

Social Studies Doctoral Dissertations in the United States and Turkey: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study delves into 169 social studies doctoral dissertations published from January 2012 to October 2015. The results of the included studies were qualitatively synthesized and presented in narrative form in the results section. In preliminary searching for systematic reviews concerning social studies, we concentrated on 169 doctoral dissertations published in the United States and Turkey, based on the following inclusion criteria: a) Only publications in the United States and Turkey between the years of 2012 and 2015 were included; b) Search was conducted by using such central keywords as 'social studies'. From the initial search of electronic databases, 169 doctoral dissertations (130 from the U.S.; 39 from Turkey) were found.

While conducting international comparisons of school curricula, little attention has been paid to the comparisons on doctoral levels. Based on the comparative findings, this study concludes with some insights into how social studies doctoral dissertations can differ across countries. Similarities regarding key words and topics used were not observed. In a sense, this study aims to achieve a mutual understanding and awareness that might encourage Turkish scholars in regards with the research focus, keywords, and above all, their contribution to the field of study.

Keywords: social studies, systematic analyses, doctoral dissertations

1. Introduction

During the nineteenth century, no social studies courses were taught in the United States. In fact, social studies did not exist as a school subject until early twentieth century. With the inclusion of social studies in school curricula, children in the nineteenth century begin to learn about good citizenship and moral behaviors in all their lessons, especially in their readers and their history and geography studies (Halvorsen, 2013). Thomas Jesse Jones first used the term social studies to refer to school subjects in a 1905 article that appeared in the *Southern Workmen*. The origin of the contemporary social studies curriculum dates back to 1916 when the term was used by the National Education Association to establish the scope and sequence of courses that define the contemporary curriculum in the United States (Ross, 2006). On the other hand, Turkey did not have any school curriculum specifically named social studies education until 1968. Instead, schools had a similar subject titled "Society and Country Studies" which was used from 1926 until the curriculum was changed to include social studies in 1968 (Tarman, 2011).

The structure of doctoral programs in United States universities is more formal, diverse and complex than in other countries, including Turkey. Doctoral applicants were previously required to have a master's degree, but many programs accept students immediately following undergraduate studies (www.wikipedia.org). Higher education in Turkey is divided into three categories: two-year vocational education, four or six year faculties, and master and doctoral institutions. The minimum length of doctoral education in Turkey is four years, which includes subject matter and pedagogical preparation. Doctoral education is primarily associated with four or more year institutions, and institutions closely linked to from kindergarten to universities. Unlike the Turkish system, the doctoral education system in the United States is decentralized and governed by each university department. Therefore, variability among universities exists in terms of degree requirements, doctoral education curricula, and licensure requirements.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine diversity in keywords and topics found in social studies doctoral dissertations in the United States and Turkey. Therefore, the study aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature regarding social studies keywords and topics that can lead to creating a new perspective while doing a dissertation study. This paper summarizes different doctoral dissertations both in the United States and Turkey to reveal some insights through comparative analyses.

2. Method

2.1 Systematic Reviews

Systematic reviews revolve around a particular area in order to address a research question or set of research questions (Wood & Haber, 2014). By nature, they provide a objective tools for gathering, synthesizing and appraising the findings of studies on a particular topic or question. In this way, bias factor that may be associated with single studies and non-systematic reviews can be minimized (Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2001).

There are tools both in categorical and constructive operations that can facilitate the systematic study. According to Gough and Thomas (2012), there are six basic systematic review components: a) aggregation and configuration, b) interpretation and innovation, c) homogeneity and heterogeneity, d) types of data, e) role of stakeholders, and f) the review question. The authors emphasize that aggregating reviews “predominately add up (aggregate) the findings from primary studies to answer a review question. On the other hand, configuring reviews predominately arrange (configure) the findings from primary studies to answer the review question. Additionally, Card (2010) states that another objective of a literature review is to identify central issues, such as unresolved questions or next steps for future research.

2.2 Limitations

There were limitations in this study. Firstly, keyword searches were done only in two main databases (ProQuest and YOK) from September 19, 2015 to October 7, 2015. Additionally, only publications from 2012 to 2015 were included in the comparative analyses. Finally, published doctoral dissertations only in the United States and Turkey were addressed.

