



**ANALYZING PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS
ON PROJECT STUDIES IN THE 6th AND 7th GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES
LESSONS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to evaluate social studies teachers' perceptions on project studies in primary schools in terms of some variables (gender, graduated faculty, years in profession, and participation to in-service training). For this purpose, a questionnaire is prepared in order to elicit opinions of 25 social studies teachers from 22 primary schools of Ministry of National Education in the province of Kastamonu about their project studies on social studies lessons. Reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.90. As a result of the survey conducted with teachers of social studies teachers, opinions of the teachers about the project studies being implemented in social studies classes do not show a statistically significant difference in terms of gender, years in profession, and participation to in-service training that they have received, but it was observed that the teachers who graduated from faculty of education have more positive views on the project studies than other social studies teachers.

Keywords: Social studies, social studies teacher, project, teachers' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Today's education system has to catch the change the age requires and educate individuals the age needs. The education system which aims to educate individuals with this approach must engage in a different formation instead

of the traditional insights that learners learn the content from teachers in the classroom. This formation must have a structure that learners and teachers learn together, team work and problem solving can be executed successfully, learners and teachers assume the role of the researcher.





The project-based learning approach is one of the educational approaches which are thought to be an appropriate structure suitable to this understanding (Başbay, 2007: 67).

Project-based learning approach is a learning approach that aims to solve problems by means of individual or small groups in a method similar to living under natural conditions. (Korkmaz & Kaptan, 2002). Project-based learning (PBL) is a model of regulating learning around projects (Thomas, 2000).

Project-based learning is a method that allows students to throw out opinions about the topics covered in fields of interest, to ask questions, to estimate, to develop theories, to use different tools, to use the skills acquired in the context of a real and meaningful life and allows learner to solve problems and answer questions in a creative way in the classroom and outside. (Katz & Chard, 2000).

Project-based learning highlights learning the concepts and principles rather than learning the facts on the desired content and highlights gaining complex problem solving skills rather than gaining skills separate from each other (Newell, 2003). According to Fogarty (1997), teaching of the project is built around the creation, application and the production of a thing. Project spans in an appropriate time. This period may be up to a period of a week, depending on the type of the project. For example, book reports, research publications, multi-media presentation and mechanical inventions are powerful regulators in creating a suitable curriculum suitable to interests, abilities, and resources. Project teaching supports learning based on hard work to produce something, creativity, cooperation and experience. According to Terry (1997), project-based learning method is a mental and physical activity that students performed at or near the actual living conditions.

Project-based learning is a model of regulating learning around projects. It allows students design, problem solving, decision-making and investigation activity opportunities including opportunities and difficult questions (Panasan & Nuangchalem, 2010: 253). Project-based learning is a teaching method that attracts learning event into real life. It encourages students to learn actively. The students plan how to access information, implements, and produce a result. Acquisition of knowledge involves an

active process, not passive. Learners are active at every stage of the learning process.

Project-based learning is a teaching method used in authentic, complex, real-life projects in order to motivate and to provide learning experiences (Shu-jing & Li-hua, 2010: 28). Project-based instruction is a teaching strategy that aims to achieve teaching through projects based on students' activity and design (Zorbaz & Çeçen, 2009: 89).

The project is a design. a process that the design is directed to develop predicts relational learning and mental model which is restructured continuously. The word "based" emphasizes the fact that the project is not a target but a process and saves the project to be a completed the final project. Learning emphasizes a truly student-centeredness by sliding the attention away from teacher to the learner (Erdem & Akkoyunlu, 2002: 3). This method is a kind of individual learning method. In the project method, research papers are given on the subject to be learned. These can also be a group tasks. Each student participates in a research on the subject or on its particular aspects. The student reveals the problem in this research study first, and then detects changes and proposes way of solution, that is, sets hypothesis. Then, try to test the hypothesis if it was right or not. At the end, each student writes his report on the project and presents it clearly and concretely as possible with his experiments in the class (Aykaç, 2005: 125).

