

REVIEW ARTICLE

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A review of experimental studies on out-of-school educational practices in social studies education

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- The experimental studies cover the learning areas for 4th, 5th, and 7th grades.

Abstract

Out-of-school education is a learning approach that enriches the educational process and supports the goals of formal education. It enables students to learn through experiences with people, places, environments, and institutions outside the classroom. This study aims to identify the learning domains covered by experimental studies on out-of-school learning, as well as the variables used in these studies, based on the social studies curriculum implemented between 2018 and 2023. Additionally, this study aims to provide ideas for activities that can be implemented in the learning domains included in the 2024 curriculum. The research question is formulated as follows: "What is the content of experimental studies on out-of-school education practices covered by the social studies curriculum implemented between 2018 and 2023, and which practices can be implemented for the 2024 curriculum?" According to the research findings, the out-of-school educational practices implemented under the curriculum between 2018 and 2023 were designed for the learning areas of "Culture and Heritage," "People, Places, and Environments," "Global Citizenship," "Production, Distribution, and Consumption," and "Active Citizenship." This study used a document review and analyzed the findings using descriptive content analysis. Most of these studies used qualitative findings and focused on learning areas such as "Culture and Heritage," "People, Places, and Environments," "Global Citizenship," "Production, Distribution, and Consumption," and "Active Citizenship." The studies focused particularly on 4th, 5th, and 7th grades; it was found that studies in the areas of "Science, Technology, and Society" and "Individual and Society" were insufficient. According to the research findings, out-of-school learning activities yielded significant results in measured variables such as academic achievement, attitudes, and attitudes toward cultural heritage and the environment, and were found to be a valuable complement to classroom instruction.

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1. Introduction

Out-of-school education is a learning approach that enriches the educational process and supports the achievement of formal education goals (Donaldson & Goering, 1970). This type of education takes place in various settings outside the school building and is planned and implemented in accordance with the curriculum (Salmi, 1993). Higgins et al. (1997) define out-of-school education as a process that includes environmental education, activities conducted outside of school, and practices aimed at individual development. By contrast, Ürey & Kaymakçı (2020) define out-of-school education as a comprehensive set of learning experiences that include people, places, environments, and institutions outside the classroom. In this context, natural areas, museums, zoos, science centers, social spaces (e.g., markets, produce stands, butcher shops, etc.), industrial facilities, botanical gardens, national parks, libraries, various public institutions, schoolyards, and non-classroom areas within school buildings can be cited as examples of out-of-classroom educational environments (Göksu, 2020). In these learning environments, students participate directly through experience-based activities and can interact with objects (Berberoğlu & Uygün, 2013). This process can also support the development of skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, self-regulation, responsibility, and decision-making. Indeed, research shows that out-of-school learning programs positively affect students' attitudes toward the subject and their personal and social development, and make the learning process more enjoyable (İnce & Akcanca, 2021). However, various challenges may arise during the planning and implementation of out-of-school learning activities, such as financial constraints, transportation and time limitations, overcrowded classrooms, safety concerns, parents' exam-focused attitudes, a rigorous curriculum, and bureaucratic obstacles (Tatar & Bağrıyanık, 2012).

When social studies education is limited to knowledge-based classroom activities, students may struggle to internalize social studies-specific skills and connect what they learn to their daily lives. Out-of-classroom learning enriches students' social studies learning. The literature indicates that studies on out-of-classroom learning in social studies are largely experimental. This situation highlights the need for research that comprehensively identifies the learning contexts and grade levels in which out-of-classroom learning practices are implemented in social studies education. This study examines trends and gaps in the literature by identifying the learning domains and variables used in experimental studies on out-of-classroom learning practices in social studies courses. This study may also contribute to future research on the 2024 curriculum.

