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The Effect of Discussion Techniques in the Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum of a Turkish Middle School

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the effectiveness of five discussion techniques (i.e., Debate, Panel, Collegium, Forum and Opposite Panel) on the learning progress in the fifth-grade social studies course. The pretest-posttest control group model, which is one of the real experimental models, was used in the research. The research participants consisted of 58 fifth-grade students studying at five secondary schools located in the centre of the Niğde province (Turkey) in the 2019-2020 spring term. Researchers prepared an achievement test for data collection: The Science, Technology and Society Academic Success Test, which was used in the research as a data collection tool. The statistical program (SPSS, Version 21) was used to analyse the data obtained from the study. The application period of the study lasted for four weeks in total, with three hours of teaching weekly in both groups. After the achievement test was applied to the students, the data was obtained and the application part of the study was terminated. As a result of the research, students taught with discussion techniques were more successful than those taught with conventional teaching activities stipulated by the current curriculum. Along with this result, it can be suggested that teaching based on discussion techniques should be often used in different classes and themes of social studies courses.

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Keywords

social sciences, discussion techniques, teaching principles and methods, courses success

Introduction

This Education is one of the most important social institutions that provides development and socialisation for human beings. Therefore, education is one of the most important subjects for the individual and society. Societies and individuals have always given great importance to education to improve themselves and keep up with the information era (Davutoğlu, 2009). Humans, as social beings, acquire all of their attitudes – except some innate behaviours – through education. For this reason, many authors have indicated that people can only be valuable individuals for themselves and the society they live in through education (Cevizci, 2011, p. 12). Education, in general, is the process of changing individuals. It is expected that there will be a change in the attitudes of humans who go through this process (Demirel, 1994, p.1). As a result, the main advantage of education should be forming conscious individuals.

Conscious individuals can be raised through education. In this direction, educational sciences aim to improve the teaching and learning process. Different learning models and techniques are contemporarily designed, and various learning materials are aimed at making education more effective, which also means educating conscious individuals (İlhan & Oruc, 2019).

In Turkey and many other countries, a social studies course plays a vital role in educating qualified individuals (Kara et al., 2012) and includes skills such as communication, critical thinking, empathy and problem-solving, as well as values such as diligence, responsibility and sensitivity (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2018). It also includes such issues as what individuals should expect and do in order to live in society. With the basic skills and values it contains, a social studies course is one of the most essential components in the education system (Bulut & Kara, 2012, p. 1622). In Turkey, the social studies curriculum includes seven themes. These are: individual and society; culture and heritage; people, places and environments; science, technology and society; manufacturing, distribution and consumption; effective citizenship; and global connections. In the fifth-grade social studies programme, there are 33 acquisitions that should be taught to the students. Those acquisitions aim to educate active global citizens who love their homeland and have a sense of responsibility (MEB, 2018).

Although a social studies course is important for individuals and society – while including issues from history, economics, sociology and civil education – students often find it boring (Barton & Levstick, 2015; Balenger, 2017). As a result, they are not interested in the lesson (Chiodo & Byford, 2004). Maybe the reason is that a social studies course is virtually wholly based on a curriculum taken to be taught as knowledge transfer (Baş & Durmus, 2019). Saving a social studies course from boredom depends on teaching the course with a new method and technique, primarily designed to develop students' critical thinking and to help students be active during lessons. Students typically contribute something fresh and personal to discussions rather than just using the words and structures that are available to them. (Zarębski, 2019).

Five discussion techniques

Social studies education can only be successful in educating qualified and conscious individuals if it follows the changes and innovations in the educational systems concerning discussion techniques and skills (Demirel, 2015; Kara et al., 2012; Safran, 2008). When we review teaching methods and techniques, discussion techniques come first among the methods that require higher-level thinking. These techniques give the student the command of analysing, synthesising and evaluating different branches of knowledge they have acquired (Demirel, 2015) by providing them with a means of analysing, understanding and commenting on various views, as well as setting out what they have learned (Binbaşıoğlu, 1994). Furthermore, incorporating debate approaches into lessons encourages students to respect one another, act democratically and consider issues from a variety of perspectives. In the literature, there are different discussion techniques (Aykac, 2014; Demirel, 2015; Gozutok, 2017; Kucukahmet, 2008). In this research, five discussion techniques were used. The techniques are mentioned below.

Debate

The first inter-university debate took place in England in 1400. It was held between Cambridge University and Oxford University (Aldağ, 2006). Two groups are created to defend an issue from different angles. These groups prepare in advance regarding the chosen topic. The execution of this strategy hinges on having a specific goal in mind and doing the necessary groundwork (Aykaç, 2014). The technique aims to develop skills such as defending the idea, expressing oneself effectively and giving quick answers. It is not important whether the subject

defended in the debate technique is academic or not – the important thing is to develop communication skills while using this technique (Şahan, 2017).