From September to October, researcher conducted an electronic database search using the ProQuest Dissertations and Turkish name YOK using the search term ‘social studies’ as title, abstract, or keyword. The following search algorithm was mainly used: ‘social studies’. Keywords and topics were reported as a frequency with percentages.

3. Results

The electronic search in two major database services, YOK and ProQuest, yielded 169 citations. The doctoral dissertations are summarized in the following Table 1. All doctoral dissertations included in this systematic analysis consist of 130 (77%) published in the United States and 39 (33%) in Turkey.

Table 1. The distributions of the included doctoral dissertations in the U.S. and Turkey

Country	YEARS								TOTAL	
	2012		2013		2014		2015		f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
US	32	24.6	39	30.0	37	28.5	22	16.9	130	100
Turkey	13	33.3	12	30.7	9	23.1	5	12.9	39	100
TOTAL	45	26.7	51	30.1	46	27.3	27	15.9	169	100

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the dissertations published each year. It is clearly seen that 26.7 % of the 169 dissertations were written in 2012 and that 30.1 % were written in 2013. There are fewer dissertations in 2015 simply because of the limited scope of time.

Similar results were not observed in the study between these two countries. From the output shown above, we see that there are 24 different keywords basically used by scholars in the United States and Turkey. The highest percentage of keywords, which were primarily used in the United States dissertations, included ‘education’. The second highest percentage of keyword searched terms was ‘social studies’, which was used in both countries. This study confirms that keywords are more common in the U.S. than Turkey. However, despite the differences in the use of keywords between these countries, “Social studies” (56.1 % US, 41 % Turkey) appeared to be the most common keyword. The table also reveals interesting facts regarding the preferences of some other keywords. For example, American scholars distinctively focused on 9 keywords (citizenship education, effective teaching, pre-service teacher education, professional development, race, secondary, social science, and teacher education), whereas Turkish scholars did not use these keywords at all and based their studies upon 12 keywords (academic success, emphatic skills, empathy, primary education, primary education schools, social studies course, social studies teaching, students achievement, students attitudes, teaching, teaching curriculums, values, values education). Both sides shared only the same 3 keywords in their studies, including *education*, *social studies*, and *social studies education*. However, a great difference is noted between the United States and Turkey. For example, in the United States education as a keyword was used 97.6 % of the time. But in Turkey the keyword education was only used 10.2 % of the time.

Table 2. Keyword-oriented distributions in the United States and Turkey

KEYWORDS	Country	2012		2013		2014		2015		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Academic success	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	-	-	2	16.6	2	22.2	-	-	4	10.2
Citizenship education	US	-	-	-	-	6	16.2	4	18.1	10	7.1
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education	US	32	100	39	100.0	34	91.8	22	100.0	127	97.6
	Turkey	4	30.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	10.2
Effective teaching	US	-	-	4	10.2	-	-	-	-	4	3.1
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Empathic Skill	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	-	-	3	25.0	-	-	-	-	3	7.6
Empathy	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	-	-	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	2	5.1
Pre-service teacher education	US	4	12.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3.1
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary education	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	2	15.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5.1
Primary education schools	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	3	23.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	7.6
Professional development	US	-	-	-	-	4	10.8	-	-	4	3.1
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Race	US	-	-	-	-	4	10.8	-	-	4	3.1
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Secondary	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	13.6	3	2.3
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social sciences	US	-	-	7	17.9	4	10.8	3	13.6	14	10.7
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social studies	US	22	68.7	25	64.1	16	43.2	10	45.4	73	56.1
	Turkey	7	53.8	5	41.6	2	22.2	2	40.0	16	41.0
Social studies course	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	8	61.5	3	25.0	3	33.3	2	40.0	16	41.0
Social studies education	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	22.7	5	3.8
	Turkey	4	30.7	5	41.6	2	22.2	-	-	11	28.2
Social studies teaching	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	5	38.4	5	41.6	3	33.3	-	-	13	33.3
Student achievement	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	2	15.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5.1
Student attitudes	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	2	15.3	-	-	2	22.2	-	-	4	10.2
Teacher education	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	13.6	3	2.3
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teaching	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	2	15.3	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	4	10.2
Teaching curriculums	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	-	-	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	2	5.1
Values	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	2	15.3	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	4	10.2
Values education	US	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Turkey	3	23.0	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	5	12.8

