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# The application of traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools by teachers in social studies

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## Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the application of the traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools used by teachers of social studies. A scan method was used as the model. The target population of the study was composed of 241 social studies teachers. As the data collection tool, a questionnaire which was structured by the researchers was used. According to the results of the present study, it is concluded that teachers apply traditional assessment and evaluation tools, especially the multiple choice test, the open ended, short answer, gap-filling tests. Teachers generally prefer project and performance assignments to alternative assessment methods and evaluation tools. Education-teaching, primary education, social studies, traditional assessment and evaluation, alternative assessment and evaluation Education-teaching

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*Keywords:* Education-teaching; primary education; social studies; traditional assessment and evaluation; alternative assessment and evaluation.

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## 1. Introduction

Social studies lessons aim to bring different information, skills, concepts and values to students. These qualifications can be achieved through a planned educational process. It is accepted that planned education has some important advantages. Planned education is to work out, on paper, which teaching activities will be selected in order to achieve the aims of education and the program, how to apply this to students, which of the additional sources and tools will be used and how to assess the success in advance (Demirel, 2007). In this context, some assessment and evaluation processes should be administered in order to evaluate the scope of attainments; if there are some inadequacies in the planned education process, these should be examined.

In social studies, as in other educational-teaching processes, the teachers can detect the scope of attainments via various assessment and evaluation approaches. These approaches are generally grouped into two subcategories as “traditional” and “alternative” assessments and evaluation. Traditional assessment and evaluation is an approach which includes assessment tools generally focusing on attainments in intellectual abilities, that is a focus on the cognitive area (Çalışkan and Yiğittir, 2008). Open-ended, short answer, true-false, multiple choice and matching

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tests are accepted as traditional assessment and evaluation tools. An alternative assessment and evaluation is a student-centered approach and it focuses on the level of the application of knowledge and skills to real life, taking the individual features of the students into consideration. While traditional assessment and evaluation only considers the behaviors in the cognitive area, the alternative approach observes the developments in affective and psychomotor behaviors. Portfolio, project, performance assignments, concept maps, structured grids, descriptive branched trees, word association, self-evaluation and peer evaluation are accepted as the tools of alternative assessment and evaluation.

Alternative tools encourage students to make up their minds on critical and complex problems, unlike the traditional tools. While students give short answers or select one of the multiple choices in traditional tools, with alternative tools they form and create answers from their own perspectives on real life, and they present their answers in different ways (Herman et al., 1997). While traditional methods generally assess memorized knowledge, alternative tools try to reveal the comprehension and accomplishment of students. In this context, alternative assessment and evaluation tools have a complementary feature for students with different learning styles and they provide alternatives for the evaluation of these students (Llewellyn, 2003).

The social studies programs in primary education emphasize the importance of a multiple evaluation structure in the application of assessment and evaluation (MEB, 2005). Therefore teachers must use alternative assessment and evaluation approaches which enable an assessment of skills and attitudes as well as knowledge, besides using traditional assessment and evaluation approaches which assess knowledge-oriented behaviors.

According to Graham (2005), the development of the knowledge and skills of teachers in terms of evaluation is one of the basic problems in the contemporary world of education. In assessment and evaluation applications, which have changed learning-teaching processes, and with the development of the new program, it is important to detect the types and scopes of the tools which are used by social studies teachers in order to discover any deficiencies and to allow effective measures to be taken in case of any problems. The present study aims to investigate the application of traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools as used by teachers in social studies.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Model of the study*

A scan method is used in the present study since it aims to investigate the application levels of the traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools used by teachers in social studies. The survey method is used in order to investigate and describe the current situation (Karasar, 2005).

### *2.2. Group of the study*

The study group was composed of 241 social sciences teachers who attended the “Introduction Course for Teaching Program” held by the MEB (Ministry of National Education) between 2008 and 2009 in different cities. Teachers came from cities all over Turkey. Of the teachers in the study group, 72.2% were males and 27.8% were females. 39.8% work in cities, 37.8% work in districts, 11.6% work in towns and 10.8% work in villages. Of these, 75.1% of the teachers in the study indicated that they had attended a course or seminar about assessment and evaluation, 24.9% indicated that they had not attended any such course.

### *2.3. Data Collection Tool*

A questionnaire, which was structured by the researchers, was used as the data collection tool. Since calculations of total and average scores acquired from the scale were not made, validity and reliability studies were not performed during the development of the questionnaire and the opinions of the experts were accepted as adequate. The questionnaire was structured according to the opinions of three experts from the field of assessment and evaluation. The first section of the study was composed of personal information. Traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools were listed in the second section and a five-point grading was made in order to detect the frequency of the application of these tools by the teachers. The grading is as follows: “always”, “usually”, “sometimes”, “rarely” and “never”.

