

## Research on historical environments in elementary schools' social sciences textbooks taught in Northern Cyprus

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### Abstract

A comprehensive study has yet to be carried out depending on the historical environment particular to the Elementary Schools in Northern Cyprus. The aim of this study is hence to determine whether the coverage of historical environment subjects in elementary school social sciences textbooks is absorbed or not by the 4th and 5th Grades in the context of both content and visuals. The method of study analysed has been organised in accordance with the qualitative research. The population was not indicated pursuant to qualitative research and so purposive sampling was implemented. The textbooks used were mainly selected from the afore-mentioned grades and classes. All the data collected were based on the textbooks used during the assessment process. The data was gathered in accordance with the document analysis technique and everything was analysed in detail. The categories used were generated after the authors performed analysis by utilising textbooks. To ensure the validity of the categories, literature scanning was undertaken and expert opinion was taken. The category definitions were written for public access.

Moreover, units, titles and sub-titles were chosen as registration units and studied accordingly. Thus, the texts in the textbooks were guaranteed to cover the sufficient coverage and dimension for teaching the subject. The frequency of categories used under the text in historical environment was given and the number of words for the scope was also indicated. The size of visuals used in textbooks was given in accordance with the categories. As a result of the study, while 5th Grade textbooks cover historical environment subjects, there was no indication for the 4th Grade textbooks.

**Keywords:** social sciences, textbooks, North Cyprus, historical environment, elementary school.

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout its history, Cyprus has enjoyed a significant position of power due to its geographical location (Ozkul, 2010; Richter, 2011; Morgan, 2013). Therefore, the island has interested many civilisations and become a home for a majority of them. In terms of a Mediterranean perspective, Cyprus was considered as an important place for Latin and Venetian populations. The main reason for this might be the possibility of using the island as a stopover point for European pilgrims between Europe and Jerusalem (Erdogru, 2008; Ozkul, 2014). Cyprus has a crucial position as it provides transportation and accommodation opportunities for the Eastern Mediterranean. The main reason why Cyprus was in the radar of many civilisations was its position on the world trade routes until the last quarter of 14th century (Orr, 2013).

Being that the Ottomans had become a superior power in the Mediterranean, the European states were looking for different trade routes in order not to pay any taxes or duties to the Ottomans and so purchase their imported goods for better prices. The arrival of Western sailors to India from Africa had made the imports of Western states cost-effective and had therefore diminished the importance of Cyprus. Afterwards, the opening of the Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean and Red Sea returned the importance of Cyprus. In terms of the framework of these latter developments, the natural gas reserves estimated to be held around the island have made the Cyprus an important island in the world today. From its early history until today, Cyprus has never lost its importance and continued to be an attraction point with its various characteristics in every period. Therefore, the island was a home to different civilisations and each one of them has left something behind in terms of influencing the culture of island (Tamcelik, 2012).

According to Evans and Brueckner (1999), the social sciences is a field that was established to protect human ethics, review the role of the individual in a democratic community and to analyse social events and human relations (as cited in Ozturk, Keskin & Otluglu, 2012). Sonmez (1998) explains that social sciences is an activity that works on the reality formed around a human being. Sonmez also noted that social sciences are the bonding period based on being proven by social facts where dynamic (living) information generated consequently. It is very difficult to define social sciences in such a way to be accepted by everybody.

From the perspective of Selanik Ay (2010), within the scope of social sciences teaching, students are provided with behaviour and values about social life and given the opportunity for socialisation and to be a good citizen. For Oner (2015), social sciences is a teaching program blended with the findings from various sciences between social and human sciences. The study of social sciences ensures the development of citizenship competence and the integration of social sciences and human sciences. Therefore, instead of giving pure information to students, it examines the evolution of children and youths towards the restructuring of significant information (Deveci, 2015). Social science lessons aim to introduce behaviour in relation to political, economic, cultural and environmental problems and their solutions (Akcan, 2010).

