

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparison of Social Studies Curriculum: A Case of South Korea and Turkey

Erhan Görmez* 

Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Faculty of Education, Department of Turkish and Social Sciences Education, Van/Türkiye

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: 05.11.2022

Accepted: 21.11.2022

First Published: 19.12.2022

Keywords

Curriculum
Elementary school
Middle school
Social studies
South Korea
Turkey

ABSTRACT

Countries use education as a tool to shape the desired human profile in line with universal principles. For this purpose, the courses in the curriculum have specific objectives. Social studies is an important course in the curriculum of countries for the purpose of raising “qualified people”. This course is included in the curriculum of many countries around the world (Canada, Japan, South Korea, Finland, Turkey, etc.) due to its mission of “realizing social existence”. The aim of this study is to compare the South Korean Social Studies Curriculum updated in 2015 and the Turkish Social Studies Curriculum updated in 2017. The data of the research, which was carried out by adopting the qualitative research approach, were obtained through document analysis. The data obtained from the research were analyzed according to the document analysis stages. When the results of the research are evaluated in general, it is seen that South Korea Social Studies Curriculum and Turkey Social Studies Curriculum are similar in terms of purpose, content (geography and economics topics) and achievement code system. In South Korea, the Social Studies course takes place at the primary, secondary and high school levels, and in Turkey it takes place at the primary and secondary school levels. It has been determined that the social studies course hours in the grade levels of both countries also differ.



Please cite this paper as follows:

Görmez, E. (2022). A comparison of social studies curriculum: A case of South Korea and Turkey. *Bulletin of Educational Studies*, 1(1), 12-18. <https://doi.org/10.29329/bules.2022.480.02>

Introduction

Societies are developed when they invest in the educational processes of their citizens. One of the most important differences between underdeveloped and developed countries is the issue of investment. Countries leading the world in terms of level of development strive to provide their citizens with a global understanding of knowledge, skills and values. These countries, which use education as an important tool of development, revise the curricula in schools according to the changing conditions of the day or help their citizens to develop by adding new courses to their Education Programs. Social studies comes first among the courses that aim to educate

individuals according to the changing conditions of the day. This course, which was created with a multi-disciplinary approach, does not have a definite definition.

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 1994) defines social studies as: “...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: erhangormez@hotmail.com

social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent World". Doğanay (2002) defines social studies as a multidisciplinary course in order to raise democratic citizens with basic knowledge, skills and values. Through this course, the individual learns how to deal with problems. With this course, the individual takes an active role in moving the society they live in further (Topkaya, 2016).

The Social Studies course, which aims to provide the individual with the important knowledge, skills and values needed to realize the social existence of the individual, is one of the important courses in the education programs of many countries. Turkey and South Korea are at the forefront of the important countries that have tried to internalize the above-mentioned aims of the social studies course in their citizens by constantly following the changes in educational sciences.

With this course, which has been included in the primary school program since 1968 and in the secondary school program since 1973 in Turkey, desired citizens have been tried to be trained. With the Social Studies Curriculum, which gained a new meaning with its constructivist philosophy in 2004, was aimed to raise citizens with a world citizen profile who adopted democratic principles. The 2004 program is particularly similar to the program implemented in the USA. Finally, the Social Studies Curriculum was updated in 2017, taking into account the changing conditions of the age.

South Korea is one of the countries with a social studies course in its curriculum. The social studies course, which is included in the curriculum in South Korea, started to take place in the curriculum with the influence of the USA after the Japanese colonization. In the period referred to as The Syllabus (1946~1954), a course called "Social Life" was added to the curriculum, which included history, geography and citizenship lessons. In the 2nd Curriculum Period (1963~1973) the subject name "Social Life" renamed as "Social Studies". the notion of social studies education in Korea has been closely associated with the terms such as relevance, reflective inquiry, rational decision making and problem-solving (Daehoon, 2017).

The aim of this study is to compare the content of the social studies curriculum taught in Turkey and South Korea with similar aims. When the literature is examined, there is no study to compare the social studies courses of these two countries. In this respect, it is important in terms of filling this deficiency in the literature.

Research Purpose

In this study, the South Korean Social Studies Curriculum, which was updated in 2015, and the Turkey Social Studies Curriculum, which was updated in 2017, were tried to be compared.

South Korea Social Studies and Turkey Social Studies curriculum;

What are the similarities and differences in terms of objectives, course hours and durations, program structure, subjects and units?

