

Academic dissertations on the Social Studies course curriculum in Turkey: A review of the literature (2006-2021)

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Article Info

Keywords

Social studies curriculum
Theses
Dissertations,
Turkey
Literature review.

Article History

Received 11.04.2022
Received in revised form
13.06.2022
Accepted 14.06.2022

Article Type

Research Article

DOI: 10.29329/pedper.2022.448.4



Abstract

This research examines the content features of the postgraduate theses prepared about the social studies course curriculum. In the research, document analysis was used in qualitative research. For this purpose, the research materials consist of 64 postgraduate theses, which can be accessed from the website of the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education, Turkey. These theses cover the years 2006-2021. There has been no regular increase in the number of theses produced over the years. Theses were made in 33 different universities. The highest number of theses are addressed to Marmara University, one of Turkey's well-established universities. The titles of thesis advisors are often doctors for master's degrees and more professors at the doctoral level. In the theses produced, mostly qualitative approach was adopted. As a model, the survey model was preferred more. In the theses, mostly curricula and teachers were chosen as samples. Survey and interview forms were mostly preferred in data collection tools. Content analysis was used most frequently in data analysis. "Social Studies Course" and "Social Studies Curriculum" were frequently used as keywords. The programs prepared in 2005 and 2018 were mostly discussed in the theses examined. Theses mainly include examining the programs (from various perspectives) with the opinions of teachers, students, parents, field experts, and pre-service teachers.

1 Introduction

Education policies and curricula are critical in the social, political, and economic development of countries today (Bilgili, 2019, p.37). In the most general terms, the curriculum is the framework of knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2017). The education program is defined as an official and technical document, a policy statement that reflects the broad social agreement to convey to children what the society deems most valuable (Bolat, 2017, p.121). The curricula have a fundamental role in realizing quality learning for all children and youth and articulating and supporting holistic development education. On the other hand, the curriculum has been expressed as the living mechanism that covers all the activities related to the teaching of a course plan to be taught to the individual at or outside of school (Demirel, 2015, p.6). All curricula developed by the Ministry of National Education Board

Cite: Gez Çinpolat, A. (2022). Academic dissertations on the social studies course curriculum in Turkey: A review of the literature (2006-2021). *Pedagogical Perspective*, 1(1), 55-67. DOI: 10.29329/pedper.2022.448.4

of Education and Discipline in Turkey are "What kind of person do we want?" and answer the question (Turan & Yıldırım, 2019, p.44). In this respect, it can be said that social studies curricula, which are also citizenship courses, are the documents that best reflect this answer.

When social studies were accepted as a concept for the first time in 1916, its subject was defined by the National Social Studies Council (NCSS) as information about the organization and development of the society and about people as a member of social institutions (as cited in Moffatt, Kaymakçı & Ata, 2012, p.37). Today, the same institution defines social studies as the integrated study of social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and rational decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 2022). Social studies is an integrated curriculum aiming to handle all social, political, cultural, economic, and similar situations with a holistic approach and prepare students for the future by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and values related to these subjects (Turan & Yıldırım, 2019).

With this name, the social studies course was first introduced in the primary school programs in Turkey in 1968. In previous periods, the aims within the scope of social studies were tried to be achieved with courses such as History, Geography, Citizenship, Society, and Country Studies (as cited in Sönmez, Dinç & Doğan, 2010, p.20). In 1985, national history, national geography, and civics courses were introduced instead of social studies courses in secondary schools. The social studies course's aim and purpose were first approached with the 1998 curriculum, and the social studies curriculum, which was put into practice in the 2005-2006 academic year, reflects the social studies understanding (Çatak, 2015, p.91). Modernization, the European Union candidacy process, the response to global developments in the field of education, and the adoption of the learning principle in the constructivist approach by abandoning the behavioral approach were effective in the radical changes in social studies in 2005 (Bilgili, 2019, p.34; as cited in Ministry of National Education, Kaymakçı, 2015, p.294).

