

Social Studies Education with Different Learning Environments

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1. Introduction

There is learning activity in the very heart of education, because realization of education depends on the realization of learning (Aküzüm, 2013; Sever, 2015). What learning is and how it occurs in humans have always attracted the curiosity of humans, and learning has been defined in different ways, which is also the case in education. For example, according to Bacanlı (2007), learning is extremely permanent changes occurring in the behaviors of the organism through repetitions or experiences. According to Senemoğlu (2003), learning is the relatively permanent changes occurring in behaviors or in potential behaviors as a result of experiences and is not referred to as the growth and temporary changes occurring in the body due to various effects. According to Yeşilyaprak (2007), learning covers the permanent changes observed in behaviors as a result of repetition or experiences. It is possible to mention more definitions on learning, and it is obvious that there are no major differences between these definitions. As a matter of fact, the majority of psychologists and educators today see learning as a *traced behavior change* occurring as a result of experiences. Based on this definition, the following conditions must exist in order to talk about learning;

- ✓ There must definitely be a behavior change as a result of learning,
- ✓ This change must occur as a result of experiences,
- ✓ This change must leave permanent traces (Aküzüm, 2013; Sever, 2015).

Since learning is an absolute behavior change, the behaviors observed as a result of learning must have certain properties. Based on the definitions of learning, it is important that the behaviors acquired after learning must appear with the interaction between the experiences of the individual and his/her environment, it must have permanent traces, and the learner must be involved in the learning process. On the other hand, learning may be effective on the change in emotions, thoughts and attitudes, and the behavior change may appear in the form of new behavior or in the form of quitting certain behaviors (Sever, 2015). It is necessary to form proper learning environments to see such behavior types or to observe the change in them.

The learning environment hosts all of the factors that affect the learning process. For this reason, the environments formed with the interaction of place, time, infrastructure, equipment, and psycho-social factors, which exist in learning process and which have certain influences on it, may be called as the *learning environments*. In general, learning environments, which are emphasized in terms of their efficacy on learning, are described as the places where individuals use their existing resources for the purpose of defining the events happening around them and developing meaningful solutions for problems (Wilson, 1996). In addition, Wilson also stated that learning environments are places where learning is *fed* and supported rather than being places where learning is imposed with force. With this statement, the role of a teacher as the guide in learning environments is emphasized. In addition to the teacher in learning environments, the students, the properties of the subject and other factors must also be determined and defined, the learning level must be determined, and the data on the achievements obtained as a result of the materials and methods must be analyzed with accuracy. In case these factors are considered and learning environments are redesigned, these environments may be transformed into more efficient learning environments. In addition, in case learning environments are structured in advance, it becomes easier for students to reach the learning target without any uncertainties (Yılmaz and Akkoyunlu, 2006). In this way, efficient learning environments may be formed with certain regulations in this way, and students may become equipped with knowledge and skills for their upper-level educations and for their lives to move on (Emrem, 2008).

The Constructivist Approach, which takes the individual speeds and differences as the bases and considers the learner as the sole authority in learning, explains the learning environment as one of the most important variables of the learning process. The learning environments that are organized in accordance with the principles of Constructivist Approach require that individuals take more responsibilities in the learning process, because the mental constructions on the elements to be learnt are performed by the individual alone. For this reason, constructivist learning environments are organized in such a manner that will enable students to interact with their environments more, and therefore have immense experiences (Arkün and Aşkar, 2010). With the help of such learning environments, individuals have the opportunity of testing

the accuracy of their previously constructed information in their minds, correct their mistakes, and even replace previous information with new one (Yaşar, 1998).

In Social Studies study field, which is defined as the “integrating social and human sciences concepts for the purpose of applying citizenship skills in critical social issues with an interdisciplinary understanding” (Barth, 1991, p.7), there are various disciplines; and for this reason, different learning environments are needed for the acquisitions prepared for each discipline. There are educational institutions that host different learning fields in them as well as those that have transformed existing classroom environment in such a way that is suitable for the acquisitions of the class throughout the world. For the purpose of ensuring efficient learning in learning environments prepared for the Social Studies Education Study Field, the means, tools and materials that are suitable for the acquisitions of the classes must be used in the learning-teaching process (Sever and Koçoğlu). Although these materials vary, smart boards that have technological properties (Koçoğlu,2017), tablet PCs, and virtual learning environments are used in Turkey in the context of the FATİH Project that has been applied in recent years. In their study, Sever and Koçoğlu (2015) grouped these learning environments under 11 categories, which are:

- ✓ Educational learning environments
- ✓ Political learning environments
- ✓ Geographical learning environments
- ✓ Touristic learning environments
- ✓ Legal learning environments
- ✓ Sociological learning environments
- ✓ Virtual learning environments
- ✓ Technological learning environments
- ✓ Historical and Artistic learning environments
- ✓ Cultural learning environments
- ✓ Religious learning environments.