Method

In this study, document analysis method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In document review, Hancock et al. (2009) state that policy documents, mission statements, meeting minutes, annual reports, codes of conduct, websites, email series, case notes, etc. materials could be used. In this study, South Korea and Turkey social studies curricula were used as data sources.

Data Analysis

Document analysis method was used in the research. There are a number of steps that can be followed when doing a document analysis: 1. Reaching the documents, 2. Checking the originality, 3. Understanding the documents, 4. Analyzing the data, and 5. Using the data. In the first stage, the researcher tried to reach the Social Studies Curriculum of both countries. South Korea Curriculum and Assessment Institute (KICE) and The Ministry of National Education: Board of Education and Discipline website was reached. The foreign sources reached were translated into Turkish and tried to be analyzed considering the problem of the research. As the unit of analysis, the content, objectives, program structure and course hours of the programs belonging to both countries were determined. These analysis units determined were transferred to tables and compared.

Reliability and Validity

Among the most important criteria used for the credibility of the results in scientific research are the concepts of "Validity" and "Reliability". These two criteria are handled differently in qualitative and quantitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

When examining what has been done to increase the validity of this research: Document analysis was used as a data collection source in the research. In this method, the validity of the research was tried to be ensured by situations such as long-term interaction of the researcher with the data sources (The time spent on translating the contents of the South Korean social studies course into Turkish and identifying and comparing the analysis units in the Social Studies Curriculum of both countries), collecting detailed and in-depth information, reporting the collected data in detail, and explaining how the researcher reached the collected data.

When examining what has been done to increase the reliability of this research: In the research, the reliability of the research was tried to be ensured by clearly defining the

curriculum that are the data source, giving the internet link about the data sources, detailed explanations about the data collection and analysis methods, and presenting the data obtained by document analysis to the reader by tabulating it.

Results

At this stage, comparative tables regarding the purpose, content, program structure and course durations of the Social Studies Curriculum of both countries are given.

When Table 1 is examined, the importance of the skills needed in daily life, the necessity of democracy and being a democratic citizen are emphasized as the purpose of the social studies curriculum of both countries.

Table 1. The purpose of the social studies course.

Turkey	South Korea
Social Studies course aims to enable students to adapt to the society they live in as citizens who have embraced democratic values and aims to equip students with equipment that can put this knowledge into practice (MEB, 2005)	Social Studies is a subject in which students recognize social phenomenon on the basis of knowledge and skills necessary for their social life and cherish values and attitudes required as a member of a democratic society to, therefore, have qualities of a democratic citizen (The Ministry of Education, 2017).

Table 2. Social studies course according to grade levels.

Country	Level	Course	Type	Grade level
South Korea	Elementary School	Social Studies	Core Courses	3-6
	Middle School	Social Studies + History	Core Courses	7-9
	High School	Integrative Social Studies + Korean History	Core Courses	10
		Korean Geography, World Geography, East Asian History, World History, Economy, Politics & Law, Society & Culture	General Elective Courses	11-12
		Travel Geography, Inquiry of Social Problems	Career Elective Subjects	
Turkey	Elementary School	Social Studies	Core Courses	4
	Middle School	Social Studies	Core Courses	5-7

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that social studies is included in the curriculum at primary, middle and high school levels (7 years) as a course in South Korea; In Turkey, social studies is included in the curriculum at primary, middle school (4 years). And also the Social Studies Curriculum of both

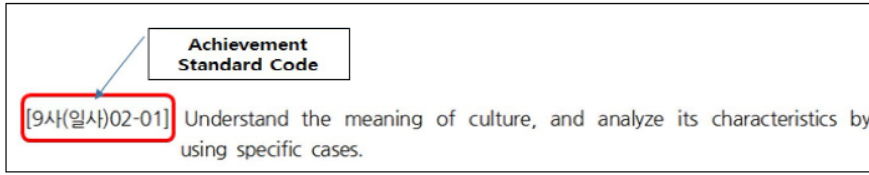
countries has a multi-disciplinary structure. In the middle school curriculum in South Korea, historical subjects are included in the history course apart from the social studies course.

Table 3. The duration of social studies course.