Numerous studies examine the effectiveness of out-of-classroom learning. Firat Durdukoca (2024) noted that the most articles on out-of-classroom learning were published in 1971, while the most were published in 2018. Demirtaş and İbret (2025) reviewed graduate-level studies in social studies education and emphasized that out-of-classroom education has gained importance since 2020. In a study examining how social studies teachers use out-of-school environments in their lessons, Malkoç and Kaya (2015) found that teachers face challenges due to a dense curriculum, planning difficulties, lack of time, and overcrowded classrooms. Özür and Şahin (2017) recommended expanding out-of-school education in social studies classes. Aydın and Çelik (2024) found that out-of-school learning in life sciences classes increased students' motivation toward the subject. Uğurlu and Sever (2024) found that teachers have various concerns about using out-of-school learning environments. Bodur and Yıldırım (2018) found that students' scientific process skills and academic achievement improved in science classes related to the solar system. Akçadağ and Çobanoğlu (2018) recommended integrating out-of-school learning environments more fully into the teaching process for sustainable environmental education. Sobacı (2024) examined social studies textbooks from 2005 to the present and identified potential out-of-school activities. The researcher found that out-of-school learning activities were more prevalent in textbooks prepared according to the 2005 social studies curriculum than in those prepared according to the 2018 curriculum. This study used an experimental design based on the curriculum implemented between 2018 and 2023.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study used document analysis, a qualitative research method. Document analysis involves analyzing written materials that contain information about an event or phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003).

2.2. Data Sources

The data sources are postgraduate theses on out-of-school activities prepared in accordance with the social studies curriculum implemented between 2018 and 2023. Theses were accessed from <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/>. The study obtained ten postgraduate theses. The reason for selecting theses with an experimental design is that, in such studies, data are collected before and after the experiment, allowing comparison between the experimental and control groups across these two periods. This allows researchers to determine whether the out-of-school learning environment was significantly effective during the experimental process (Karasar, 2019). Experimental studies are important for understanding the effectiveness of out-of-school learning activities. Therefore, this study included only studies designed with an experimental design. This study is considered important for future researchers to identify gaps in the field and determine which areas of the current curriculum can be implemented in out-of-school learning. The data for the second sub-problem is the social studies curriculum. The Ministry of National Education's public network provided the curriculum. The study does not require ethical committee approval.

2.3. Data Analysis

This study focused on out-of-school learning practices within the social studies course and identified the learning domains addressed by relevant graduate studies. The study also identified the variables related to these learning domains. The data were analyzed using content analysis. The researcher downloaded the studies from the Council of Higher Education's thesis archive and reviewed them. The theses provided detailed information. The researcher then reviewed the 2024 curriculum and identified variables based on learning outcomes appropriate for out-of-school learning practices. This approach is believed to ensure credibility and consistency.

3. Results

An examination of the learning areas where experimental studies incorporating extracurricular learning practices were prepared in the 2018-2023 curriculum revealed that these were designed for the "Culture and Heritage," "People, Places, and Environments," "Production, Distribution, and Consumption," "Active Citizenship," and "Global Connections" learning areas. Studies focusing on experimentally designed extracurricular learning activities did not include studies addressing the "Science, Technology, and Society" and "Individual and Society" learning areas. Studies were concentrated in grades 4, 5, and 7, with the fewest studies conducted in grade 6. In the Culture and Heritage learning area, activities measured variables such as attitudes toward cultural heritage, perceptions of change and continuity, academic achievement, and conceptual understanding. The People, Places, and Environments learning area included extracurricular activities to demonstrate environmental attitudes and academic achievement. The Production, Distribution, and Consumption learning area focused on academic achievement. The Active Citizenship Learning Area included activities focusing on civic awareness and attitudes towards the subject. In the Global Connections Learning Area, attitudes towards the environment, environmental literacy, and green skills were used as knowledge and perception variables.

Table 1. Examination of the Distribution of Experimental Studies Including Extracurricular Education Practices According to the 2018 Curriculum in Terms of Various Variables.

