41	1191
Question-answer (Recitation)	31.8	30.9	27.8	6.3	3.2	3.82	1184
Discussion	8.3	14.4	35.9	20.2	21.2	2.68	1177
Group activity	11.2	7.6	16.1	12.5	52.6	2.12	1165
Student presentation	42.0	17.6	17.8	11.9	10.6	3.69	1173
Quiet reading from textbook	13.5	11.7	25.5	17.0	32.4	2.57	1173
Role playing/Simulation	7.4	7.5	15.4	15.3	54.5	1.98	1164

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Table 6 presents students' perceptions of instructional activities in terms of their frequency. Students report that the most frequently used teaching strategy is lecturing, a point contrary to what the teachers report with regard to the same question. The second most frequently used teaching strategy is recitation followed by student presentation. Discussion and quiet reading are used sometimes while group activity and role playing/simulation are used only rarely.

TABLE 7: Use of Course-Related Support Materials (According to Teachers and Students)

	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	MEAN	N
How often are support materials used?							
Teachers	6.7	8.9	20.1	17.0	47.3	2.11	224
Students	7.8	4.6	6.8	7.6	73.2	1.66	1177
How often should support materials be used?							
Teachers	34.9	36.1	18.1	4.2	6.7	3.88	238
Students	38.8	17.1	14.3	22.0	7.8	3.73	1176

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Certain points students make with regard to the frequency of teaching activities they are exposed to in class are different from what teachers report. First of all, as mentioned above, the most common mode of instruction is lecturing according to the students, while teachers claim that they use recitation most often in class. Second, discussion and group activity are not used as often as teachers report. Third, according to students, quiet reading from textbook is used sometimes, while teachers report that they use quiet reading only rarely. The reasons for these differences are not very clear in the data. One possible explanation might be that the teachers do not want to report that activity since it implies that the teacher does not want to make an effort to teach in class but leaves the responsibility to the student through quiet reading.

In addition to teaching strategies, the kinds of materials used in instruction are important to make social studies learning more active, meaningful and long-term. Traditionally, the textbook is the most dominant instructional material used; however, the degree to which other supporting materials are used in class is unclear. To examine this issue, both teachers and students were asked to report on the frequency of use of course-related materials other than textbooks (Table 7).

Both teachers and students report that the use of course-related materials other than textbooks in class is rare. This implies that the instructional activities are heavily dependent on the textbook. Although both groups fall in the range of 'rarely' in terms of their ratings, students seem to experience the lack of use of instructional materials more often than their teachers do. As the second part of

Table 7 displays, both teachers and students claim that course-related materials should be used more often than they are presently. This indicates that both groups feel the need for additional course materials assuming that they will result in an increase in the quality of the teaching and learning process.

The kinds of assignments given have a special significance in social studies teaching since they can contribute to various goals (e.g. thinking skills, participation) if used effectively. In order to understand how often certain types of assignments allowing different kinds of learning experiences are given to students in social studies courses, assignments were grouped in three categories and teachers were asked to indicate how often they assigned them to their students (Table 8).

TABLE 8: Use of Different Types of Assignments in Terms of Frequency

ASSIGNMENTS	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	MEAN	N
Textbook-related assignments (e.g., reading, question answering)	33.6	39.8	12.3	7.8	6.6	3.86	244
Library-related assignments (e.g., newspaper search, literature review)	2.4	17.6	57.1	18.8	4.1	2.96	245
Field studies/projects (e.g., interview, observation)	.4	7.0	29.8	42.6	20.2	2.49	242

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Teachers report that they mostly assign textbook-related homework, such as reading a chapter or section, and answering the end-of-chapter questions. While they often give assignments from the textbook, they sometimes assign library research assignments, while field studies (e.g., observations and interviews) are set only rarely. In response to an open-ended question asking whether they assigned any other types of assignments to their students, a great majority do not report any while few mention other textbook-related activities like summarising or writing questions on certain topics. Overall, assignments are mostly confined to textbook-related tasks, and other options are not given much priority. This heavy emphasis on textbook may help in promotion of content transmission, but may not be effective in reaching other significant purposes of social studies teaching.