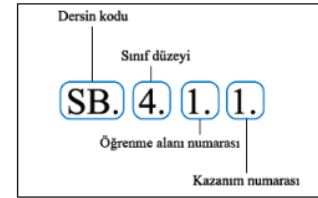
Country	Level	Course	Grade Level	Annual Duration (Hours)
South Korea	Elementary School	Social Studies + Moral Education	3-4	272
	Elementary School	Social Studies + History + Moral Education	5-6	272
	Middle School	Social Studies + History + Moral Education	7-9	510 (Approximately 170 per each subject area)
Turkey	Elementary School	Social Studies	4	540 (180x3)
	Middle School	Social Studies	5-7	540 (180x3)

When Table 3 is examined, in South Korea, where each semester consists of 17 weeks, 272 hours of social studies course hours in elementary schools (3-6th grades) and 170 hours in middle schools (KICE, 2012); In Turkey, it is seen that there

are 270 hours of lessons in elementary and middle schools in a semester of 18 weeks.



South Korean Achievement Standard Code



Turkey Achievement Standard Code

Figure 1. Achievement standard code.

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that the intra-unit achievements of both countries are expressed with special codes. In South Korea, this code system includes both Korean

letters and numbers; In Turkey, the achievement coding process in the social studies curriculum is respectively “course code, grade level, learning area number and achievement number”.

Table 4. Content structure of the social studies curriculum in South Korea.

Country	Type	Course Name	Units	
S. Korea	Core Curriculum	Social Studies	Elementary (1-6)	
			3rd and 4th Grade	5th and 6th Grade
			1. The place we live	1. Territory & our life
			2. The way we live	2. Respect of human rights & a just society
			3. Today & tomorrow in our region	3. Ancestors' life & culture
			4. Diversity & change in ways of life	4. New social changes & life today
		Geography	5. Our nation's political development	6. Our nation's economic development
			6. Our nation's economic development	7. Countries around the world
			7. Countries around the world	8. Future of Reunified Korea & world peace
			Middle School (Grade 7-9)	
			1. The world I live in	2. Differing climates from ours
			3. A Journey into nature	4. Diverse worlds, diverse cultures
Social Studies	5. Natural disasters around the world	6. Competition & conflicts around natural resources		
	6. Competition & conflicts around natural resources	7. Population change & population problems		
	7. Population change & population problems	8. City: The habitat we build		
	8. City: The habitat we build	9. Global economic activities & local changes		
	9. Global economic activities & local changes	10. Environmental problems & sustainable environment		
	10. Environmental problems & sustainable environment	11. Korea in the world		
General Social Studies	11. Korea in the world	12. The world we live in together		
	12. The world we live in together	1. Individuals & social life		
	1. Individuals & social life	2. Understanding culture		
	2. Understanding culture	3. Political life & democracy		
	3. Political life & democracy	4. Political process & civic participation		
	4. Political process & civic participation	5. Daily life & the law		
5. Daily life & the law	6. Human rights & the Constitution			
6. Human rights & the Constitution	7. The Constitution & state institutions			
7. The Constitution & state institutions	8. Economic life & choices			
8. Economic life & choices	9. Market economy & prices			
9. Market economy & prices	10. National economy & international trade			
10. National economy & international trade	11. International society & international politics			
11. International society & international politics	12. Social change & social problems			
12. Social change & social problems				

When Table 4 is examined, in South Korea, where the compulsory education period is 9 years (elementary school + middle school). Social studies course is included in the

curriculum between the 3rd and 9th grades. There are four units with the same name in elementary school 3rd and 4th grades; It is seen that there are 7 units with the same name in 5th and 6th

grades. It is seen that 12 units related to geography discipline are included in the middle school program (7-9) under the name of Social Studies course and 12 units are included under the title of general social studies. When elementary and middle school curricula are examined, it is seen that in general, units related to the discipline of geography, current issues related to the discipline of economics, the concept of change in social life, human rights issues, political participation and democracy, relations with different countries, and Korean history are included. The most remarkable feature of the 2015 Social Studies Curriculum is that it has a theme-based and integrative structure. At elementary school level, 12 theme-based units were developed by integrating the content areas of Geography, History and General Social Studies courses. Two curriculum topics or themes have received much attention in the Social

Studies curriculum: Global awareness and multiculturalism. Global awareness and multiculturalism are included in many units in the 2015 Social Studies Curriculum. In the core subjects at elementary and middle level, students are encouraged to examine issues such as economy, culture, consensus, the environment and future society from a global perspective through the Geography and General Social Studies units. Adopting a multicultural perspective, students try to understand the meaning of cultural diversity as well as critically analyze cases of cultural prejudice and discrimination that occur both nationally and globally. The Korean social studies curriculum was also heavily influenced by societal needs. With the 2015 social studies revision, two specific contents stand out on the main topics: regional education and financial literacy.