While understanding a good citizen dominates the past curricula, understanding a good citizen in the 21st century is to be an effective and participatory citizen (Kaya & Öner, 2017, p. 6). The continuity of change and development (MoNE, 2017) makes it inevitable for curricula to undergo changes in line with conditions and needs (Yazıcı & Koca, 2011, p.20). Thus, the new social studies program was put into practice in 2018. This program draws attention to the changes in science and technology and explains the effects of these changes on learning processes and activities (MoNE, 2018, p.3). The basic elements of the social studies program are skills, acquisitions, competencies, concepts, values, measurement, and evaluation. It is seen that there are new elements added to the content dimension of the competencies in the 2018 curriculum (Bilgili, 2019, p.45). However, in some studies on the 2018 social studies curriculum, it has been stated that the gains and explanations are not sufficient, the absence of activity examples is negative, and there are deficiencies in measurement and evaluation methods and tools (Kalaycı & Baysal, 2020, p.125; Öztürk & Kafadar, 2020, p.124).

This research aims to examine the postgraduate theses on the curriculum in the field of social studies education at universities in Turkey between 2006-2021. For this purpose, the keywords, methods, and purpose contents of the theses were examined. The curricula are the most important determinant of the formal education process. For this reason, great care should be taken in preparing the curricula. It is important to examine the current curricula with a critical eye by researchers and to report the identified problems. In this study, it is thought that an overview of

the field will be provided by determining the tendencies of the studies examining the prepared social studies curriculum. Researchers who want to study the subject see the previous studies collectively can be decisive in what they will examine in their studies. For these reasons, it was deemed necessary to conduct this research.

2 Method

2.1 Research design

In the research, document analysis was used in the context of the qualitative research approach since it determined the basic structure of the master's and doctoral dissertations prepared about the social studies course curricula. Document analysis is a research method that rigorously and systematically analyzes the contents of written documents (Wach & Ward, 2013, p.1). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016, p.189) define document analysis as the analysis of written materials containing information about the facts or events that are intended to be investigated. Document analysis can be a stand-alone research method or be used in conjunction with other qualitative methods. Curriculum, course contents, educational practices, or the effectiveness of a given education in the field of education, theses, articles, and books can be researched by the document analysis method (Sak, Şahin Sak, Öneren Şendil & Nas, 2021, p.232).

2.2 Data

The materials of this research consist of postgraduate theses accessed from the official website of the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>). Theses were scanned with the advanced search feature of the official website of the National Thesis Center of the Higher Education Institution. "Social studies" and "curriculum" were chosen as keywords. A total of 64 postgraduate theses, 56 of which are master's theses and eight doctoral dissertations, constitute the data of the research.

2.3 Data collection

The document analysis technique was used to collect research data. In the document analysis technique, the data obtained from the electronic media exactly reflects the characteristics of the data obtained because of the traditional document reviews. Web pages, reports, and electronic articles can be counted as easily accessible electronic data sources (Merriam, 2013, p.149). Thus, for the purpose of the research, data were obtained by accessing 64 studies in .pdf format from the Council of Higher Education, National Thesis Center website. The graduate theses' title, author, advisor, and jury information are not included for ethical reasons.

2.4 Data analysis

In the analysis of the data obtained in the research, content analysis, which is the main aim of reaching the concepts and relations that can explain these data, was preferred. In content analysis, similar data are brought together within the framework of certain themes and concepts, arranged, and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p.242). In this research, the categorical analysis technique, one of the content analysis types, was used. Categorical analysis refers to 'dividing a certain message into units first and then grouping these units into categories according to certain criteria' (Bilgin, 2000, p.15). The obtained findings are presented in tabular form by specifying the frequency values for each research result, and the tables are explained.

3 Findings

The distribution of the examined theses according to their types and years is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Years and types of the theses and dissertations

Years	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
2006	2	-	2
2007	6	-	6
2008	3	1	4
2009	5	-	5
2010	1	-	1
2011	3	2	5
2012	3	2	5
2013	2	-	2
2014	4	-	4
2015	3	-	3
2016	2	1	3
2017	2	1	3
2018	2	-	2
2019	9	-	9
2020	3	1	4
2021	6	-	6
Total	56	8	64

