

Concepts in Social Studies Curriculum

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Abstract

Social studies was first introduced as a distinct course in Turkey's curriculum in 1968. Until 2005, the Turkish national education system was primarily shaped by essentialism and perennialism, though progressivism and reconstructionism appeared periodically. In 2005, constructivism became the dominant approach in the education system, with curricula made more explanatory and systematic than before. In this context, concepts enabling individuals to prepare for the future and understand and give meaning to life were directly incorporated into the curricula—especially in social studies. The interdisciplinary nature of social studies and its rich content made concept teaching particularly important, as concepts are presented in relation to knowledge, skills, and values. This study examines social studies curricula implemented since 2005 using document analysis to present concepts in tables, followed by descriptive analysis for interpretation. The aim is to observe changes and transformations in concepts within the social studies curriculum.

Key words: Concept, curricula, social studies.

Introduction

Until 2005, Turkish curricula were shaped primarily by essentialism and perennialism—the philosophical foundations of the national education system—with periodic influences from progressivism and reconstructionism (Ciydem & Akdag, 2021). These curricula generally aimed to transmit knowledge through unit and subject content, relying heavily on teacher narration while lacking opportunities for students to interpret and apply information. Since 2005, however, curricula have adopted a constructivist approach, emphasizing not only theoretical knowledge but also students' ability to use and interpret information and engage actively in social life. Values, skills, and concepts—previously absent or implicit—are now explicitly presented under dedicated headings.

Social studies was first introduced as a course in the Turkish curriculum in 1968. This course, encompassing history, geography, citizenship, and other social sciences, aims to prepare students for life and foster active citizenship. The interdisciplinary nature of the social studies curriculum has also contributed to its conceptual depth (Tokcan, 2015). The importance of concepts in the development of society and in establishing interpersonal relationships has also

made the social studies curriculum important in concept teaching. This is because everything in the universe gains meaning through concepts. Events, facts, and thoughts are stored in human memory through concepts. Therefore, concepts help categorize events, facts, and thoughts and eliminate complexity (Celikoz, 1998). Concepts, present in every area of life, also contribute to individuals' understanding of life. Particularly in the area of education and training, where people get ready for life, and notably in social studies education, concepts are an essential component. By its very nature, the social studies course is intertwined with concepts, whether they are taught explicitly or not.

Given the importance of concept teaching in social studies, this study examines the concepts presented in social studies curricula. The 2005 social studies curriculum—which first explicitly incorporated concepts under a constructivist approach—serves as the baseline for this study. Concepts from the 2015 and 2024 curricula are then compared by grade level to reveal changes and transformations.

Method

In this study, which employs the document analysis method, the concepts included in the social studies curriculum from 2005, 2015, and 2024 were examined. In the document analysis method used in qualitative studies, changes and transformations related to the subject under study are also revealed based on the documents (Yildirim & Simsek, 2021). A descriptive analysis was performed on the study's results.

Findings

In this section, the concepts included in the social studies curriculum are analyzed, presented in tables, and interpreted in accordance with the study's objectives.

Concepts in the 2005 social studies curriculum

In the 2005 social studies curriculum, concepts are integrated with knowledge, skills, and values within the framework of constructivism. Concepts presented through units and learning areas, along with learning outcomes and activities, are defined as fundamental elements of the social sciences (MoNE, 2005). Accordingly, the aim is for students to understand and analyze these concepts in the context of daily life, society, and history. They have also been concretized using techniques such as meaning analysis tables, concept networks, and concept maps. The concept of global citizenship is emphasized in the general objectives of this curriculum, which highlights the theme of citizenship.

Table 1: Concepts in the 2005 social studies curriculum

Concept	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade	7 th Grade
Disaster	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	
Family	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	
Kinship	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	
Constitution	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Independence	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Peace	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Similarities and differences	*(D)	*(D)		
Human environment	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	*(R)
Declaration(Statement)		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Science		*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Individual		*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Primary source		*(I)		
Region	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Invention			*(D)	*(R)
Budget	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	*(R)
Geographical Location			*(D)	*(R)
Republic	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Era			*(I)	*(D)
Environment	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	*(R)
Environmental pollution	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Distribution	*(I)	*(D)		
Behaviour	*(D)	*(R)		
Solidarity	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Value	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Change			*(R)	*(R)
Change and sustainability	*(I)	*(D)		
Democracy	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
The State	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Language	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Religion	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Natural sources		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Natural environment	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	*(R)
Emotion	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Thought	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Sovereignty	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Economy	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Economic activity	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Equator			*(I)	*(D)
Effort	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Energy		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Aesthetics			*(D)	*(R)
Interaction			*(I)	*(D)
Active citizen	*(I)	*(D)		
Conquest			*(I)	*(D)
Ghaza(Holy war)			*(I)	*(D)
Tradition	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Generalization			*(I)	*(D)
Income and expense	*(I)	*(I)		
Entrepreneur		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Clothing	*(D)	*(R)		
Migration		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Opinion			*(I)	*(D)
Group	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Power	*(I)	*(D)		
Customs			*(I)	
Right			*(R)	*(R)
Map			*(D)	*(R)
Intercommunication		*(I)		