## 2.4. The analysis of the data

The data acquired from the questionnaire was transferred to SPSS 15.0 package program. Percentile, frequency, arithmetic average and standard deviation were examined in order to detect the usage of traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools by the teachers of social studies.

## 3. Results (Findings)

In this section, the findings obtained from the analysis of the data were interpreted and presented in tables.

In Table 1, the frequency of application of the traditional assessment and evaluation tools by social studies teachers in assessment and evaluation processes was given.

Table 1. The frequency of application of traditional assessment and evaluation tools by the teachers of social studies

Alternative Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		$\bar{X}$	S
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Open-Ended Test	9	3,7	21	8,7	27	11,2	49	20,3	135	56,0	4,16	1,15
Short Answer Test	2	0,8	5	2,1	53	22,0	65	27,0	116	48,1	4,20	,91
True-False Test	1	0,4	9	3,7	51	21,2	71	29,5	109	45,2	4,15	,91
Multiple Choice Test	-	-	2	0,8	14	5,8	64	26,6	161	66,8	4,59	,64
Matching Test	11	4,6	31	12,9	61	25,3	57	23,7	81	33,6	3,69	1,19
Oral Exam	42	17,4	63	26,1	58	24,1	37	15,4	41	17,0	2,88	1,34

According to the analysis of the results as set out in Table 1, social studies teachers generally use multiple choice tests with a percentage of 66.8% and 4.59 arithmetic average among traditional assessment and evaluation tools (a high participation with a percentage of 93.4% when merging the choices of always and usually). Furthermore, teachers always use open-ended tests with a percentage of 56.0% and 4.16 arithmetic average, short answer tests with a percentage of 48.1% and 4.20 arithmetic average, true-false tests with a percentage of 45.2% and 4.15 arithmetic mean. Matching tests are always used with a percentage of 33.6% and 3.69 arithmetic average. Oral exams were rarely used by majority of the teachers with a percentage of 26.1% and 2.88 arithmetic average.

In Table 2, the frequency of application of alternative assessment and evaluation tools by social studies teachers in assessment and evaluation processes was given.

Table 2. The frequency of application of alternative assessment and evaluation tools by the teachers of social studies

Alternative Assessment and Evaluation Tools	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		$\bar{X}$	S
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Performance Assignment	1	0,4	2	0,8	45	18,7	86	35,7	107	44,4	4,23	,81
Project Work	2	0,8	15	6,2	68	28,2	68	28,2	88	36,5	3,93	,99
Portfolio	29	12,0	52	21,6	71	29,5	52	21,6	37	15,4	3,07	1,24
Group and Peer Evaluation	57	23,7	71	29,5	64	26,6	34	14,1	15	6,2	2,50	1,18
Self-Evaluation Form	36	14,9	54	22,4	72	29,9	45	18,7	34	14,1	2,95	1,26
Attitude Scale	75	31,1	67	27,8	71	29,5	20	8,3	8	3,3	2,25	1,09
Observation form	44	18,3	50	20,7	76	31,5	53	22,0	18	7,5	2,80	1,19
Interview	46	19,1	43	17,8	63	26,1	69	28,6	20	8,3	2,89	1,25
Concept maps	42	17,4	34	14,1	69	28,6	67	27,8	29	12,0	3,03	1,27
Structured Grid	125	51,9	41	17,0	60	24,9	12	5,0	3	1,2	1,87	1,03
Descriptive Branched Tree	129	53,5	53	22,0	42	17,4	13	5,4	4	1,7	1,80	1,02
Word Association	88	36,5	49	20,3	57	23,7	32	13,3	15	6,2	2,32	1,26

According to the analysis of Table 2, social studies teachers generally use performance assignments with a percentage of 44.4% and 4.23 arithmetic average among alternative assessment and evaluation tools (with a high percentage by 81.1% when merging the choices of always and usually). Again it was detected that social studies teachers always apply project work with a percentage of 36.5% and 3.93 arithmetic average. Furthermore, they sometimes use portfolios (29.5% and  $\bar{X}$ =3.07), concept maps (28.6% and  $\bar{X}$ =3.03), self-evaluation forms (29.9% and  $\bar{X}$ =2.93) and observation forms (31.5% and  $\bar{X}$ =2.80). They usually use interviews (28.6% and  $\bar{X}$ =2.89). However, social studies teachers never use, respectively, the descriptive branched tree (53.5% and  $\bar{X}$ =1.80), the

structured grid (51.9% and  $\bar{X}=1.87$ ), an attitude scale (31.1% and  $\bar{X}=2.25$ ), word association (36.5% and  $\bar{X}=2.32$ ) and they rarely use group and peer evaluation (29.5% and  $\bar{X}=2.50$ ).