Student evaluation is an important concern to teachers of all subject areas. However, it poses challenges, particularly to social studies teachers. For example, while multiple-choice type measurement instruments can be confidently used to measure success in many subject areas like Mathematics and certain sciences, they become problematic to a certain extent in social studies classes. First of all, there might be multiple realities in certain social studies content. Second, knowledge itself may be less important than what a student can do with it. Often it becomes important to measure higher levels of thinking rather than just knowledge and comprehension of certain content. Third, attitudes and social skills are among the important areas all social studies courses try to address. These and similar other features of social studies course make student evaluation a difficult and challenging task for the teacher.

Teachers were asked to indicate the frequency of certain evaluation strategies they use in their classes. The strategies were grouped in four categories: objective tests (e.g. multiple-choice, true-false, matching), short answer tests (where knowledge and comprehension are measured through students' own statements of their understanding of content), essay tests (where the student is given more flexibility in forming their own responses and more opportunity to involve his/her own thoughts in responses), and finally oral exams (where the student answers teachers' questions – short answer mostly – orally in front of the whole class). Table 9 presents teachers' use of different types of evaluation strategies in terms of their frequency.

Teachers report that they use short answer tests very often, oral exams sometimes and objective tests and essay tests only rarely. The preferences for using certain evaluation strategies more often than others are explained in teachers' responses to an open-ended question asking them to comment on the tests they use.

TABLE 9: Use of Different Types of Evaluation Strategies

EVALUATION STRATEGIES	VO (5)	O (4)	S (3)	R (2)	N (1)	MEAN	N
Objective tests (e.g., multiple choice, true-false, matching)	3.1	12.3	25.0	28.1	31.6	2.27	228
Short answer tests	68.8	27.9	2.0	.8	.4	4.64	247
Essay tests	1.4	7.2	14.0	24.4	52.9	1.80	221
Oral exams	30.7	23.7	11.4	14.9	19.3	3.32	228

VO=Very Often, O=Often, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely, N=Never.

Teachers use short answer tests most frequently due to certain reasons. First, they are easy to prepare, administer and grade. Second, a short answer test can include many questions covering a lot of topics students are exposed to. Third, objectivity can be established to a certain degree in grading them since the expected response is clear in most cases, making this type of test most realistic, effective and practical among others. Fourth, the questions in this type of test give the students an opportunity to use their comprehension skills in addition to reciting their knowledge. Fifth, teachers think that this type of test helps the students learn more effectively and remember what they learn for a long period of time. Finally, teachers believe that short answer test is the most appropriate measurement instrument for the middle school students. Objective tests are not appropriate because the students are not used to answering multiple-choice, true-false or matching questions. Students are not very successful in essay tests either because open-ended questions confuse them. So according to the majority of the teachers, the most appropriate way of testing student learning seems to be short-answer tests.

Oral exams are also used often by teachers for several reasons. First, an oral exam seems to be an effective way of checking student understanding of the content through many short-answer questions. Second, it gives the student the opportunity to improve his/her verbal ability in front of a group of people. Third, it encourages the student to study and learn more effectively. Fourth, oral exams present effective learning opportunities for the students listening to the questions and responses. They see the kinds of questions asked and the kinds of answers acceptable. Finally, this type of exam helps the teacher to establish a dialogue with the individual student.

Teachers find objective tests realistic and objective, and useful in covering a lot of topics in one exam. However, many teachers find it difficult to prepare objective tests of good quality (e.g. writing objective items). Some teachers admit that they have no experience and skill in preparing and administering an objective test. In addition, they think that through objective tests only certain types of questions (mainly questions requiring memorisation of knowledge) can be asked, and for some teachers who would like to go beyond that in evaluating student success, this is a major weakness. As a result, they avoid using them often in their evaluations of students.