The environment is a composite of living and non-living factors that have an impact on all living things during their life cycle (Yildiz, Sipahioglu & Yilmaz, 2011). The concept of the environment is divided into different parts within itself. According to Kocatas (2003), the environment is divided conceptually into natural, artificial and socio-economic environments. The natural environment is examined in two parts as living (plants, animals, micro organisms) and non-living (soil, air, water). People form artificial environments through the use of non-living materials on the basis of knowledge and culture. The socio-economic environment as a whole formed by people through economic, political and social systems (Kocatas, 2003). Erturk (2012) and Yildiz et al. (2011) assess the environment in terms of natural and artificial environment. The environment of humans is analysed in terms of physical, biological and social environment. The physical environment makes a reference to the concept of artificial environment provided by prior authors and the biological environment to the natural environment. The social environment contains history, folk, tradition, culture, religion, politics, ethics, family structure, education, work, income, nutrition, recreation and welfare (Dincer Nazlioglu, 1988).

The concept of environment is divided into the five dimensions of space, quality, internal and external environment for individual and geographical environment. The sub-dimensions of these five are: physical and social environment under 'quality'; local, regional, national, international, global and universal environment under 'space'; political, economic, cultural, architectural and technological environment under 'external environment for individual'; physical, human, economic, rural-urban environment under 'geographical environment'; and psychology, emotion, ethics, immaterial and information environment under the 'internal environment for individual'. Education on the environment is an understanding arisen from the synthesis of different science fields. The key objective of education on environment is to provide opportunities for individuals so that they can perceive their surrounding as a whole, develop a critical point of view towards their surrounding and to be aware and engage with it as individuals. From this perspective, historical buildings and movable works displayed in museums constitute historical environment (Atasoy, 2006). The tools and devices developed by humanity to meet the changing needs as well as buildings and roads are the elements of historical environment (Safran & Ata, 2006). Thus, the environmental education is a comprehensive area including not only the natural environment, but also the education of historical environment as another dimension of environment.

Since historical environment is the way to transfer cultural heritage, it is comprised of valuable information in many periods of history (Nisanci, 2010). Historical buildings and movable works displayed in museums constitute the historical environment. The tools and devices developed by humanity to meet changing needs, as well as buildings and roads, are the elements of historical environment (Safran & Ata, 2006).

The ruins of a certain historical period are the reflection of their cultural structure. These ruins reflect past periods and symbolise them. The existence of societies is determined by their history. Historical ruins provide some of the most important evidence of past experiences. Therefore, the historical environment is comprised of many significant materials and shines a light to the social, cultural, economic and scientific developments of societies (Kale, 2014).

In other words, the historical environment has a function that enables us to understand today and to know ourselves (Ahunbay, 2011). Historical spaces are the main elements as it is the visual evidence of today that helps us to understand the past through its reconstruction. While historical ruins are very crucial for the formation of historical environment perception, they also build bridges between past and present and allow people to have protective attitudes towards environmental values (Karatas, 2011). Historical environments provide unique information regarding the present and ensure empathy about the past. Briefly, empathy is very important in order to understand the behaviour and the future plans of people that left a mark in history.

Historical ruins are one of the most valuable tools in creating empathy with the past. Thus, historical environment is one of the most important tools to be used in history teaching. Historical environment is also an important work field in terms of student-oriented history teaching. Historical spaces have a vital role in history teaching, while they are also important places for the fictionalisation of past. Consequently, students should be able to learn with a permanent mark by observing and contacting with the materials located in historical environment (Demircioglu, 2014).

It is possible to provide qualifications and skills to individuals regarding democracy, entailing that it is then possible for individuals to analyse the events appropriately in accordance with the present conditions. History teaching may also make it possible to provide quality information to individuals regarding historical environment. In this way individuals get to learn about historical ruins and make appropriate reviews in accordance with applicable conditions.

Teaching historical environment is considered as a part of environmental education. As stated in Atasoy (2006), historical buildings and movable works displayed in museums are the part of historical environment, entailing that it is also important to teach historical environment. Settling aesthetic phenomena, developing societal consciousness by documenting the past, the diversification of social and cultural living and using time effectively depends on historical environment (Hacisalihoglu, 2013).