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are two master's theses in 2006, six master's theses in 2007, three master's theses, one doctoral dissertation in 2008, five master's theses in 2009, one master's thesis in 2010, three master's theses in 2011, two doctoral dissertations, three master's theses in 2012, two doctoral dissertations, two master's theses in 2013, four master's theses in 2014, three master's theses in 2015, two master's theses in 2016, one doctoral dissertation, two master's theses in 2017 one doctoral dissertation, two master's theses in 2018, nine master's theses in 2019, two master's theses in 2020, one doctoral dissertation, and six master's theses in 2021. In total, 56 master's theses and eight doctoral dissertations were prepared on the subject between 2006-2021. It can be said that the interest in the subject increased with the first programs prepared by the constructivist approach. In addition, it can be said that preparing a new curriculum draft in 2017 affected the interest in the subject.

In addition, the year distribution is given in the chart below to see the change over the years easily.

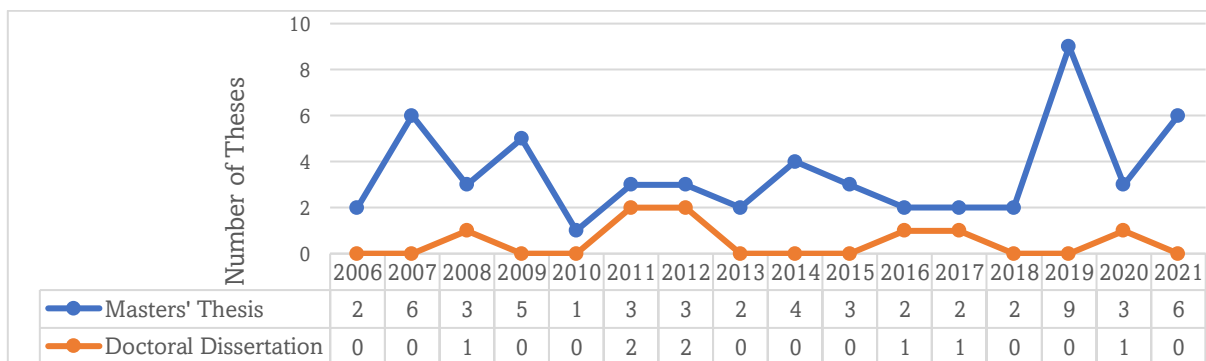


Figure 1 Years and types of the theses and dissertations

The distribution of the examined theses according to the institutions they are affiliated with is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Institutions where the thesis and dissertations were prepared

University	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
Marmara University	7	1	8
Firat University	5	1	5
Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University	4	-	4
Atatürk University	2	1	3
Balıkesir University	3	-	3
Gazi University	1	2	3
Kütahya Dumlupınar University	3	-	3
Gaziantep University	-	2	2
Abant İzzet Baysal University	1	1	2
Çukurova University	2	-	2
Erzincan University	2	-	2
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	2	-	2
Ondokuz Mayıs University	2	-	2
Selçuk University	2	-	2
Sivas Cumhuriyet University	2	-	2
Adnan Menderes University	1	-	1
Afyon Kocatepe University	1	-	1
Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University	1	-	1
Akdeniz University	1	-	1
Amasya University	1	-	1
Ankara University	1	-	1
Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University	1	-	1
Celal Bayar University	1	-	1
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	1	-	1
Eskişehir Osmangazi University	1	-	1
Hacettepe University	1	-	1
İnönü University	1	-	1
Mersin University	1	-	1
Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University	1	-	1
Niğde University	1	-	1
Uşak University	1	-	1
Sakarya University	1	-	1
Yüzüncü Yıl University	1	-	1
Total	56	8	64

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the theses on social studies curriculum were mostly prepared at Marmara University (8), Fırat University (5), and Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University (4). In addition, it is seen that these theses were published in 33 different universities. The distribution of thesis advisors according to their titles is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Titles of thesis advisors

Type/Title	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Professor
Masters' Theses	29	12	14
Doctoral Dissertations	1	3	4
Total	30	15	18

In Table 3, it is seen that the supervisors of 29 master's theses are assistant professors, the supervisors of 12 master's theses are associate professors, and the supervisors of 14 master's theses are professors. In addition, one of the doctoral dissertation advisors has the title of assistant professor, three associate professors, and four professors. In total, 30 of the theses advisors were assistant professors, 15 were associate professors, and 18 were professors. This may be related to the higher number of assistant professors working in higher education institutions and the higher number of graduate students compared to doctoral programs. Table 4 shows the distribution of the examined theses according to their methods.