Panel

In this technique, a chairman is chosen to lead the discussion before a discussion topic is then determined. The discussion begins after the groups are created (Gözütok, 2017). Using this method, the audience can ask questions or voice their opinions. The people leading the discussion may be experts in their fields (Saracaloğlu, 2015, p. 315).

Forum

In this approach, people with different ideas participate in discussions about a predetermined problem or topic. This method enhances the ability to comment and ask inquiries. Additionally, it motivates students to actively engage in the conversation (Cengizhan, 2018).

Opposite Panel

As with other techniques, this requires preliminary preparation before application (Gözütok, 2017). To apply this technique, the class is divided into two groups. One of these groups is the one that asks questions and the other is the one that answers. At the same time, the correct answers are noted, and the winning group is determined (Aykaç, 2014). It is one of the discussion techniques that students enjoyed most during lessons in the research (Saracaloğlu, 2015).

Collegium

Collegium is a technique of discussion by two different groups in front of an audience on a certain topic. One of these groups is experts in their subjects and the other is the students selected from the class (Aykaç, 2014). One of the groups is regarded as experts in their field, which is the distinctive characteristic that sets the collegium apart from the panel and debate. The key benefit of this method is that viewers can ask specialists questions (Cengizhan, 2018).

Despite the differentiation between the five discussion techniques specified above, in the research, we do not compare them with respect to their usefulness or effectiveness. In the study, the inclusion of one of the aforementioned approaches in the lectures and its exclusion from the lessons are compared.

The effectiveness of the learning-teaching process in the classroom depends on the selection of appropriate methods and techniques (Demirel, 1994, p. 44). Therefore, the knowledge aimed to teach the students is carried out through the

active participation of the students (Coskun & Kara, 2020). At the same time, considering the goal of the social studies course – which relies in raising active citizens with democratic attitudes – it would be an important deficiency not to use discussion techniques in a social studies course. A social studies course includes critical thinking, research, communication, using evidence, decision making, social participation, using language correctly and effectively, as well as the values of respect, equality and solidarity. Learning these skills and values successfully is possible through the use of discussion techniques. At the same time, the mere discussion is the practical application of democracy in the field of education (Hill, 1977).

With the 2005 change in the social studies curriculum in Turkey, an emphasis was put on constructivist education (Akpinar, Çakmak & Kara 2010). In this direction, "constructivist education" emphasises the use of methods and techniques that allow students to participate effectively in social studies courses. After reviewing the literature on the subject, it becomes clear that there are few studies on discussion techniques. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effect of discussion techniques on student learning success. The experimental and control groups were determined, and the preliminary knowledge of the students in the group was measured. Then, the groups that received instruction in discussion tactics and the groups that received instruction using programme-based methods were contrasted. The expected result of the research is that students who were taught by the discussion technique (in the experimental group) will attain significantly better achievement scores than their counterparts who were taught according to the programme-based classroom teaching plan. Because no studies on the subject have been found (at least in the Turkish education field), this research is of great importance for an effective social studies education.

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to determine the effectiveness of five discussion techniques on the learning progress in the fifth-grade social studies course. For this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions:

Is there a discernible difference between the pretest-posttest results of the students in the experimental groups who received discussion-based instruction on the themes of science, technology and society and those of the control groups who received instruction based on the current curriculum?

Method

The Research Model

In this study, which aims to determine the effect of discussion techniques on student achievement in the social studies fifth-grade science technology and society theme, the pretest-posttest experimental design model with control group was designed. The reason why the experimental model with a pretest-posttest control group was used in the study is that it offered the researcher the opportunity to make comparisons on the subject (Büyüköztürk, Çokluk & Köklü 2018, p. 17). In addition, the researcher could examine the effects of comparisons and reach sound results and comments on the study. Therefore, it was the most appropriate model to determine the effect of discussion techniques in social studies course on student success.

Pretest-posttest control group design symbolised as below:

$$\begin{array}{lllll} G_1 & R & O_{1.1} & X & O_{1.2} \\ G_2 & R & O_{2.1} & & O_{2.2} \end{array}$$

As seen, G1 symbolises the experimental group, while G2 symbolises the control group. First of all, a pre-test (O1.1, O2.1) is applied to know the level of preliminary knowledge of the groups about the subject that will be taught. If the preliminary knowledge of the groups does not differ significantly as a result of this test, X – the effect of which is wanted to be measured – is applied. After this application is finished, the post-test (O1.2, O2.2) is applied. Then, the effectiveness of X is determined by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores (Karasar, 2010).