### *1.1. Importance of Historical Environment Education*

The importance of historical environment education for students may be listed as follows:

- It develops the observation, classification, analysis and evaluation abilities of students.
- It develops the historical time, continuity, change, difference and chronologic perception of students.
- It helps to understand the change in historical materials over time.
- It contributes to the sensory development of students.
- It develops the environment perception of students.
- It gives students the opportunity to see different interpretation and prejudices.
- It develops the skills to measure, estimate and plan on the part of students.
- It helps the students to understand the difference between reality and fiction.
- It shows the students the cause and effect relation.
- It helps the student to use historical evidence.
- It helps the student to improve basic concepts about history and learn difficult concepts.
- It ensures the use, evaluation and analysis of visual evidences apart from written resources by students (as cited in Demircioglu, 2014; Kale, 2014).

Textbooks are materials that help learning by considering the developmental characteristics of students as the target group based on cognitive and affective targets. From this framework, history and related subject textbooks like social sciences provide information about the past to students and also has an important role in the transfer of social values. Therefore, during the context preparation of history and social sciences textbooks, the way that it is used to deliver the past and the extent to which it contributes to gaining social values should be evaluated and designed well (Safran & Ata, 2006). The most significant point while creating the school text books is the co-relation of the topics, as well as its being well organised and clarifying the content page (Altun, Arslan & Yazgan, 2004).

### *1.2. Aim and Importance of Study*

People in Cyprus live in a historical environment. However, the increasing destruction of this historical environment and its reflection in the press demonstrates that society has not yet understood the importance of historical environment subject. This also indicates that the importance of historical environment has not been sufficiently understood in history education. This study aims to identify how the historical environment issues are discussed in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade social sciences textbooks in terms of context and form. Thus, this would identify the coverage level of historical environment in North Cyprus and whether there is any need to develop this coverage. This study is the first for the literature. It will be helpful for the future relevant studies, as it would fill a gap in the field. Moreover, it also aims to underline the historical environment in Cyprus.

### *1.3. Research questions*

The following questions shall guide the study.

1. Under which titles are historical environment issues discussed?
2. How many pages do the textbooks have to include historical environment issues?

3. Up to what point do the textbooks use visuals when historical environment issues are given?
4. What is the coverage of textbooks on historical environment issues?
5. Which period's historical works have more coverage in textbooks when historical environment is given?

## **2. Methodology**

The method of study is organised in accordance with the qualitative research.

### *2.1 Sample*

The population was not indicated pursuant to the qualitative research and purposive sampling was used. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Grade social sciences textbooks taught in Northern Cyprus Elementary Schools were chosen as samples and units were assessed according to their scope on environment.

### *2.2 Data collection*

Since textbooks were used as single data resource in the study, the document analysis review technique was used. With this method, documents are used as direct data collection resource instead of being an addition to the other data collection methods.

### *2.3 Data analysis*

For the analysis of the data collected through this method, the sample was chosen from the data to be analysed, categories were developed, the analysis unit was identified and then the data generated was made numeric (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). The data categorised that will be analysed was determined by utilising the textbooks and the study conducted by Kasot and Ozsezer (2015). To determine the validity of the categories, literature scanning was undertaken and an expert opinion was taken. The category definitions were written for public access. Moreover, units, titles and sub-titles were chosen as registration units and studied accordingly. Thus, we ensured that the texts in the textbooks provided sufficient coverage and dimension for teaching the subject. The frequency for categories under the texts on historical environment was given and the number of words for the scope was also indicated. The size of the visuals used in textbooks was given in accordance with the categories. Visuals showing the categories were measured with a ruler and sizes were determined.

## **3. Findings**

There are 8 categories determined under the scope of study. The category definitions were written for public access. These categories are given respectively:

Castle: a sound building constructed to get inside of and fight against enemies with thick walls and bastions suitable to fire weapons all around.

Inn: large building where businessman associate and for the accommodation of guests, travellers and foreigners, located on the road and city centre.

Castle entrance doors (Gate): built from stones for the entrance and exit of castles.

Turkish baths: a place to bathe.