Items that are included in project-based learning approach are content, processes, activities and results. (Buck Institute for Education, PBL Overview, What is Project Based Learning?; Four Reasons to Try). According to Erdem & Akkoyunlu (2002), process steps in project-based learning: The identification of targets, determination and identification of the subject to be discussed or done, formation of teams, determination of the features of final report and presentation style, work schedule determination of control points, determination of the evaluation criteria and level of proficiency, collection and organization of the information, reporting, presentation of the project.

Teachers guide more and teach less in project-based learning (Carr & Jitendra, 2000). The role of teachers is to organize the conceptual knowledge, questions and the status of the dispute around according to the students' interests. Teachers assist students in establishing a new





connection between what they have learned new and old and in developing what they have learned new. Presentations made in wide range of thoughts cut into pieces then. Activities are student-centered and students are encouraged to ask their own questions, complete their own experiences and arrive at their own conclusions. (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Project-based learning transformed teacher's role from a speaker who teach people and direct training to a person who provided resources and transformed teacher's role from an expert person to a person that help and lead. (Çiftçi, 2006: 54). The task of teachers is to increase experiential meanings that includes spontaneous impressions which is about the events around students suitable to developing interests and expectations of students rather than equipping students with standard knowledge (Gürdal, Şahin & Çağlar, 2001: 11).

The student's role in Project-based learning method differs from traditional learning classes. Throughout the project, the student not only implements what the teacher told, but also looks for solutions to problems he/she faces on their own. Students work with teachers together from the selection of the project subject to planning activities. The students have the opportunity of checking themselves with the help of the teacher in every step of the learning process, they apply activities themselves, produce exploratory and unifying thoughts define their own processes, work independently most of the time (Çepni, 2005). Students work together for creating goals, providing information and for decision-making activities in Project-based learning. The students apply knowledge they gained through research not only to solve problems but also to deliver the results they reached (Horward, 2002). Project-based learning is a method that allows students to apply their acquired skills in the context of meaningful real life applications that enables the learner to solve problems and answer questions in a creative way in the classroom and outside. Real life is problem-solving oriented and directs all the students to work and try. This is also effective on thinking skills as it developed students' problem-solving skills. (Karakuş, 2004: 44). In project-based learning, students form groups or work individually to solve the problems. They decide themselves how they approach to problems, which activities they carry out and what resources they need to reach.

According to Hamurcu (2000), project-based learning method has a number of advantages. These are as follows: the vital skills, ability to use technology, cognitive skills, self-control skills, Attitudes, Trends, and Beliefs. Teachers may be shy to give students responsibility in project-based learning model. They think that students are not ready enough. Lack of instructional materials, exam pressure and family expectations can be other disadvantages (Aladağ, 2005).

Korkmaz and Kaptan (2001) expressed the disadvantages of project-based learning method as follows:

1. Teachers do not like to leave authority and power in their classrooms although they have a role of learning with students together and role of facilitating the process. Therefore, the time for learning process is difficult for teaching.
2. It is difficult for teachers to change teaching methods.
3. The teacher's responsibility increases much more in the classroom that student-centered educational model is applied.
4. Implementation of the content in classrooms that student-centered education model is applied takes a long time 20% compared to classrooms that traditional learning approach is applied
5. Social development is ignored as Individual development is given more importance
6. Teacher control decreases compared to traditional methods and therefore activities transform into a spontaneous event.

Evaluation is done by considering the process and the product together in Project-based learning approach, Evaluation is not just about whether learners learn the subject or not. At the same time it is about the development of learners' problem-solving skills required in real-life needs. In other words; assessment deal with not only has taken into account what the learners have learned but also how what they have learned.