The essay test appears to be the least frequently used evaluation instrument. The main reason is the difficulty the teachers go through in grading open-ended questions in terms of time, effort and objectivity. Teachers say essay tests take more time to grade than other types of instruments. In addition, essay tests require much effort by the teacher, making grading difficult and tiresome. Finally, essay tests allow students to write different type of responses for the same question, and

this makes objective grading difficult. Few teachers mention the difficulty in adjusting the level of essay questions to the level of students and the low level of success students have in these types of exams.

On evaluation of student success, teachers were asked how satisfied they were overall with the evaluation strategies they used. Teachers report that they are only somewhat satisfied with the strategies they use (Mean = 2.22 on scale where 1 = 'not satisfied at all', 2 = 'somewhat satisfied' and 3 = 'satisfied'). The main reasons for their dissatisfaction with the evaluation strategies are related to their lack of knowledge and experience in different types of testing strategies, lack of time to work on preparing good quality tests, the inadequacy of different types of tests they have to use, the overall testing system in the school system and other contextual circumstances such as crowded classrooms. Some teachers believe that no test can measure the real success of the student since each student is different, and it is hard for teachers to carry out individualised assessment. Others complain about the size of their classroom population saying that 'it is very difficult to measure student achievement fairly in a class of 65 students whatever technique you use'. A number of teachers liken the school system to a horse racing arena where 'students study only to pass the grade, memorise to be successful in the exam, but not to learn'. Finally, the teachers complain that they are not free in student evaluation. They say that inspectors put a pressure on them to use certain types of exams like short answer and oral exam while not to consider others. However, some teachers would like to try out other types of exams to see their adequacy in measuring student learning.

In relation to evaluation of student achievement, students were asked whether the exams were adequate in measuring their success in the social studies courses. Close to two-thirds (63%) find the types of exams adequate while a little more than one-third (38%) say the exams are not sufficient in measuring their real success in these courses. The data indicates that dissatisfaction with the evaluation increases at upper grades (7th and 8th). While only 29% at the 6th grade find evaluation inadequate, 39% at the 7th and 45% at the 8th grade do so. Other variables such as gender, and the course students take do not create significant differences in students' perceptions about the exams.

Those who do not find exams adequate state that test anxiety, types of questions, heavy requirements, dislike in studying for the exam cause problems for them in reflecting their real performance in exams. First, a large number of students say that they feel nervous in the exam resulting in difficulty in remembering what they know. Second, short answer questions are heavily dependent on memorisation which they find difficult to do. Third, they are expected to remember a large body of knowledge in exams, and this makes studying for the exam boring and an unpleasant experience.

Discussion

In a centralised system of education, the impact of centrally prepared and controlled curriculum guidelines on instruction and its results will naturally be extensive. First of all, this kind of curriculum may be perceived as a rigid prescription for instruction, and teachers may feel a necessity to follow it thoroughly. Second, whatever the curriculum emphasises will be reflected in classroom instruction to a certain degree. The results of this study indicate that the curriculum guidelines prepared by the MONE assist teachers in selection of the topics to be taught and their sequence in all social studies courses in middle schools. Teachers actually follow the guidelines in preparing yearly and unit plans for instruction even though they find the guidelines somewhat less helpful in unit plans. This assistance by the curriculum guidelines appears to be very strict, that is, the curriculum guidelines do not leave much room for flexibility to the individual teacher in the above respects. However, teachers find more flexibility in the guidelines in terms of determining their instructional methods, materials and evaluation strategies they will use in their class because the guidelines do not offer much help to the teachers in these respects. Teachers are not happy about the deficiencies of the guidelines in terms of teaching activities, materials and evaluation strategies, and suggest that the guidelines should provide them with ideas, suggestions and directions that they can utilise in class in these respects. As a result, the content is determined by the standardised curriculum guidelines whereas how the content is delivered and how the delivery is measured are left to the teacher.

Social studies instruction should not only focus on transmission of knowledge since the knowledge itself is not very important unless it causes some skill and attitude development in individuals. Developing thinking, studying, research, social skills and positive attitudes are also among the significant goals of social studies. The teachers this study reached perceive that the standard MONE curriculum focuses mostly on transmission of knowledge while other significant goals are emphasized to a lesser degree. As a result, transmission of knowledge becomes the priority, and other areas are not given sufficient attention in classroom instruction.