Weather condition	*(D)	*(R)		
Weather event	*(D)	*(R)		
Tolerance	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Restructuring				*(I)
Export		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Secondary source		*(I)		
Climate	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Communication		*(I)		*(D)
Settlement policy			*(I)	*(D)
Wastage	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Desires and needs	*(D)	*(R)		
Division of labor	*(I)	*(D)		
Unemployment		*(I)	*(D)	*(D)
Import		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Public	*(I)	*(D)		
Public Opinion	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Evidence	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Explorer		*(I)		
Participation	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Resource	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Urbanization		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Discovery		*(I)		*(D)
Continent	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	
Identity	*(I)	*(D)		
Personality			*(I)	*(D)
Chronology	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
General Assembly			*(I)	*(D)
Institution	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Divine blessing(Kut)			*(I)	*(D)
Pole			*(I)	*(D)
Culture	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Cultural element	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Global problem			*(I)	*(D)
Secularism		*(I)	*(I)	*(D)
Leadership	*(I)	*(D)		
Press	*(I)	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)
Occupation	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Constitutional monarchy			*(I)	*(D)
Milestone, the birth of christ			*(I)	*(D)
Nation	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
National sovereignty	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
National Culture	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Monarchy			*(I)	*(D)
Causality	*(I)	*(D)		
Population		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Ocean			*(I)	*(D)
Fact	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Oligarchy			*(I)	*(D)
Common heritage		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Scale			*(D)	
Freedom		*(I)	*(I)	*(D)
Money	*(D)	*(R)		
Market	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Reform				*(I)
Role		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Renaissance				*(I)
Reign, sultanate		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Art	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Industry			*(D)	*(R)
War	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Election	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Capital			*(D)	*(R)

Non-governmental organization	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Politics				*(I)
Political power			*(I)	*(D)
Responsibility	*(D)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Social science			*(I)	*(D)
Social interaction	*(I)	*(I)		
Social organization	*(I)	*(I)		
Agreement	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Saving	*(D)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Technology	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Copyright and patent			*(D)	
Fundamental rights and freedoms	*(I)	*(D)		
Theocracy			*(I)	
Organization	*(I)	*(I)		
Trade	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Ceremony	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Tourism		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Consumption	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Transportation	*(I)	*(D)	*(D)	*(R)
Civilization			*(I)	*(D)
Price	*(I)	*(I)		
Production	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Product	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Foundation		*(I)		*(I)
Hypothesis			*(I)	
Homeland	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Citizen			*(R)	*(R)
Tax	*(I)	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Efficency		*(I)		
Judiciary	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Law	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Legislation		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Investment		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Location	*(D)	*(R)		
Settlement	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Direction	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)	
Administration	*(I)	*(D)	*(R)	*(R)
Citizenship	*(I)	*(D)		
Executive			*(I)	*(D)
Century		*(I)	*(D)	*(R)
Total	91	120	124	121

As shown in Table 1, the social studies curriculum includes 91 concepts at the 4th grade level, 120 concepts at the 5th grade level, 124 concepts at the 6th grade level, and 121 concepts at the 7th grade level. These concepts comprise history, geography, citizenship, and cultural elements within the scope of the social studies course. Reflecting the constructivist approach, the teaching of grade-appropriate concepts—based on students' readiness—followed a sequence of introduction (I), development (D), and reinforcement (R). Here, the introduction was followed by development and then reinforcement. Teaching of each concept began at the introductory level and progressed spirally to the next grade. Thus, in the final stage, concepts were reinforced to achieve permanent learning. Furthermore, a transition from abstract to concrete topics was ensured. Concepts were addressed in a detailed and

interdisciplinary manner. In this respect, the 2005 social studies curriculum laid the foundation for concept teaching in subsequent curricula.