Evaluation activities are about whether students understand issues or not, develop their skills they need in real life outside the school and document them. the progress of the students can be documented thanks to evaluation that reflect what and how much they have learned in extra-curricular studies. The best assessment is





students' evaluating themselves which enables them to find answers to questions such as "What I understand?", "How I am doing?" (Çakan, 2005: 22). Project-based learning approach is a process that Develops students' knowledge and skills, supports lifelong learning and encourages them to learn self-controlled (Korkmaz & Kaptan, 2001: 194). As learning is a process, the evaluation of process is required during the evaluation.

This research is important because it reflects the perspectives of social studies teachers to project-based learning method, it shows the positive and negative aspects of the project work and it shows parent involvement in the studies.

The aim of this study is to evaluate social studies teachers' perceptions on project studies in primary schools in terms of some variables (gender, graduated faculty, years in profession, and participation to in-service training). In this context answers were sought to these following questions.

1. What are the perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies in their schools?
2. Do the perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies show a meaningful difference in terms of teachers' gender?
3. Do the perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies show a meaningful difference in terms of teachers' graduated faculty?
4. Do the perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies show a meaningful difference in terms of teachers' years in profession?
5. Do the perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies show a meaningful difference in terms of teachers' participation to in-service training?

METHOD

Method of the Study

This is a descriptive research in the survey model. The population of the study is 42 social studies teachers who work in primary schools in central province of Kastamonu. The study sample of this study was 22 social studies teachers in 22 primary schools.

Participants

The demographic features of the study sample were analyzed. The split between genders was in favor of female with 60% female and 40% male. The rate of teachers whose years in profession is between 1 to 5 years is 4%, whose tenure of office is between 6 to 10 years is 40%, whose tenure of office is between 11 and over is 56%. The rate of teachers whose years in current school is between 1 to 5 years is 68%, whose tenure of office is between 6 to 10 years is 12%, whose tenure of office is between 11 and over is 20%. When we analyze the participants in terms of previous work experience, 12% of them worked in private teaching institutions, 4% of them worked in colleges, 12% of them work in Ministry of Education as a paid teacher and 72% of the has no working experience. When we analyze the participants in terms of participation to in-service training seminars, 28% of the participated once, 24% of them participated twice, 44% of them participated, three times and 4% of them participated four times. When we analyze the participants in terms of their graduated school, 80% of participants graduated from faculty of education, %4 of them graduated from four year vocational education high school, %4 of them graduated from four year vocational education high school and %12 of them graduated from faculty of science and literature.

Data Collection

As a data collection instrument, a questionnaire is used in order to elicit opinions of 25 social studies teachers from 22 primary schools about their project studies on social studies lessons.

For the reliability of the instrument, literature study was done and pre-interview form was administered to ten social studies teacher in ten primary school of Ministry of Education and then a questionnaire is prepared. Expert opinion was examined for the validity of the questionnaire. Questionnaire was revised in line with the opinions of faculty members. Reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.90.

Data Analysis

In this study, quantitative data collection technique was used. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) program was used for statistical analysis of





the data collected by the surveys filled in correctly and fully according to the explanations in the frame of the general aims of the study.

The frequency, percentage, arithmetical mean and standard deviation of the answers were calculated. Independent t-Test, Kruskal-Wallis-H and Mann Withney-U test was used to analyze the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of Social Studies Teachers on Project Studies in Their Schools

Perceptions of social studies teachers on project studies in their schools were given in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceptions of Social Studies Teachers on Project Studies in Their Schools in terms of Scale Items

| | |
|----|--|
| 1 | I have information on project-based learning method. |
| 5 | The purposes of projects constructing should be determined prior to project activities. |
| 8 | Calculations for the project cost needs to be done before students start working on the project. |
| 16 | Hours for the social studies course must be increased in order to use project-based learning method effectively. |
| 21 | Students do project studies in order to receive high marks. |
| 24 | Parents should be informed about their responsibilities during the course of project-based learning. |
| 30 | Product and process should be evaluated together in the evaluation of the students' project work. |