Table 4 Methods of the examined theses

Methods and theses and dissertations	Total
Qualitative (Master)	25
Quantitative (Master)	2
Mixed (Master)	6
Qualitative (Doctoral)	4
Quantitative (Doctoral)	-
Mixed (Doctoral)	3
NOB ¹ (Master)	23
NOB ¹ (Doctoral)	1

It is seen in Table 4 that there are 25 qualitative approach master's, two quantitative approach master's, six mixed approach master's, four qualitative approach doctorate, and three mixed approach doctoral thesis. In addition, there are 23 master's and one doctoral dissertation without (not observed) a method approach. The predominance of methods with a qualitative approach may be related to the fact that the curriculum as a document is suitable for this and the researchers' aim to conduct in-depth analysis. The research designs used in the examined theses are given in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Research designs used in the examined theses and dissertations

Design	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
Descriptive model	3	-	3
Document analysis	6	1	7
Case study	8	1	9
Action research	1	-	1
Phenomenology	3	1	4
Survey	28	2	30
Basic qualitative research	1	-	1
Mixed (qualitative dominant)	-	1	1
Mixed (survey, case)	-	2	2
Mixed (survey, qualitative)	1	-	1
Mixed (exploratory)	1	-	1
Not observed	4	-	4
Total	56	8	64

¹NOB: Not Observed

In the theses examined, three descriptive model, seven document review, nine case study, one action research, four phenomenology, one mixed model (qualitative dominant), two mixed (survey, case), one (survey, qualitative), one mixed (exploratory sequential), 27 survey, one basic qualitative research was used. In four theses, no model was specified. Survey describes an existing situation, and it is thought that the survey model is more preferred because it is tried to be examined by describing the existing situation in the theses. The distribution of the examined theses according to the samples is given in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Samples of the examined theses and dissertations

Samples	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
Curricula (Social Studies)	13	1	14
Middle school students	2	1	3
Teachers	35	2	37
Parents	1	-	1
Teachers and students	2	1	3
Field experts, teachers, and students	-	1	1
Curricula, teachers, and field experts	-	2	2
Curricula and teachers	1	-	1
Field experts and teachers	1	-	1
Field experts, teachers, pre-service Teachers	1	1	2
Total	56	8	64

As seen in Table 6, curricula in 14 theses, students in three theses, teachers in 37 theses, parents in one thesis, teachers, and students in three theses, field experts, teachers, and students in one thesis, programs, teachers, and field experts in two theses, programs, and teachers in one thesis, field experts in one thesis and teachers, in two theses, field experts, teachers, and pre-service teacher were preferred as samples. It can be considered a normal situation that teachers are preferred the most as samples because they are the curriculum implementers. Data collection tools used in theses are presented below.

Table 7 Data collection tools in the examined theses

Data Collection Tools	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
Surveys	23	3	26
Interview forms	19	6	25
Observations	3	1	4
Scales	6	2	8
Scientific studies and curricula	15	2	17
Total	66	14	80

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that data collection tools are mostly used in the types of questionnaires (26), interview forms (25), scientific studies, and programs (17). Questionnaires are frequently used data collection tools in survey studies. In this study, it was seen that most studies were carried out with the survey model. Thus, this can explain the frequency of use seen in the surveys. Data analysis types of theses examined in Table 8 below are presented.