The Study Group

The study group of this research consists of fifth-grade students at a public secondary school, in the city centre of Niğde, in the 2019-2020 academic year. In the selection of the public school in the research, the students (participants in the research) had average characteristics in terms of socio-economic and academic achievement; they were easily accessible too. The study groups came from a public school representing the country's general characteristics. There are five grade branches (A,B,C,D and E) and five classes in each branch in the relevant school. Due to the easily accessible sample from these five branches, it was planned to work with a teacher who was taught in two classes. One of these branches was randomly assigned as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

The study groups were determined as one with 28 participants in the experimental group and 30 participants in the control group – a total of 58.

Data Collection Tool

The Science, Technology and Society Academic Success Test was developed by the researcher to determine the level of achievement of the students participating in the research, to measure their prior knowledge and to determine how much discussion techniques affect student achievement. While preparing the test, first of all, the 'science, technology and society' theme in the social studies curriculum was examined together with the course hours. After reviewing the science, technology and society theme in detail, a field survey was carried out. A thorough assessment of the subject of science, technology and society education was conducted, and field specialists (from the education department and teachers at the public school in Niğde) were consulted. With the findings obtained hitherto, ten questions suitable for each acquisition were prepared and an achievement test of 50 questions was developed. The validity study of the test was endorsed by three experts: one was a curriculum development specialist and the others were assessment and evaluation specialists. The test's item difficulty and item discrimination indexes were applied to 300 sixth-grade students who had been taught this theme the previous year. As a result of the analysis, six questions were removed from the test. The science, technology and society academic achievement test, consisting of 44 questions, was then agreed on to collect the research data.

Analysis of Data

Data from the science technology and society theme achievement test was analysed using the SSPS 21.0 package program. A significance level of 0.5 was taken into consideration in the evaluation of statistical data. In order to analyse the science, technology and society theme achievement test differences between the pretest-posttest results, a t-test was used (Büyüköztürk, Çokluk & Köklü, 2018). To check the findings showed a normal distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) normality tests were used (Can, 2014; Tabachnick & Fidel, 2015).

Application of the research

As aforementioned, in the research, first of all, a theme suitable for the discussion techniques was selected, and the chosen theme was *science, technology and society*. The reason for this is that students are more receptive to conversation when it comes to technology as they are interested in it and have different thoughts about it than when it comes to other Turkish themes such as *culture and heritage*. For

the sake of comparison, pre-tests were applied in both groups. Students were informed about these techniques. They were then asked to prepare for the theme to be taught. In the control group, the theme was taught based on the current social studies curriculum. Afterwards, the post-test was applied. Students' success was analysed with the data obtained from the tests (Table 1 below):

Table 1: Application process table

Groups	Pre-test	Experimental Process	Post-test
Experimental Group	Achievement Test	Debate, Panel, Collegium, Opposite Panel and Forum Discussion Techniques	Achievement Test
Control Group	Achievement Test	Programme-Based Teaching Activities	Achievement Test

Data analysis

In order to apply statistical analysis of test scores, first of all, the data was evaluated using the 'Single Group Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test' to determine whether the test results showed a normal distribution. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results table

	Control group					Experimental Group				
	N	M	s	z	p	N	M	s	z	p
Pre-learning achievements	30	54.03	16.61	0.614	0.845	28	56.92	18.13	0.923	0.362
Post-learning achievements	30	67.66	11.07	0.613	0.846	28	77.50	12.90	0.838	0.484

As seen in the table, all the test scores in both groups show normal distribution ($p > .05$). The normal distribution of pre-test scores means that parametric tests

can be applied to the data. The parametric tests used in this study are: independent groups t-test and dependent groups t-test.

In the study, it was determined that the students' prior knowledge was similar. The obtained pre-test scores were analysed with the independent groups t-test. The results are in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics results of the pre-test findings of the students in the experimental and control groups

Group	N	M	ss	t	sd	p
Experiment pre-test	28	56.92	18.13	.635	56	.528
Control pre-test	30	54.03	16.61			

When we look at Table 3, we can see the mean pre-test achievement score of the students in the experimental and control groups. According to this table, it was observed that the pre-test learning achievement score (M = 56.92) of the students in the experimental group and pre-test learning achievement score (M = 54.03) of the students in the control group were close to each other. This demonstrates that preliminary data from the groups can be seen equally and that group applications are possible.