Social Studies teachers stated that 52% of them agree about item 1 of the scale "I have information on project-based learning method". 52% of the teachers definitely agree about item 5 of the scale "The purposes of

projects constructing should be determined prior to project activities". 60% of the teachers agree about item 8 of the scale "Calculations for the Project cost needs to be done before students start working on the project". 60% of the teachers definitely agree about item 16 "Hours for the social studies course must be increased in order to use project-based learning method effectively". 44% of the teachers agree about item 21 of the scale "Students do project studies in order to receive high marks". 60% the teachers agree about item 24 of the scale "Parents should be informed about their responsibilities during the course of project-based learning". 44% the teachers definitely agree about item 30 "Product and process should be evaluated together in the evaluation of the students' project work".

Arithmetical Mean and Standard Deviation of the Answers That Teachers Give about Their Project Studies

Arithmetical mean and standard deviation of the answers that teachers give about their project studies were given in Table 2.

Table 2. Arithmetical mean and standard deviation of the answers that teachers give about their project studies

| Item No | \bar{x} | S | Item No | \bar{x} | S |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------|-----------|-------|
| 11 | 3,440 | 1,044 | 116 | 3,920 | 1,151 |
| 12 | 3,560 | 1,083 | 117 | 4,000 | 1,000 |
| 13 | 2,960 | 1,059 | 118 | 4,040 | 0,888 |
| 14 | 4,240 | 0,969 | 119 | 4,200 | 1,000 |
| 15 | 4,200 | 1,154 | 120 | 3,960 | 0,840 |
| 16 | 3,400 | 1,040 | 121 | 3,800 | 1,118 |
| 17 | 2,920 | 1,077 | 122 | 4,120 | 0,971 |
| 18 | 3,880 | 0,832 | 123 | 3,840 | 0,898 |
| 19 | 2,320 | 1,029 | 124 | 4,000 | 1,000 |
| 110 | 2,120 | 1,092 | 125 | 3,840 | 1,027 |
| 111 | 2,240 | 1,011 | 126 | 3,920 | 1,187 |
| 112 | 3,000 | 1,080 | 127 | 3,560 | 1,044 |
| 113 | 3,680 | 1,144 | 128 | 3,640 | 1,113 |
| 114 | 3,160 | 0,898 | 129 | 4,080 | 1,115 |
| 115 | 3,400 | 1,000 | 130 | 3,920 | 1,151 |
| TOTAL | 107,80 | 16.96 | | | |

4 Project studies that students can prepare in daily life must be given.





- 5 The purposes of projects constructing should be determined prior to project activities.

- 19 Students must participate actively in project-based learning studies.

- 10 Project-based learning method can't be applied effectively due to lack of time in the social studies curriculum.

- 11 Project-based learning method can't be applied effectively due to crowded classes.

When we analyze Table 2, it can be seen that the highest arithmetical mean of the items are I4 (4.24), I5 (4.20) and I19 (4.20), on the other hand, the lowest arithmetical mean of the items are I10 (2.12) and I11 (2.24). The total arithmetical mean of the scale in general is 107.80. According to these findings it can be seen that teachers answer generally in the level of "I agree".

Mann Whitney-U Test Results According to Teachers' Gender

Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' gender were given in Table 3.

Table 3. Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' gender

| Gender | N | Per Rank | Rank Total | MW-U | p |
|--------|----|----------|------------|--------|-------|
| Male | 15 | 12,50 | 187,50 | 67,500 | 0,677 |
| Female | 10 | 13,75 | 137,50 | | |

*p>0.05

When we analyze Table 2, it can be seen that teachers' opinions about their project studies do not show a meaningful difference according to gender [U = 67,50, p>0,05]. The findings are similar with the research done by Karamustafaoğlu (2006) which aims to determine science and technology teachers' levels of using instructional materials.

Mann Whitney-U Test Results According to Teachers' School Type

Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' school type they graduated were given in Table 4.