Lodge: special building where dervishes sit under the control of a sheikh and perform invocation and requital.

Mosque: house of worship for Muslims.

Column: supporting elements helping the buildings stand still from ancient times.

Mansion: big and grand buildings (Develioglu, 2013).

### 3.1 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Sciences Textbook

The historical environment of Cyprus is not covered in the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade social sciences textbooks. However, under the title "My Friend Far Away" in the Unit 8 of the book, the names and information on human and physical geography of countries were given as Turkey, Italy, Japan, Egypt, Madagascar, Azerbaijan and Malta respectively. In addition, photos of touristic and historical buildings were used explaining the cultures of these countries. For examples, the photos of important historical buildings in Turkey such as Sultanahmet Mosque, Ephesus, Aspendos were used. The book also has the picture of Pisa Tower in Italy and a pyramid in Egypt with an explanation in twenty-eight words. Therefore, it is not possible to refer to the categories' identities regarding the historical environment in Cyprus.

### 3.2 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Sciences Textbook

5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Sciences Textbook was identified as covering the historical environment issues. The Unit 2 of textbooks, under the title "Our Cultural Heritage", includes historical environment issues in Cyprus. There are 4 pages in total between pages 16-19 noting the subject. Culture has been defined under the main title of Cultural Heritage. Culture is defines, as *"the architectural buildings of our country are comprised of walls, antique cities, monuments and various buildings surroundings cities. These buildings were constructed once by the people living in Cyprus for thousands of years."*

There are 8 categories defined in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade social sciences textbook. These categories cover the historical environment issues in North Cyprus. Contents of the categories were given in subtitles according to the aim of the study.

#### 3.2.1. Castle

There was a short part with the sub-title 'Why walls were built?' and then a significant part discussing the Nicosia Walls. There was a diagram of Nicosia Castle and some photos of other historical buildings within it. Twelve bastions were shown on the diagram of Nicosia Castle. Seven questions were asked directly and indirectly related to the historical environment from the activities given in Page 18. These questions were as follows:

- a) If you were Venetians and were supposed to find a way to protect Nicosia against Ottomans apart from building walls, what would it be?
- b) Why do you think that walls were built by adding bastions instead of in the shape of a circle?
- c) Why were the walls built by using stones instead of mud-brick or other material?
- d) Why do you think that Ottomans did not destroy the walls when they invaded the city?
- e) Should we demolish the walls?
- f) Do we have any other cities surrounded by the walls? Learn with the help of your family.
- g) Should we surround today's cities with the walls for any reason?

When the questions were reviewed, they were understood to allow the student to interfere by using their imaginations. The question 'e' might be considered as a significant question giving the opportunity to students to deliver their views on historical environment protection. While

the questions are of a high quality, they were also considered a little difficult for the students' level.

In the page 19, there was a 4.6 x 6.2 cm photo of Paphos Castle with a description of 36 words; for Kyrenia Castle, there was a 4.6 x 6.2 cm photo with a 63-word description.

### *3.2.2. Castle entrance doors (Gate)*

For the Famagusta and Paphos Gates, only the names were mentioned while there was a photo of Kyrenia Gate in the size of 3.5 x 3 cm on page 17. The diagram shows the buildings on Nicosia Walls with photos.

### *3.2.3. Mansion*

On page 17, there was only a photo of Dervish Pasha Mansion of 2 x 3.2 cm. A description of the photo was not given.

### *3.2.4. Mosque*

On page 17, there were two photos of the Selimiye Mosque of size 3.5 x 2.5 cm and Arabahmet Mosque of a 3 x 2 cm size. Descriptions of the photos were not given.

### *3.2.5. Turkish Bath*

On page 17, there was a photo of Grand Turkish Bath of a size of 2 x 2.5 cm. A description of the photo was not given. On page 19, for Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque, a 4.6 x 6.2 photo with 55-word description was given. Under the photo and descriptions, there was space enough for a building and its description. There was an activity for this space, in which students can choose a building from their region and stick a photo of it with a description underneath.

### *3.2.6. Lodge*

On page 17, there was a photo of Mevlevi Tekke (Whirling Dervish) of size 2.5 x 3 cm. A description of the photo was not given.