Table 5. Content structure of the social studies curriculum in Turkey.

Level	Learning Field (MEB, 2017)	Units	Number of Achievement
4 th Grade	Individual and society	Everyone has an identity	5
	Cultural heritage	I'm learning my past	4
	People, places and environments	Where we live	6
	Science, technology and society	Fortunately, there is	5
	Production, distribution, consumption	From production to consumption	5
	Active citizenship	People and management	4
	Global connections	My distant friends	4
5 th Grade	Individual and society	Me in society	4
	Cultural heritage	My country, my culture and my history	5
	People, places and environments	Where we live	5
	Science, Technology and Society	Technology and life	5
	Production, distribution, consumption	From production to consumption	6
	Active citizenship	Those who work for the community	4
	Global connections	Global interaction	4
6 th Grade	Individual and society	We and our values	5
	Cultural heritage	Journey to history	5
	People, places and environments	Life on earth	4
	Science, technology and society	Science and technology in our lives	4
	Production, distribution, consumption	I produce, I consume, I am conscious	6
	Active citizenship	I agree with the management	6
	Global connections	Our international relations	4
7 th Grade	Individual and society	Communication and human relations	4
	Cultural heritage	Journey to Turkish history	5
	People, places and environments	Population and settlement	4
	Science, technology and society	Science in time	4
	Production, distribution, consumption	Economy and social life	6
	Active citizenship	Living democracy	4
	Global connections	Bridges between countries	4

When Table 5 is examined, there are learning fields named individual and society; cultural heritage; people, places and environments; science, technology and society; production,

distribution, consumption; active citizenship; and global connections at all grade levels in elementary and middle school programs, respectively. Although a spiral approach has been

followed at every grade level in these learning fields, this understanding is sometimes strayed from. The most mentioned topics in the 2017 current program belong to the disciplines of economy and geography. Then there are the subjects and achievements of history, science, citizenship and international relations. In the current program compared to previous programs, it is seen that more importance is given to accepting and respecting differences and using technology effectively. When the programs of both countries are compared, it is seen that the units related to the discipline of geography, current issues related to the discipline of economics, the concept of change in social life, human rights issues, political participation and democracy, and relations with different countries are given the same intensity.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the first finding, it was tried to determine the similarities and differences between the South Korean Social Studies Curriculum and the Turkish Social Studies Curriculum in terms of purpose. It has been concluded that the social studies curricula of both countries generally emphasize the importance of raising individuals with “the importance of being a democratic citizen, citizenship skills and competences”. The purpose of the emergence of the social studies course, which originates from the USA, is to contribute to raising the qualified citizens desired by the societies. NCSS (1994) defines the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

In the second finding, it is understood that the social studies curriculum in South Korea takes place at elementary, middle and high school levels and has a multidisciplinary structure. In Turkey, this course, which takes place in the elementary and middle school period, has a multidisciplinary structure like South Korea. But in Turkey, there is no social studies course at the high school level. Many studies (Tay, 2017; Demir & Haçat, 2018; Tonga, 2019) reveal that the social studies course in the curriculum in Turkey has an interdisciplinary approach.

In the third finding, it is understood that the semester durations and social studies course durations of both countries are close to each other. Only in South Korea, moral education and history lessons are included in addition to social studies lessons at primary and secondary school levels.

When the fourth finding is examined, it is seen that the achievements in the curriculum of both countries are shown with some codes. It is seen that Korean letters and numbers are included in the expression of achievements in the South Korean program. In Turkey, the achievement numbering process in the social studies curriculum is respectively “course code, grade level, learning area number and achievement number”.

In the fifth finding, the social studies subjects in the South Korean primary and secondary school curriculum were examined. During compulsory education, the Social Studies course is included in the curriculum between the 3rd grade of primary school and the 9th grade of secondary school. Four units with the same name were included in primary school 3rd and 4th grades. It was also determined that 7 units with the same name were included in the 5th and 6th grades. It is seen that there are 12 units directly related to the discipline of geography under the name of Social Studies course in the secondary school program (7-9) and 12 units under the title of general social studies. When primary and secondary school curricula are examined, it is seen that in general, units related to the discipline of geography, current issues related to the discipline of economics, the concept of change in social life, human rights issues, political participation and democracy, relations with different countries, and Korean history are included.