Although the acquisitions that are suitable for the whole of the learning environments in Social Studies Study Field are included in Social Studies Curriculum, it is possible to claim that the most-frequently used learning field in Turkey is the Educational Learning Environment.

The proficiency of teachers, economic opportunities and the structure of schools are influential factors in this preference. It is an incorrect judgment claiming that using educational learning environments in Social Studies frequently means using traditional hypotheses in education, because using this learning environment in the guidance of the principles of the Constructivist Hypothesis increases the realization of learning with modern learning principles.

Social Studies is a primary and secondary education subject that is formed with the mass teaching concept in which the interaction of humans with social and physical environment in the past, present and future are taught, involving the integration of learning fields under one single theme or unit, reflecting the Social Studies and citizenship fields like history, geography, economy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political sciences and law for the purpose of helping individuals realize their purpose of existence (MoNE, 2005). Based on this definition on Social Studies, the learning environments for the Social Studies classes' curriculum must be suitable for the following;

- ✓ Activities that are suitable for the developmental stages of students (being intended for students)
- ✓ Activities intended for the acquisitions that cover different disciplines in Social Studies study field (wide area design)
- ✓ Activities intended for daily needs (vitality, being close to life)
- ✓ Activities that increase the interaction levels of students throughout learning process.

Since education is a phenomenon that lasts from the birth until the death of an individual, it includes political, social, cultural and individual dimensions in it at the same time. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to define education with a certain definition, because education consists of different processes within each other. Meanwhile, education is also a social process that ensures social adequacy and optimum individual development under the influence of a selected and controlled environment (especially the school). This process shows variations according to the quality of educational learning environments (Ekinçi, Bal and Gürol, 2012; Koçoğlu, 2015). Changes in every aspect are reflected in education, and the individuals needed by the modern society and the qualities of the educational environments that are meant to raise them are debated again and again. In order to acquire the skills needed by modern age, a constructivist approach is adopted, which forces educationalists to prefer the Constructivist Approach and learning environments based on this approach (Tse-Kian, 2003; Koçoğlu, 2015). In this context, the Constructivist Philosophy is becoming widespread, has shown itself in research and articles in educational field, and has influenced many education specialists at

universities to apply more authentic environments for learning and teaching (Herrington and Herrington, 2006).

Traditionally, learning environments based on educational environments consist of the shaping of schools, classrooms and conference halls. In order for these environments to become a *spatial learning environment*, it is necessary that these areas are converted into places that are suitable for use in learning, teaching, learning and teaching strategies together, because these four elements constitute a general structure needed for a student in the learning process (Thomas, 2010). This structure brings certain responsibilities to students in the efficiency of the learning and teaching process. The most important of these responsibilities is being included in the learning environment and in the meaningful learning process (Graetz, 2006). Formal education, which is also called as systematic and regular education, is an education that is established deliberately with a professional quality (Fidan, 2012). Systematic education occurs through learning. Learning denotes the changes that appear as the interaction of individuals (Büyükkaragöz, 1996). In other words, learning may be defined as the changes in the behaviors of an individual by establishing communications and interactions. In this context, learning environments may be defined as any of the areas where education takes place throughout the formal or informal education process. Based on this definition, the first learning environments that cross the mind are school, family, circle of friends, social and economic environment. Today, when educationalists are developing various methods on learning methods, they claim that one of the basic means of such methods is the technological equipment. The viewpoints claiming that technological equipment must exist in every corner of the educational institutions are becoming more and more widespread; and there are some other viewpoints claiming that in places where these conditions do not exist, there must be certain other places that have such technological equipment, and they must always be open for everybody. The common side of both viewpoints is the requirement of places with technological equipment at primary education schools. Technological equipment is the indispensable means of specialized education. Without the specialized educationalist and the technological equipment required by this specialty, the specialized education model will be meaningless (Çınar, Çizmeci and Akdemir, 2007), because a productive learning process is only possible with the “*seeing*” of the student, as well as the presence of the teacher, studying and discussing with friends within small work groups in an active manner, and sometimes creating his/her own individual working environment. The places where such works are collected is the “branch classroom” and “practice area” where the equipment of the relevant specialty will be present (Çınar, Çizmeci and Akdemir, 2007; Koçoğlu, 2015). One of the places that have such technological equipment is the school. School is the most prominent educational place or institution that raises individuals in accordance with the economic activities of the state and with the requirements of modern live. School is accepted as “the institution that prepares the required human force”. On the other hand, in classical and

general terms, “the place where education is provided in any level and in any complex manner consisting of at least one teacher who has devoted himself/herself to education may be considered as an educational instruction (Öncül, 2000; Koçoğlu, 2015).