### *3.2.7. Column*

On page 17, there were two photos of Venetian Column of size 3.5 x 1 cm and of the Great Inn at 2.2 x 3.5 cm. Descriptions of the photos were not given.

### *3.2.8. Inn*

On page 17, there was a photo of the Great Inn of size 2.2 x 3.5 cm. The Great Inn was described with sixty-six words at the left bottom of page. There was also an activity part next to the description asking to "Describe a building that you will choose among the walls".

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Historical environment is not that sufficiently covered under the 5<sup>th</sup> grade social sciences textbooks. The historical buildings were defined under the titles "Cultural Heritage". The photos and names of some important historical works located within Nicosia Walls were mentioned in an exercise under Page 17, which is considered as significant in terms of stressing the importance of works. Giving only a picture and description for Great Inn in this part creates a perception as if only the Great Inn is important. There is also an activity given in a speech bubble on the right where the description of the Great Inn is provided. There is also the note asking to, "Describe a building that you will choose inside the walls". The performance of this exercise is important for raising the understanding of children towards historical environment buildings.

However, one major deficiency in the book, the diagram of Nicosia Castle in Page 17, is given in a complex way. The diagram looks like as if there are 10 bastions in Nicosia castle, whereas the real number is 11. When the diagram is closely looked, the unseen bastion is behind the Kyrenia Entrance Gate. Another issue is that there is only a photo of Kyrenia Gate and only the names of the Paphos and Famagusta Gates are given, which are all three entrance-exit gates of Nicosia Walls (Figure 1). This is also considered as a deficiency in terms of content integrity.

Additionally, apart from the Venetian Column, the majority of historical buildings given in this chapter are Turkish-Islam structures. Since Cyprus has been a home for various civilisations from ancient times until now, it is very rich in historical elements, which makes this more interesting. In addition to many Turkish-Islam buildings, there are also works from Eastern Rome, Lusignan and Venetian times. Therefore, the books covers more Turkish-Islam works, which creates an impression that the historical works of other civilisations are being ignored. Ozsezer and Kasot (2015) have emphasised limited coverage of historical environment in secondary school history books taught in Northern Cyprus. This situation can be considered as a deficiency for social sciences teaching.

In the exercises part given in page 18, 7 questions were asked directly and indirectly related to historical environment. In addition to these questions, another question may be added: "How can the historical environment be protected?" which would create a basis for students to gain awareness about this issue.

There is an exercise on historical environment in page 19. The photos of Paphos Castle, Kyrenia Castle and Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque were given with descriptions next to them. There is also an additional space in the book after the three buildings, where students were asked to give information about a historical structure from their areas. This practice is in accordance with the constructivism discipline that is accepted by modern countries as stated in Dilek (2007). Constructive approach is where students make contact with a series of historical resources, analysing, understanding different interpretations and defining their own ideas.

The historical environment of Cyprus was not covered in the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade social sciences textbooks, which was a major deficiency. However, under the title "My Friend Far Away" in the Unit 8 of book; the names and information on human and physical geography of countries were given as Turkey, Italy, Japan, Egypt, Madagascar, Azerbaijan and Malta respectively. Additionally, the photos of touristic and historical buildings explaining the cultures of these countries were used. For examples, the photos of important historical buildings in Turkey such as Sultanahmet Mosque, Ephesus, Aspendos were used.

The book also has the picture of Pisa Tower in Italy and a pyramid in Egypt with an explanation in twenty-eight words. This part is very important from the perspective that it gives students knowledge of different cultures and the historical buildings central to them. All of the touristic and historical places mentioned in this book are from foreign countries. In environmental history education, students first come to know about the historical buildings in their own country, then in other countries as stated in Alkis and Oguzoglu (2005). In the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade social sciences textbook, they mention





Figure 1. The diagram of Nicosia Castle

foreign historical buildings instead of local historical buildings. This situation has made student learning difficult.