Table 8 Data analysis types of theses and dissertations examined

Analysis	Masters' Theses	Doctoral Dissertations	Total
Descriptive analysis	18	1	19
Kruskall Wallis-H	6	2	8

Mann Whitney U	5	1	6
t-Test	13	2	15
Descriptive quantitative Statistics	16	2	18
Chi-Square	2	1	3
One way ANOVA	10	1	11
Content analysis	21	6	27
Critical discourse analysis	-	1	1
Correlation	1	-	1
Total	92	17	109

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that content analysis (27), descriptive analysis (19), descriptive quantitative statistics (18), t-test (15), and Anova (11) techniques are mainly used for data analysis. The high use of content analysis and descriptive analysis supports that the studies are mostly conducted with a qualitative approach. In addition, the high preference for descriptive quantitative statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA techniques show the use of the survey model. The most frequently used keywords in the examined theses are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9 The most frequently used keywords in the theses and dissertations examined

social studies (course) (28)
social studies course curriculum (25)
teaching (education) curriculum (18)
constructivist/teaching/educational approach/understanding (12)
curriculum evaluation/review (12)
social studies education/teaching (8)
curriculum development (6)
teacher opinions (6)
social studies teacher/educators (5)
social studies textbooks/textbooks (5)
learning outcome (3)
primary education (3)
curriculum (3)
alternative measurement and evaluation (3)
revised bloom's taxonomy (3)
education (2)
general purposes (2)
skills (2)
activity (2)
primary education program (2)
placement test (2)
curriculum elements (2)
2017 social studies curriculum (draft) (2)
2005 social studies curriculum (2)

Note. Similar keywords in the theses have been grouped.

Keywords (word groups) in the theses are presented in Table 9. In the keywords, most social studies (course) (28), social studies course curriculum (25), teaching (education) curriculum (18), constructivist/education (teaching/education) approach/understanding (12), curriculum evaluation/examination (12), social studies education/teaching (8) was used. It is seen that these keywords are related to the social studies curriculum, which is the subject of the study. In Table

10 below, the years of the programs discussed in the theses and the grade levels of the programs are given.

Table 10 Years of curricula and grade levels of curricula

Curriculum Years	Masters' Thesis	Doctoral Dissertation
2004	11	1
2005	18	6
2004 and 1998	2	-
2005 and 1998	1	-
2004 and 2005	2	-
38, 49, 70, 85, 98 and 2005	1	-
24, 30, 31-32, 38, 48, 49, 62, 68, 70, 85, 90, 98 and 2005	1	-
2004 and 2018	1	-
2005 and 2017	2	-
2017	2	-
2018	14	-
2005 and 2018	1	-
1998, 2005 and 2018	-	1
Grade Level	Masters' Thesis	Doctoral Dissertation
4 th grade	2	-
5 th grade	10	-
6 th grade	5	2
7 th grade	3	1
4 th and 5 th grade	8	1
6 th and 7 th grade	12	3
5 th , 6 th , and 7 th grade	10	-
4 th , 5 th , 6 th , and 7 th grade	6	1

When Table 10 is examined, it is seen that the social studies curricula prepared in 2005 (24), 2018 (14), and 2004 (12) years are mostly discussed in the theses. In addition, it has been determined that studies on the 6th and 7th grades (15), 5th, 6th, and 7th grades (10), and 5th grade (10) curricula are most frequently conducted in the studies. In Table 11 below, a grouping was created for the purpose tendencies of the studies.

Table 11 Grouping of the purpose tendencies of theses and dissertations

Group	Number of Theses and dissertations
1. Examining the curricula with the views of teachers, students, parents, field experts, and pre-service teachers, examining them from various perspectives (e.g., realization of outcomes, skills, the effectiveness of the activity, citizenship)	35
2. Comparison of multiple curricula with the opinions of teachers, students, parents, field experts, and pre-service teachers	4
3. Examination of curricula according to various theoretical elements (e.g., Bloom's taxonomy, sociology, psychology)	9
4. Comparison of curricula with foreign countries	3
5. Examination of various topics in curricula (e.g., Globalization, children's rights)	4
6. Comparison of curricula from various aspects (e.g., values)	3

In Table 11, the grouping is related to the purpose tendencies of the theses. Accordingly, most thesis was carried out to examine the curricula from the views of teachers, students, parents, field

experts, and pre-service teachers, examining them from various perspectives. It has been observed that curriculum stakeholders are preferred quite frequently in the sample selections. Therefore, benefiting from the views and perceptions of these stakeholders shows the importance given to the application area of the curriculum.

4 Discussion and conclusion

In the research, thesis studies prepared between 2005 and 2021, when the curricula prepared by the constructivist curriculum approach started to be implemented, were examined. Accordingly, the following discussion and conclusion section was created according to the findings obtained in the study.