In the sixth finding, the social studies subjects in the elementary and middle school curriculum in Turkey were mentioned. The social studies curriculum is divided into 7 learning fields to follow the same order in the elementary and middle school curriculum. Each learning field contains subjects and achievements belonging to one or more disciplines. It is seen that the individual and society learning field is associated with the disciplines of citizenship, sociology, psychology, history, scientific research, law, science and technology, informatics; culture and heritage learning area is associated with scientific research, history, sociology, citizenship, environmental education, economics, political science disciplines; people, places and environments learning area is associated with geography, citizenship, environmental education, scientific research discipline; science, technology and society learning area is associated with science and technology, history, environmental education, sociology, informatics, history, scientific research, philosophy disciplines; production, distribution and consumption learning area is associated with environmental education, economy, sociology, citizenship, philosophy, science and technology disciplines; active citizenship learning field is associated with the disciplines of human rights and democracy, citizenship, political science, philosophy; global connections is associated with the disciplines of geography, political science, philosophy, sociology, history, economy (Turan, 2019).

When the programs of both countries are compared, it is seen that the units related to the discipline of geography, current issues related to the discipline of economics, the concept of change in social life, human rights issues, political participation and democracy, and relations with different countries are given the same intensity.

Conflict of Interest

The author of this article declares that he has no conflict of interest.

References

- Daehoon, J. (2017). The social studies curriculum in Korea: Characteristics, issues, and prospects. *Journal of Research in Curriculum & Instruction*, 21(3), 185-196. <https://doi.org/10.24231/rici.2017.21.3.185>
- Demir, F. B., & Haçat, S. O. (2018). Sosyal bilim disiplinlerine göre 2005 ve 2018 sosyal bilgiler dersi öğretim programındaki kazanımların değerlendirilmesi. *Uluslararası Sosyal Bilgilerde Yeni Yaklaşımlar Dergisi*, 2(2), 27-56. (In Turkish)
- Doğanay, A. (2002). Sosyal bilgiler öğretimi. In C. Öztürk & D. Dilek (Eds.), *Hayat bilgisi ve sosyal bilgiler öğretimi* (pp. 15-46), Pegem Yayıncılık. (In Turkish)
- Hancock, B., Ockleford, E., & Windridge O. W. (2009). An introduction to qualitative research. Nottingham: The NIHR RDS for the East Midlands.
- KICE. (2012). *Education in Korea*. Retrieved Oct 1, 2022 from <http://www.kice.re.kr/main.do?s=kice>
- MEB. (2005). *İlköğretim sosyal bilgiler dersi öğretim programı ve kılavuzu: 4- 5. Sınıflar*. Devlet Kitapları Müdürlüğü. (In Turkish)
- MEB. (2017). *Sosyal bilgiler dersi öğretim programı (İlkokul ve Ortaokul 4, 5, 6 ve 7. Sınıflar)*. Retrieved Nov 4, 2022 from <http://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/Dosyalar/201812103847686-SOSYAL%20B%20C4%B0LG%C4%B0LER%20>

%C3%96%C4%9ERET%C4%B0M%20PROGRAMI
%20.pdf (In Turkish)

- NCSS. (1994). *Expectations of excellence: Curriculum standards for social studies*. Retrieved Nov 4, 2022 from <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/national-curriculum-standards-social-studies-introduction>
- Tay, B. (2017). 2005 Sosyal bilgiler dersi öğretim programı ile 2017 sosyal bilgiler dersi taslak öğretim programının karşılaştırması. *International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences*, 8(27), 461-487. (In Turkish)
- The Ministry of Education. (2017). *The curriculum framework for elementary and secondary schools (MOE Notice # 2015-74)*. The Ministry of Education.
- Tonga, D. (2019). 2005 ve 2017 Sosyal bilgiler öğretim programı: Benzerlikler ve farklılıklar. *Ulusal Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 22, 83-100. <https://doi.org/10.29228/diyalektolog.39499> (In Turkish)
- Topkaya, Y. (2016). Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin değer aktarım yaklaşımları hakkındaki görüşlerine ait nitel bir çalışma. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 17(1), 637-652. (In Turkish)
- Turan, S. (2019). 2018 Sosyal bilgiler öğretim programının disiplinlerarası yapısının incelenmesi. *Sosyal Bilgilerde Yenilikçi Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2(2), 166-190. (In Turkish)
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2011). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Seçkin Yayıncılık. (In Turkish)