According to Baloğlu (1990), not even once have the resources been at the desired level in education in the Republic of Turkey (Şimşek, 1995). This situation gave rise to the emergence of certain problems in education mainly the learning environment or learning place. The Ministry of National Education has made several regulations to prevent such problems that may appear in educational process. In the context of these preparations, according to the basic assumptions defined by the Ministry of National Education, Primary School General Directorate, the following conditions are defined for 8-year compulsory education;

- ✓ Each class has its own class teacher between the 1st and 5th years. However, as of 4th year, the classes that require specific areas are provided by branch teachers in specific classrooms as much as possible.
- ✓ All classes between 6th and 8th grades are provided in specific places allocated for branch teachers.
- ✓ Classrooms are designed for maximum 30 students in order to provide and protect educational quality. There are separate desks and chairs for each student in classrooms.
- ✓ The primary school is also an in-service educational center for social, cultural and sportive activities that are open for public use.
- ✓ School buildings are open for use throughout the year aside from the educational hours. As well as places that are open for all users in the primary school, there are specific places for four different age groups.
- ✓ Schools, program and durations are designed in such a way that will ensure academic, social and personal development of students.

Parallel to the developments in education in Turkey, different educational models were developed and tested in various periods. Each educational model formed its own curriculum, and based on this curriculum, the definition of educational places were changed, because place is one of the most important means in ensuring the applicability of an educational model in terms of its qualitative and quantitative characteristics. In this context, it is extremely important that the aims of educational curriculum are studied well and the required educational places are planned well. Organizing the educational places in accordance with the requirements, structure, subject, and type of the classes together with all technological and physical equipment

to help the teaching of classes has become one of the most emphasized topics of recent years (Çınar, Çizmeci and Akdemir, 2007; Koçoğlu, 2015).

The basic aim of the learning environments prepared for Social Studies study field is to ensure that students learn by living and experiencing during the learning-teaching process in order to increase the meaningful learning level. However, it is not completely fair to associate the realization of this purpose with the learning environments that are suitable for acquisitions, because although learning environment is ready, if there is a teacher who does not know how, where and when to use these materials and equipment, the realization of the main purpose will not be possible. For this reason, we may claim that teacher proficiencies are influential on the efficient use of learning environment.

In Social Studies Study Field, learning environments that enable students perform learning with the awareness of time sensitivity to cover their present needs with the past experiences for the purpose of being prepared for the future are needed. In this study field, which is considered with a social prejudice because of its abstract-based acquisitions and contents, in order to eliminate this prejudice, the learning environments in this field must be prepared to be used by Social Studies teachers. Such learning environments will affect the student success in a positive way. This positive effect has been reported in previously conducted studies. Dorman (2001) conducted a study and investigated the effect of learning environment on academic success. In this study, it was reported that there was a strong relation between academic success and the learning environments. Karataş (2008) conducted another study and investigated the effect of problem-centered learning environments on cognitive and affective learning of students' learning in order to develop problem-solving skills. He reported that problem-solving skills of students and the skills of them in applying the problem-solving steps developed and changed in a positive way as well as their attitudes towards certain subjects. Aysan, Tanrıöğen and Tanrıöğen (1996) conducted another study and reported that one of the academic successes of the students was the problem about the learning environments. Papanastasiou (2002) reported in his study that learning environment was effective on student success. For this reason, it is possible to claim that learning environments designed in accordance with the target of the study field -no matter which Social Studies field it is- increases the success levels and skills of students.

Results

As well as in Social Studies education, in other disciplines and studies conducted in any countries of the world and in Turkey, the basic aim is to make students, who take classes on the study field, achieve success by ensuring meaningful learning. For this purpose, a constant program change is preferred based on modern hypotheses. As long as these program changes

are not reflected in the design of the learning environments, successful results must not be expected, because the attention, perception, discriminating and permanence levels of students will be fairly low in a class that is taught in a learning environment that is not suitable for the acquisitions of the learning process. For this reason, program changes must always be reflected in the learning environments. In this study, the importance of the preparation of learning environments that are suitable for the acquisitions of the Social Studies study field has been emphasized, and an evaluation has been made on the effect of learning environments on learning-teaching process, and the most commonly used learning environments used in Social Studies have been mentioned.

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