Learning Area	4th Grade		5th Grade		6th Grade		7th Grade	
	Number	Variables	Number	Variables	Number	Variables	Number	Variables
Individual and Society								
Culture and Heritage	2	Attitudes towards tangible cultural heritage. Academic success, Ability to perceive change and continuity.					1	Intangible cultural heritage attitude, tangible cultural heritage attitude, concept perception
People, Places, and Environments	1	Attitude toward the class, Academic success.	1	Attitudes toward the environment, Academic achievement				

Science, Technology, and Society					
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	1	Academic achievement			
Active Citizenship	1	Civic awareness, Attitudes toward the course			
Global Connections			2		Attitude towards the environment, Environmental literacy, Knowledge and perception of green skills
General			1	Life Skills	
Total	3	3	1	3	

1. Tanta (2025) implemented some 6th-grade Social Studies learning outcomes in an eight-week experimental process using out-of-school learning activities. The study found that the post-test results of the experimental group students' life skills scale scores increased significantly compared to the pre-test results.

2. Güzel (2025) conducted an experimental study using activities designed for the "Culture and Heritage" learning area of 4th-grade primary school. He measured students' academic achievement and attitudes toward cultural heritage and examined their thoughts on out-of-school learning. It was found that both the academic achievement and attitudes toward tangible cultural heritage of the participating students in the experimental group significantly increased, and both students and teachers adopted a positive approach to out-of-school learning environments.

3. Demir (2025) examined the Life Sciences, Science, and Social Studies curricula in the context of acquiring green skills and prepared teaching materials for the "Global Connections" learning area of 7th-grade Social Studies. In an experimental study conducted using these materials, the researcher demonstrated that out-of-school social studies instruction significantly increased students' knowledge and awareness of green skills and supported the development of their cognitive structures.

4. Değirmenci (2025) taught the 5th-grade "Active Citizenship" learning domain objectives in the experimental group through out-of-school activities and found significant relationships between variables indicating students' socioeconomic levels, civic awareness, and attitudes toward the course.

5. Uzun (2024) focused on the ability to perceive change and continuity in a six-week experimental study, presenting the results of which included the 4th-grade "Culture and Heritage" learning domain objectives in the Social Studies course. Although the study results did not reveal a significant difference in the experimental and control groups in terms of the ability to perceive change and continuity, the qualitative findings revealed a difference in favor of the experimental group.

6. Terzi (2024) demonstrated the impact of out-of-school educational activities designed according to the learning outcomes of the 5th-grade Social Studies "People, Places, and Environments" Learning Area on academic achievement and environmental attitudes through a five-week experimental study. The study revealed an increase in the academic achievement and environmental awareness of the experimental group students. The qualitative findings of the study revealed that the program was fun, educational, and provided lasting information.

7. Şener (2024) examined the impact of out-of-school educational activities covering the 7th-grade Social Studies "Global Connections" learning area on students' environmental attitudes and environmental literacy levels. Posttest results from the experimental and control groups were compared, and it was determined that environmental affect, environmental behavior, and cognitive skills tests, as well as environmental education attitudes, showed significant differences in the experimental group.

8. Utku (2023) found that out-of-school educational activities designed according to the learning outcomes of the 7th-grade social studies "Culture and Heritage" learning area significantly differentiated the intangible cultural heritage attitudes, tangible cultural heritage attitudes, and conceptual perceptions of the experimental group students. The qualitative findings of the study also indicate that the students were satisfied with the out-of-school learning process.

9. Yavuz (2023) implemented out-of-school learning activities on the 5th-grade social studies "Production, Distribution, and Consumption" learning area. The study found that the academic achievement of the experimental group students increased compared to the control group students.

10. Avcı (2019) found that the attitudes and academic achievement of the students in the experimental group were significantly higher in his experimental study where he implemented the learning outcomes of the 4th-grade social studies "People, Places, and Environments" learning area through out-of-school activities. Four weeks after implementation, the researcher also found that students' retention levels were high based on a retention test.