#### **4. Discussion**

It was found that social studies teachers always prefer to use multiple choice tests in the assessment and evaluation process, besides which they usually use open-ended, short answer and true-false tests. The reason why teachers widely apply these traditional tools could be their sense of self-adequacy in preparing, applying and evaluating these tools, familiarity with the use of these tools and the assumption that these tools measure the knowledge of the students accurately. Similarly, Parmaksız and Yanpar (2006) in their study of 119 social studies teachers found that teachers always prefer traditional assessment tools such as multiple choice and open ended tests. The studies by Güven (2001) and Çakan (2004) found that social studies teachers always prefer multiple choice tests and open ended questions, the results of these studies are consistent with the findings of the present study. While the word matching is generally preferred by social studies teachers, it is found that oral exams are not widely preferred by the teachers when compared with other traditional tools. The primary reason for the lack of preference for oral exams is the amendment in the regulation of primary education institutions in terms of the evaluation of student success in which abolished the use of oral exams as an evaluation tool. However, it is observed that some of the teachers still use oral exams as a tool for the evaluation of student success.

It is detected that social studies teachers attach importance to using performance assignments and also project work among the alternative assessment and evaluation tools. The main reason for teachers to attach importance to performance assignments and project work is the change of tools for the evaluation of student success as a result of the amendment in the programs of primary education in 2005. With this amendment, performance assignments and project works are accepted as primary tools for the measuring of student success. The findings of the present study indicate that the most used alternative tools are performance assignment and project work and is similar to the findings of Duban and Küçükylmaz, 2008; Güven and Eskiürk, 2007; Özdaş et al., 2007). Furthermore, social studies teachers indicated that they sometimes use portfolios, concept maps, self-evaluation forms, interviews and observation forms in the assessment and evaluation activities in lessons. The reason for teachers to use these tools “sometimes” is that each tool has a specific ability to reveal the qualities of individual students. In other words, teachers select the tool which will best serve the aims of assessment and evaluation. It is found that social studies teachers do not prefer the descriptive branched tree, structured grids, attitude scales, word association, group and peer evaluation forms among the alternative assessment and evaluation tools. The reason for this may be an inadequate competence in the use of these tools. Nearly all of these tools were only incorporated into the education-teaching process with the 2005 program.

When the application of traditional and alternative assessment and evaluation tools by the teachers of social studies are analyzed and compared, it is indicated that the teachers use both traditional and alternative tools. However, teachers generally prefer traditional tools. Furthermore, it can also be stated that the majority of the teachers never use alternative tools. In the studies of Yapıcı and Demirdelen (2007) and Gelbal and Kelecioğlu (2007), it is found that the teachers generally use traditional assessment and evaluation tools when compared with alternative tools.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

As a consequence of this study, it is revealed that social studies teachers generally use traditional assessment and evaluation tools in the assessment and measurement processes for the lessons, they especially make frequent use of the multiple choice test, open-ended, short answer, gap filling tests. It is observed that while the matching test is widely used, oral exams are rarely used among the traditional assessment and evaluation tools. Teachers always use project and performance assignments among alternative assessment and evaluation tools. Teachers sometimes use portfolios, concept maps, self-evaluation forms, interviews and observation forms. However, it is found that teachers do not adequately use some of the alternative assessment and evaluation tools (branched tree, structured grid, attitude scales, word association, group and peer evaluation). Furthermore, the comparison of traditional and alternative tools reveals that the teachers both use traditional and alternative tools; however, they generally prefer traditional tools.

In the light of the results of the present study, some recommendations are made as follows:

- In-service training should be provided for teachers in terms of the preparation, application and evaluation of traditional but more especially the alternative assessment and evaluation tools. However the focus should be on practice during the in-service training, rather than on theory.
- Teachers should focus on using alternative tools as well as traditional tools since a constructivist program approach suggests a multi-directional evaluation.
- Teachers should use the interview as the alternative assessment and evaluation tool rather than using the traditional oral exams, since interviews have many advantages when compared with oral exams.
- Teachers should more frequently use branched tree, structured grids, attitude scales, word association, group and peer evaluation, which currently have a low level of application by the teachers.

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