Classroom activities carry a special importance for social studies teaching. A History or Geography lesson can easily be a boring and undesired experience through a straightforward lecture without involving students actively in their learning. At the same time the same social studies content can be delivered in a lively atmosphere where students are somehow involved in their knowledge and idea building process. Therefore, it is important to consider how classroom activities are organised and what role students and the teacher have in this

organisation. The results in the study show that the most common approach to classroom instruction is recitation and lecturing followed by student presentation. Students either read from a textbook or listen to the teacher's lecture, learn the knowledge and recite orally in class. This approach is consistently used to some degree by the classroom teachers in all social studies courses. The instructional approaches which allow more student involvement in learning like discussion, group activity and role playing are only used rarely. This result indicates that the teaching in social studies classes is mainly teacher-centered, and students remain passive in the learning process most of the time. In addition, the use of materials other than the course textbook is very limited even though both teachers and students prefer to have different kinds of course-related materials in the teaching and learning process.

Textbook-related activity (e.g. reading, answering questions) is the common mode of homework assignment given to the students. Library-related assignments (e.g., newspaper search) are used by the teachers sometimes while field studies (e.g., interviews, observations) are only assigned rarely. Again, the common mode of assignments indicate that out of class activities the teachers assign to the students are mostly dependent on the course textbook.

Short-answer test and oral exams are the most common mode of student evaluation in social studies classes. Teachers find both strategies easy to use, objective and appropriate to the student population in their classes. Short-answer tests help the teacher cover many topics in a single exam, and students feel comfortable in answering the short answer questions. Objective tests (e.g. multiple-choice, true-false) and essay tests are only used rarely since they are perceived as difficult to prepare and grade, and inappropriate for the age group the teachers serve. A quite large number of teachers reflect their dissatisfaction with the exams they use since they feel unequipped with new and alternative measurement and evaluation strategies. The crowded classrooms, insufficient time and support by administrators, and the rigid testing system for entrance to special high schools and universities appear to be the other main problems for their dissatisfaction. Supporting teachers' perspectives, a number of students also complain that the exams they are exposed to are not sufficient to measure their real success in the social studies course they take, and this perception is more apparent among students in upper middle school grades. As a result, measurement appears to be a significant issue to deal with in improving the social studies teaching.

The above perceptions of the teachers on different aspects of social studies teaching in middle schools are more or less similar across specific subject areas. In addition, the differences in the perceptions are not significant in terms of subjects' gender, teaching experience, educational level, teaching load and the

number of students in class. This indicates that social studies teaching does not differ to a great degree in these respects. The curriculum implementation is pretty much routinised in different types of classrooms by different teachers.

Several implications for further research can be drawn from this study. First of all, the impact of the teaching and learning process on student learning and thinking skills, attitudes toward social studies courses, and social skills should be investigated to bridge what goes on in class and what kinds of outcomes are produced. Second, the self-report data in this study are somewhat limited in understanding what goes on in social studies classes in depth and the perceptions of teachers and students. Interviews and observations can be carried out to validate the results of this study and provide detailed descriptions of curriculum implementation. Finally, since the textbook seems to be the dominant instructional material used in social studies classes, its impact on the teaching and learning process should be studied more in depth.

Studying teaching and learning process in social studies courses in middle schools is important from several perspectives. First of all, there has been a common dissatisfaction with all social studies courses in middle schools among both students and teachers. There have been varied explanations for this dissatisfaction by the Ministry of National Education mainly focusing on old textbooks and crowded classrooms. This study uncovers some of the realities of the curriculum implementation process from the perspectives of teachers and students, which may help to find ways to improve both the curriculum and its implementation. Furthermore, this study shows the importance of receiving feedback from teachers and students, those who experience the curriculum directly, and taking into account their perspectives in designing curriculum and improving the implementation process rather than just depending on inspectors' evaluations of teachers' performance and records of student achievement.

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