Table 4. Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' school type they graduated

| School Type | N | Per Rank | Rank Total | MW-U | p |
|---|---|----------|------------|-------|-------|
| Faculty of Education | 2 | 14,53 | 290,5 | 19,50 | 0,038 |
| Other (Faculty of science and literature, two year vocational education high school, etc) | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |
| | 5 | 6,90 | 34,50 | | |

*p<0.05

When we analyze Table 4, it can be seen that teachers' opinions about their project studies show a meaningful difference according to teachers' school type they graduated [U=19.50, p<0,05]. This finding can be interpreted like that teachers who graduated from faculty of education have a more positive opinion than other teachers who graduated from other faculties and vocational education high schools. This situation may be due to the fact that teachers who graduated from Faculty of Education took courses of educational sciences (Introduction to Education, Teaching Principles and Methods, etc.) during their training.

Mann Whitney-U Test Results According to Teachers' Years in Profession

Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' years in profession were given in Table 5.

Table 5. Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' years in profession

| Years in profession | N | Per Rank | Rank Total | MW-U | p |
|---------------------|----|----------|------------|-------|-------|
| 1-10 years | 11 | 16,05 | 176,50 | 43,50 | 0,066 |
| 11 year and over | 14 | 10,61 | 148,50 | | |

*p>0.05





As it can be seen in Table 5, there is not a meaningful difference between teachers whose years of profession is 1-10 years and teachers whose years of profession is 11 year and over [$U = 43,50$, $p > 0,05$]. The findings are similar with the research done by Şahin (2007) which is called "Teacher and student opinions on application of project-based learning method in elementary science and technology course". In this research, teacher opinions on application of project-based learning method don't change according to teachers' years in profession.

Mann Whitney-U Test Results According to Teachers' Participation to In-Service Training

Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' participation to in-service training were given in Table 6.

Table 6. Mann Whitney-U Test results according to teachers' participation to in-service training

| In-service training | N | Per Rank | Rank Total | MW-U | p |
|---------------------|----|----------|------------|-------|-------|
| None or once | 7 | 11,21 | 78,50 | 50,50 | 0,448 |
| Twice and more | 18 | 13,69 | 246,50 | | |

* $p > 0,05$

When we analyze Table 6, it can be seen that teachers' opinions about their project studies do not show a meaningful difference according to teachers' participation to in-service training [$U = 50,50$, $p > 0,05$]. This finding can be interpreted like that teachers have similar opinions about their project studies according to teachers' participation to in-service training. The findings aren't similar with the research done Önen et al. (2010). In this research, teachers' opinions about their project studies change significantly in a positive way.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, Items that teachers state opinions mostly are 8, 16 and 24, substances. 60% of the teachers agree about item 8 of the scale "Calculations for the Project cost needs to be done before students start working on the project". 60% of the teachers definitely agree about item 16 "Hours for the social studies course must be increased in order to use project-based learning method effectively". 60% the teachers agree about item 24 of the scale "Parents

should be informed about their responsibilities during the course of project-based learning". When all items were analyzed, it was found that teachers respond 8 items as "I definitely agree", 14 items as "I agree", and 4 items as "I partially agree".

As a conclusion it can be seen that that teachers' answers about their project studies being implemented in schools in the level of "I agree". Opinions of the teachers about the project studies being implemented in social studies classes do not show a statistically significant difference in terms of gender, years in profession, and participation to in-service training that they have received, on the other hand, teachers' opinions about their project studies show a meaningful difference according to teachers' school type they graduated. It was observed that the teachers who graduated from faculty of education have more positive views on the project studies than other social studies teachers.

According to the results of the study, the following recommendations can be made: the teachers provide the necessary information to students about the purpose of construction of the project before doing the project work. Teachers also should provide the necessary information about the cost of the project before students start working on the project. Social studies teaching hours should be increased in order to implement a project-based learning method effectively. Teachers should inform the family of the students about their responsibilities during the project work.

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