The research on the *experimental* group social studies was carried out with discussion techniques, while the research in the *control* group social studies was carried out based on the methods and techniques prescribed by the current programme. After the end of teaching in both groups, post-tests were applied. The post-test scores taken from the groups are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics results of the post-test findings of the students in the experimental and control groups

Group	N	M	ss	t	sd	p
Experiment post-test	28	77.50	12.90	.120	56	.003
Control post-test	30	67.66	11.07			

According to the post-test results, it can be seen that there was a statistically significant difference between the learning achievement scores of the *experimental*

group – where the teaching of social studies was carried out by discussion techniques – and the *control* group students, where the teaching of social studies was carried out through the methods and techniques prescribed by the current programme. It was observed that the post-test learning achievement score of the students in the experimental group was M = 77.50, and that the post-test learning achievement score of the students in the control group was M = 67.66. It can be then concluded that the group social studies carried out by discussion techniques was more successful than the one carried out by the methods and techniques prescribed by the current programme. It can be said that the lesson carried out with discussion techniques led to more successful learning outcomes than the lesson led to methods and techniques in the current programme.

Table 5 shows the pre- and post test score of the experimental group.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics results of the Experimental Group Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	t	sd	p
Experiment pre-test	28	56.92	18.13	.891	54	.000
Experiment post-test	30	77.50	12.90			

As can be seen, there is a significant difference between the experimental group's pre-test and post-test success mean scores. The experimental group's success average pre-test was **(= 56, 92)** at the beginning of the study and reached success **(= 77.50)** in the post-test. From this result, it is seen that the use of discussion techniques provides a serious benefit in increasing the success of the students [t=14.891 (p=.000), P<0.50].

Table 6 shows the pre- and post test score of the control group.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics results of the Control Group Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	t	sd	p
Control pre-test	28	54.03	16.61	.740	58	.000
Control post-test	28	67.66	11.07			

Table 6 shows us the pre-test and post-test success of the control group. According to the data obtained, there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test. In other words, the average score of the control group students' pre-test success (= 54, 58) at the beginning of the study increased to (= 67, 66) in the post-test. According to this result, social studies teaching carried out in the current curriculum [in the control group] increased the success of the students [t=6, 740 (p=.000), P<0,50].

Discussion of the results

According to the analysis of the pre-test results, there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test scores of the experimental group – in which the discussion techniques were applied to the theme – and the control group, in which the programme-based teaching was carried out. It can be said that the pre-experimental knowledge of the groups is equivalent.

When Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 are examined, the conclusion can be drawn that the teaching with discussion techniques in the experimental group was more effective in increasing student achievement than the control group. Based on it, the increase in learning success with the discussion techniques applied to the experimental group (experimental group pretest-posttest mean difference $\bar{x}$ = 20.58) is higher than the programme-based teaching (experimental group pretest-posttest mean difference $\bar{x}$ = 13.63).

The research has been compared with other studies on this subject. These comparisons are as follows: Park et al. (2011) conducted a study using discussion techniques in online education and found that teaching with discussion techniques in an online course would be positively perceived as a teaching strategy by the faculty involved. At the same time, Çabuk and Yeni (2016) aimed to determine the effect of the debate technique in preschool education. Although tests cannot measure the academic achievement of preschool children (because they are not capable of writing and reading), the researchers stated that the debate technique supports preschool children cognitively. At the same time, the result of that study is that debate techniques can be used in early childhood years. Carpenter (2006) sought to examine the effectiveness of five teaching methods (lecture, lecture/discussion combination, jigsaw, case study, team project) in a large class setting and based on the pre-test and post-test results – all five of the teaching methods appeared to affect students' grasp of the material positively. Sarıgöz (2013) conducted a study of 50 students in the Child Development Department of one of the Turkish universities, and found out that debate technique positively affected their learning achievement. These studies show that the discussion technique is

suitable for its use in earlier education and adult students. Arung and Jumardin (2016) conducted a study to describe the implementation of the debate technique in teaching speaking and to identify how much students' speaking skills improved after being taught using the debate technique. Tests and observations revealed that employing the debate strategy can enhance students' speaking abilities. Also, Firmansyah and Vegian (2019) wanted to find out whether or not the debate technique can improve students' speaking skills and to analyse the classroom situation when the debate technique is implemented a in speaking class, as well as find out whether debate is an appropriate technique used to improve students' speaking skills. These studies show discussion techniques can be used to teach psycho-motor skills. Additionally, Zare and Othman (2013) stated in their study that employing classroom debate as a teaching/learning strategy has several benefits for students, including fostering critical thinking abilities, helping them grasp the course material, and enhancing their speaking abilities.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the conducted research, carried out in Turkish context, it can be concluded that employing the discussion technique in the lessons on *social studies* proved to be more effective than lessons without these techniques. It should be read as a recommendation for using these techniques more widely during the teaching process in *social studies* courses at middle schools.

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