A total of 64 postgraduate theses were prepared between the years 2006-2021 on social studies curricula. The year in which most theses were prepared on the subject was 2019. There has not been a regular increase or decrease in the number of theses over the years. However, it can be said that there has been an increase in the number of theses in the years following the preparation of new curricula.

When the universities where postgraduate theses on the subject are prepared are examined, Marmara University comes first. Fırat University is in second place, and Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University is in third place. In other studies, examining master's and/or doctoral dissertations prepared in the field of social studies education, it is seen that Gazi University, Marmara University, Fırat University, and Atatürk University are at the forefront (Dilek, Baysan, & Öztürk, 2018; Oğuz Haçat & Demir, 2018; Sever, 2021). It is seen that the number of theses produced in postgraduate education in academically well-established universities is higher than in newly established universities. In addition, the titles of the supervisors of the master's theses are mostly assistant professors; doctoral dissertations were found to be professor doctors.

Qualitative approach was used more frequently in master's theses and doctoral dissertations. In addition, four of the eight doctoral dissertations were prepared with qualitative and three with mixed approaches. In 23 master's theses, the approach used in the research was not directly stated. In the models used in the studies, the survey model comes first. In the second place, the case study design was used. Sever's (2021) study stated that quantitative approach designs were used the most in the theses prepared in social studies education. In the study conducted by Oğuz Haçat and Demir (2018), it was stated that the mixed approach designs were mostly preferred in doctoral dissertations. Dilek, Baysan, and Öztürk (2018) study show that designs suitable for the qualitative approach are preferred more frequently in postgraduate theses.

The samples in the examined theses mostly consist of teachers. It is expected that teachers, the curriculum implementers, are more preferred in these studies. Teachers were chosen as the sample most frequently in the master's theses prepared in social studies education. In doctoral dissertations, it is seen that secondary school students are mostly selected as samples (Dilek, Baysan, & Öztürk, 2018; Oğuz Haçat & Demir, 2018; Sever, 2021).

Questionnaires and interview forms were used most frequently to collect data. Content and descriptive analysis were used the most in the analysis of the collected data. These selected methods are compatible with the design selection, which is another result of the research. Because interview form, content analysis, and descriptive analysis are the more frequently used methods/techniques in qualitative research.

It has been determined that 'social studies (course) (28), social studies course curriculum (25), teaching (education) curriculum (18), constructivist/teaching/educational approach/understanding (12), curriculum evaluation/review (12)' keywords are used more frequently in master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Keywords should be carefully chosen in terms of providing information about the content of the study and finding the study in internet searches. In the study in which Oğuz Haçat and Demir (2018) examined the doctoral theses, it was determined that the keywords related to the "Social studies course curriculum" were more common.

The curriculum prepared in 2005 comes first among the curricula examined in the theses prepared on social studies curricula. In the second place is the curriculum prepared in 2018. Theses examined the most frequently "6th and 7th grade" curricula. In the second place is "5th grade" and "5th, 6th, and 7th grade" the researchers examined levels. The purpose of the researchers to conduct a more in-depth analysis for certain classes may have been effective in this situation.

When the aim tendencies of the theses examined are examined, it is seen that examining the curricula with the views of teachers, students, parents, field experts, and pre-service teachers, examining them from various perspectives comes most frequently. Researchers mostly evaluated the prepared curricula regarding the realization of the achievements, skills, effectiveness of the activity, and citizenship. In the study by Yaylacı and Büyükalın (2020), in which the theses in the field of social studies education were examined, it was determined that the researchers frequently consulted the teachers' opinions about the social studies curriculum. According to these, it can be said that teachers are commonly chosen as samples for curriculum evaluation.

4.1 Limitations and future directions

This research covers master's theses and doctoral dissertations prepared in Turkey between 2006 and 2021. The research included the methods, keywords, and general purposes of the preparation. The results of the theses are not included. In future studies, a general view of the curricula can be obtained by examining the results of the theses prepared on this subject.

5 Statement of researchers

5.1 Researchers' contribution rate statement: 100%

5.2 Conflict statement: None

5.3 Support and thanks: None

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