

THE INFLUENCE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING ON THE NEW SOCIAL STUDIES MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Social Studies [Sosyal Bilgiler] as an interdisciplinary course has been a school subject in Turkey over a half century (Akpınar & Kaymakçı, 2012). However, integrated social studies education is fairly new concept in Turkey. After the curriculum reform over the last decade, Social Studies education in Turkey has been defined as an integrated field of study. Until this reform movement, social studies courses was only combination of history and geography and instructional units in the textbooks focused either on history or geography (Açıkalın, 2011; 2014). This interdisciplinary notion of social studies education is established in the curriculum as a result of modeling one of the most prominent social studies organization in the world: NCSS (National Council for the Social Studies). This new social studies movement in Turkey has taken a thematic approach and focuses on developing skills and values in the curriculum (see MEB, 2009a; 2009b). The new curriculum ensure that each thematic unit to be a mixture of various subjects such as history, geography, economy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, law, civic, and other related subjects (Semenderoğlu & Gülersoy, 2005; Şahin, 2009; Şimşek, 2009).

The new curriculum include various measurement and evaluation methods other than the traditional evaluation methods (see MEB, 2009a; 2009b). Former curriculum focused mostly on written exams with open-ended questions and/or multiple choices tests. Unlike the former curriculums, this new curriculum has adapted alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, self and peer evaluation, projects, poster presentations, and rubrics. On the contrary, the Turkish educational system is based on the standardized testing. Students are placed to high schools and the university based on their achievement levels in the standardized tests. The dominancy of the standardized testing in the Turkish educational system contradicts the newly adapted alternative assessment methods in the current social studies curriculum (Açıkalın, 2011; 2014). Therefore, it is important to discuss whether the new social studies curriculum works with the standardized testing system.

On the other hand, the influence of high-stakes testing in diminishing the instructional time of social studies classes and instructional decisions in these classes have also been discussed in the United States (Au, 2009; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Mathis & Boyd, 2009; McGuire, 2007; Saye, & Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative [SSIRC], 2013). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to compare and discuss the influence of standardized testing on social studies education both in Turkey and the United States.

Key words: Social studies education in Turkey, standardized testing; social studies curriculum

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Biography

Mehmet Acikalın is an associate professor in the Department of Social Studies Education at Istanbul University, Turkey. He received his master degree from the University of Missouri- Columbia in 2002 and PhD from The Ohio State University, USA in 2006. After completed his study, he returned to Turkey started to teach at Istanbul University. He teaches a variety of courses including social studies methods, instructional technologies and material development, and field experiences. His research interests are computer-supported instruction in social studies, global education and social studies teacher education.