Consequently, we can see that a 5th Grade social sciences textbook does not sufficiently cover the historical environment issue. In the exercise on page 17, only some of the historical buildings inside of Nicosia walls were mentioned, which is not sufficient for the introduction of historical environment, being that Nicosia is a home for various buildings in terms of historical environment. Moreover, student visits to historic buildings from an early age is required for historical environment awareness.

As Perry (2012) suggests, families have vital roles, especially to make pupils both become aware of and to establish loyalty towards the essence of historical buildings. With traditional education methods, because of the repetition of abstract concepts, lots of knowledge used to remain in student's mind, and also because of their learning through direct participation where students' direct experiences are long lasting (Hacisalihoglu, 2013). However, just like in the past, many students graduate from their schools without realising the historical structures and buildings of their neighbourhoods, cities and towns. Both schools and families have major responsibilities in order to eliminate this problem and to ensure historical environment awareness for everybody, which would make students know their historical environment and give the commitment. This study in particular shows that social sciences textbooks used for teaching in schools either do not include this issue or do not discuss it that much. Since individuals are more open to learning at their early age, these issues should be covered more to form historical environment awareness.

Lastly, in regard to the days in the curriculum allocated for the introduction of historical environment, schools mainly organise picnics instead of cultural visits. This is also considered as

a restriction in terms of the formation of historical environment. In this framework, the realisation of historical environment activities is seen as a non-performed fact in the curriculum. Ozteke (2004) states that effective environmental history education is not limited to just giving lecture and creating responsibility for students, it also affects the behaviour of students.

## 5. Recommendations

The photos and names of some important historical places located within Nicosia Walls were given in an exercise under Page 17. In this page, giving only a picture and description for Great Inn, creates a perception as if only Great Inn is important. Instead of describing Great Inn with too many words, short descriptions for other historical words will also give the children the opportunity to learn more about the other place. In this way, study of the other historical works may also be emphasised.

The diagram of Nicosia Castle in Page 17 is rendered in a complex way. When the diagram is examined closely, we see that the unseen bastion is behind the Kyrenia Entrance Gate. In order to eliminate this problem and prevent the wrong learning process, the proposal is to recreate this diagram. Only the Kyrenia Gate's photo and just the names of Famagusta and Paphos gates were used on the diagram. With the addition of photos of other gates, the diagram can become a whole.

Most of the works covered by the book are in the Turkish-Islamic language. When the historical ruins of different cultures are considered with the historical environment, not only the works from a specific period but also all works from past to present should be considered in order to eliminate this perception and teach the historical environment as a whole.

It will be possible to create a better, integrated historical environment. The historical environment of Cyprus is not covered in the 4th Grade social sciences textbooks, which is a major deficiency. Only the names and information on human and physical geography of countries were given as Turkey, Italy, Japan, Egypt, Madagascar, Azerbaijan and Malta respectively under the title "My Friend Far Away". The photos of the touristic and historical buildings explaining the cultures of these countries were used, along with the photos of important historical buildings in Turkey, such as the Sultanahmet Mosque, Ephesus, Aspendos, were used in the book. This part is very important for the students to know the cultures in different cultures and to learn the historical buildings there. However, our recommendation is that the students should first know about the historical buildings in their own country, then in other countries. Therefore, this would provide a proximodistal approach as one of the basic education principles and so facilitate the students' learning. This is also considered to be a contribution on the formation of historical environment awareness.

The 5th Grade social sciences textbooks do not sufficiently cover the historical environment issue. Therefore, the books should not only cover and introduce the historical buildings inside the walls of Nicosia, but also cover the many historical structures located in different residential places of North Cyprus, such as Famagusta, Kyrenia and Morphou. This would give students the opportunity to learn about and reinforce their understanding of the historical richness of their country, as well as understand the importance of such structures and protect them. This study shows in particular that the social sciences textbooks taught in schools either do not include historical environment or not discuss it sufficiently. Since individuals are more open to learning at an early age, these issues should be covered further to form historical environment awareness.

The realisation of historical environment activities is seen as a non-performed fact in the social sciences curriculum. Our recommendation on this issue is that historical environment visits should not be ignored, for they are an important need and should be planned substantially.

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