Concepts in the 2015 Social Studies Curriculum

In the 2015 social studies curriculum, units have been replaced by learning areas. As in the 2005 social studies curriculum, concepts are not listed under a separate heading. Concepts are presented within learning areas in relation to all learning outcomes (MoNE, 2015). Concepts included in an interdisciplinary approach have been developed through knowledge-based learning outcomes and integrated with skills and values. The aim is for students to think abstractly, perceive change and continuity, and connect with social life.

Table 2: Concepts in the 2015 social studies curriculum

Concept	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade	7 th Grade
Family	*			
Constitution			*	
Aristocracy				*
Supply and demand				*
Human geography			*	
Human factor	*			
Scholar				*
Science	*	*		
Scientific research			*	
Scientific information			*	
Accumulation			*	
Unity and solidarity		*		
Longitude				*
Budget	*			
Geographical discovery				*
Conflict		*		
Environment	*			
Environmental problems		*		
Child	*			
Solution		*		
Behaviour				*
Change	*			*
Democracy			*	*
Democratic value				*
Epic			*	
Natural disaster	*	*	*	
Natural element	*			
Natural asset		*		
Emotion				*
World	*			
Thought				*
Economy	*	*	*	
Economic zone				*
Economic activity		*	*	
Economic resource		*		
Economic motivation			*	
Equator				*
Latitude				*
Aesthetics				*

Interactivity			*	
Active citizen		*	*	
Conquest			*	*
Finance			*	
Financial instrument			*	
Physical geography			*	
Ghaza(Holy war)				*
Income	*			
Expense	*			
Enterprise				*
Entrepreneurship				*
Group	*	*		
Migration	*			*
Visual source	*			
Opinion			*	
Right	*	*		
Raw material		*		
Map		*		
Weather event	*			
Restructuring				*
Invention				*
Export			*	
Revolution				*
Need	*			
Climate		*	*	
Climate change				*
Communication				*
Reform				*
Internet		*		
Settlement policy			*	
Islam			*	
Desire	*			
Workforce		*		
Import			*	
Ruins		*		
Evidence			*	
Participation		*		
Resource	*			
Identity theft		*		
Mass media				*
Location	*	*		*
Coordinate system				*
Sketch	*			
Rule	*			
Institution		*		
Culture	*	*		
Cultural activity			*	
Cultural element		*		
Cultural heritage				*
Cultural factor		*		
Legend(Map)				*
Press			*	
Occupation	*			*
Constitutional monarchy				*
Monarchy				*
Museum	*			
Population				*
Oligarchy				*
Scale				*
Free thinking				*
Patent			*	
Popular knowledge			*	
Popular culture			*	*

Competition				*
Competitive production		*		
Advertisement				*
Role		*		
Reign, sultanate				*
War			*	
Capital		*		
Insurance			*	
Non-governmental organization		*	*	
Political party			*	
Social life		*		
Social media		*		
Socialization		*	*	
Social problem		*		
Oral source	*			
Sustainability			*	
Continuity	*			*
History	*			
Technology	*	*		
Copyright			*	
Theocracy				*
Terrorism				*
Trade route			*	
Social unity			*	
Social role			*	
Soil		*		
Consumer				*
Consumption	*			*
Production	*	*		
Judiciary			*	
Legislation			*	
Investment			*	
Written source	*			
Settlement	*			
Settling		*		*
Landforms		*		
Direction	*			
Administration		*	*	*
Executive			*	
Motherland			*	
Total	36	40	45	49

As shown in Table 2, the social studies curriculum includes 36 concepts at the 4th grade level, 40 at the 5th grade level, 45 at the 6th grade level, and 49 at the 7th grade level. These concepts form a coherent whole and are vital for raising students' awareness of the world they live in. Regarding the role of sociological concepts in teaching, the aim extends beyond fostering socially compatible individuals to creating broader social awareness. The concepts are integrated through an interdisciplinary, life-oriented approach that supports lifelong learning and develops students' abstract thinking and civic awareness.

Concepts in the 2024 social studies curriculum

Within the scope of the 2024 Century of Türkiye Education Model, concepts have been included as key concepts in each learning area in the social studies curriculum (MoNE, 2024).

Prepared from a holistic perspective, the curriculum interrelates concepts in a mutually supportive manner. This ensures that connections are established between disciplines.