When 169 studies are analyzed, it is clearly seen that dissertation themes revolve around 11 central topics (assessment, citizenship education, critical thinking, curriculum studies, historical thinking, literacy, multicultural education, student engagement, teacher education, teacher knowledge, and technology). Even though 8 themes are shared in both countries, only 3 themes (critical thinking, historical thinking, and multicultural education) are used in the United States. Of all the commonly used themes, teacher knowledge appears to be the most popular one (28.4% in the United States, 20.5% in Turkey). The largest difference between these two countries occurred in ‘curriculum studies’ (23 % in 2013). ‘Teacher knowledge’ increased (28.4% United States, 20.5 % Turkey), while the percentage of ‘assessment’ decreased (3.8 % United States and 2.5 % Turkey). ‘Assessment’ theme received the lowest attention between 2012 and 2015 in both countries. The theme of ‘student engagement’ has been consistently used in Turkey, whereas the same theme seems to be used less in the United States in each year (from 10.2% in 2013 to 0% in 2015). ‘Technology’ is becoming another central theme, whose popularity is increasing through the years in both countries. But specifically in Turkey, technology was not found in 2012 and 2013, and there is a considerable focus in the last two consecutive years (25% in 2014, 40% in 2015). In the United States technology as a search term has gradually increased from 3.1 % in 2012 to 18.1 % in

2015. In Turkey the term technology as a keyword jumped considerably. In 2014, technology as a search term was found 25 % of the time in Turkey. But by 2015, the terms was used 40 % in all searches.

Table 3. Distributions of dissertations themes

TOPICS	Country	2012		2013		2014		2015		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Assessment	US	2	6.2	1	2.5	2	5.4	-	-	5	3.8
	Turkey	1	7.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.5
Citizenship education	US	4	12.5	2	5.1	6	16.2	4	18.1	16	12.3
	Turkey	2	15.3	-	-	-	-	1	20.0	3	7.6
Critical thinking	US	-	-	2	5.1	1	2.7	1	4.5	4	3.0
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Curriculum studies	US	5	15.6	4	10.2	2	5.4	2	9.0	13	10.0
	Turkey	2	15.3	4	33.3	1	11.1	-	-	7	17.9
Historical thinking	US	1	7.6	-	-	-	-	2	9.0	3	7.6
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Literacy	US	4	12.5	3	7.6	1	2.7	4	18.1	12	9.2
	Turkey	2	15.3	2	16.6	-	-	-	-	4	10.2
Multicultural education	US	-	-	4	10.2	3	8.1	-	-	7	5.3
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Student engagement	US	2	6.2	4	10.2	1	2.7	-	-	7	5.3
	Turkey	3	23.0	2	16.6	1	11.1	1	20.0	7	17.9
Teacher education	US	3	9.3	2	5.1	5	13.5	1	4.5	11	8.4
	Turkey	1	7.6	2	16.6	1	11.1	-	-	4	10.2
Teacher knowledge	US	10	31.2	13	33.3	10	27.0	4	18.1	37	28.4
	Turkey	2	15.3	2	16.6	3	25.0	1	20.0	8	20.5
Technology	US	1	3.1	4	10.2	6	16.2	4	18.1	15	11.5
	Turkey	-	-	-	-	3	25.0	2	40.0	5	12.8

4. Conclusion

It can be clearly inferred from the results of the study that central keywords and topics are used differently in each country.

The results of this study indicated that keywords and topics fluctuate through the years and show variations. It seems that keywords being used between countries depend on two basic factors: One factor is based on the fact that countries have different educational systems, the second factor is based on how terms are used with different meanings and/or connotations in both scholarly communities. Heathcott (2007) emphasized that these two factors are critical especially while supporting 'the mastery of disciplines, the development of rich conceptual frameworks, and a demonstrable attainment of research skills' on doctoral studies. Improvement of communication among doctoral candidates through considering central themes in other cultures results in better cooperation, which may ultimately lead to diverse possibilities in scholarly work.

In addition to the results for each country, the findings of this study also raise awareness over potential research agendas that will enhance the comparative and mutual understanding of doctoral dissertations in social studies. It is imperative that academic advisors proactively plan strategies to ensure that they are able to offer high-quality doctoral dissertations by considering the focus areas in other cultures. In this way, their institutions will be able to fulfill their research missions.

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