Table 3: Concepts in the 2024 social studies curriculum

Concept	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade	7 th Grade
AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority)		*		
Disaster		*		
Hunter-gatherer society		*		
Balbal (stone figure)			*	
Human environment		*	*	
Scientist	*			
Scientific ethics				*
Conscious consumption	*			
Individual characteristics	*			
Unity and solidarity		*	*	
Budget		*		
Jihad				*
Geography		*		
Republic	*	*		
Pluralism		*		
Behaviour				*
Solidarity	*	*		
Change				*
Democracy		*		
Democratic state				*
Democratic participation	*			
Epic			*	
Foreign policy				*
Digital footprint		*		
Cyber security	*			
Digital privacy	*			
Digital citizenship			*	
Language			*	
Religion			*	
Natural resource	*		*	
Natural environment		*	*	
Natural environmental factor	*			
E-commerce		*		
Economy				*
Economic activity		*	*	
Effective communication				*
Active citizenship		*		
Effort			*	
Conquest				*
Equality of opportunity				*
Idea			*	
Intellectual property			*	
Ghaza(Holy war)				*
Future				*
Custom and tradition			*	
Income		*		
Public network		*		
Universal suffrage				*

principle				
Expense		*		
Entrepreneurship				*
Migration			*	
Gök Tengri(Sky God)			*	
Relative position		*	*	
Group		*	*	*
Right		*	*	
Map	*			
Map legend	*			
State of law				*
Rule of law		*		
Hijrah(Migration)			*	
Law			*	
Need	*			
Climate			*	
Communication			*	*
Area of interests	*			
Settlement policy				*
Islam			*	
Desire	*			
Conciliation policy				*
Paper			*	
Development				*
Participation		*		
Public opininon			*	
Mass media				*
Neighbouring country		*		
Nomadic			*	
Separation of powers				*
Unity of power				*
Culture	*	*	*	
Cultural cooperation			*	
Globalization				*
Global problems				*
Secular state				*
Brand			*	
Civilization		*		
Press			*	
Occupation			*	
Milestone, the birth of christ		*		
National value			*	
National sovereignty		*		
National culture	*			
National Struggle	*			
Absolute position			*	
Navigation (route applications)	*			
Population			*	
Common heritage	*	*		
Proposal				*
Special needs				*
Patent			*	
Marketing			*	
Problem				*
Rezerve	*			
Role		*	*	
Art	*		*	
Respect		*		
Border		*		
Cyberbullying	*			
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)		*	*	

Political party			*	*
Responsibility		*	*	
Social studies	*			
Social sciences				*
Social state				*
Social life				*
Sustainability		*		
History			*	
Design			*	
Saving		*		
Technology		*		
Copyright			*	
Registration			*	
Society			*	*
Social unity	*			
Mores			*	
Attitude				*
Turkic World			*	
Transportation			*	
UNESCO		*		
Production-distribution-consumption	*		*	*
Helping each other		*		
Judiciary				*
Legislation				*
Investment			*	*
Settled life		*		
Executive				*
Total	26	41	52	40

As shown in Table 3, there are 26 concepts at the 4th-grade level, 41 at the 5th-grade level, 52 at the 6th-grade level, and 40 at the 7th-grade level. The 2024 social studies curriculum includes concepts that are compatible with the era's technological developments and address not only social but also universal issues. There is a shift from local to global perspectives. Within this framework, the concepts demonstrate continuity, complementing and supporting one another at every grade level.

Conclusion

According to the study's data, concept teaching in social studies curricula is connected to the curriculum's knowledge, skill, and attitude components. The knowledge domain defines concepts, the skill domain applies them, and the attitude domain internalizes them. This is where the constructivist approach's efficacy is demonstrated. It is evident that the ideas in social studies curricula are intended to produce acceptable citizens as well as to help students become more adaptive to the shifting global order of the 2000s, when science and technology are developing.

The 2005 social studies curriculum included learning areas alongside units. Skills and values were incorporated. Concepts were used to facilitate their acquisition. In the 2015 social

studies curriculum, units were not included; instead, all content was presented under learning areas. While the number of concepts was reduced, new concepts were added. This situation continued in the 2024 social studies curriculum. The curriculum was prepared with an understanding that is more in line with the times, incorporates global developments, and embraces society. In parallel with the development of technology, concepts related to digitalisation in particular have been included. Within this framework, the concepts in the social studies curricula have changed and been renewed in line with the social needs of the period.

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