Out-of-school practical activities can be conducted for the 4th grade level of Living Together, focusing on respect for differences, cooperation, and social responsibility; for the 5th grade level on the acquisition of national values; and for the 6th grade level on communication. Field studies can be conducted in the "Our Home, Our World" learning area on spatial literacy; for the 5th grade on attitudes toward the environment and environmental awareness; and for the 6th grade on direction and location information. It has been determined that the "Our Common Heritage" learning area can include variables on attitudes toward common heritage and cultural heritage awareness in the 5th grade, and on attitudes and awareness of cultural heritage in the 6th grade. These variables can be implemented through out-of-school museum trips, historical site visits, and cultural heritage-based activities. It was found that in the "Our Living Democracy" learning area, activities can be implemented for the 4th grade on democratic attitudes and democratic citizenship; for the 5th and 6th grades on active citizenship; and for the 7th grade on responsible consumption, democracy awareness, and democratic citizenship. In the "Economy in Our Lives" learning area, it was determined that activities focusing on active citizenship in the 4th grade, financial literacy in the 5th grade, economic literacy in the 6th grade, and sustainable consumption and responsibility in the 7th grade could be implemented. In the "Technology and Social Sciences" learning area, it was observed that activities aimed at measuring legal literacy and political literacy in the 5th grade, technological literacy in the 6th grade, and conscious consumption and problem-solving in the 7th grade could be included.

Table 2. Learning Areas Where Out-of-school Education Practices Can Be Implemented and Variables That Can Be Used in the 2024 Curriculum

Learning Area	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade
Living Together	Respecting differences	Cooperation, Social Responsibility	Acquiring national values,	Communication
Our Home is the World	Spatial literacy	Attitude and awareness towards the environment	Direction and location information	
Our Common Heritage	Attitude and awareness towards common heritage	Attitude-awareness towards Cultural Heritage		
Our Living Democracy	Democratic Attitude Democratic citizenship	Active citizenship	Active citizenship	Responsible consumption, democracy awareness, democratic citizenship
Economy in Our Lives	Active citizenship	Financial literacy	Economic literacy	Sustainable consumption, Responsibility

4. Discussion

An examination of experimental studies on out-of-school educational practices in curricula implemented between 2018 and 2023 found that 10 master's theses were completed. Most of these studies are supported by qualitative findings. An analysis of the distribution of these studies reveals that they were designed for the learning areas of "Culture and Heritage," "People, Places, and Environments," "Global Citizenship," "Production, Distribution, and Consumption," and "Active Citizenship." No studies address the "Science, Technology, and Society" or "Individual and Society" learning areas. Şahin & Asal Özkan (2023): Postgraduate studies on out-of-school educational settings in Turkey have focused primarily on science and life skills courses, with only 7 studies conducted on social studies.

While studies concentrate on the 4th, 5th, and 7th grades, the fewest were conducted in the 6th grade. According to the findings, most graduate studies using out-of-school learning methods found that classroom activities yielded significant results on the measured variables. Saraç (2017) also notes that Likert-type scales are predominantly used in studies on out-of-school educational settings. Bostan Sarioğlu & Küçüközer (2017) noted that the outdoor school learning process in science education increases students' academic achievement and sense of curiosity. Out-of-school learning activities are enjoyable and facilitate learning (Kubat, 2018). Say (2024) addressed some of the second-grade learning objectives in the Life Skills curriculum through six weeks of out-of-school learning activities. In their experimental study, they found that these objectives facilitated learning and effectively taught values. Out-of-school learning activities complement in-class lessons. Indeed, in their studies highlighting the benefits of out-of-school activities, Karbeyaz & Kurt (2020) emphasized their complementary nature to in-class activities. Some experimental studies incorporating out-of-school learning activities have been conducted in geography-specific learning areas (such as People, Places, and Environments, and Global Connections). Kaya & Bozyiğit (2024) found that out-of-school learning environments are important for students' understanding of natural elements and human-environment interactions. Indeed, Örs (2025) observed that geography-specific learning outcomes among the third-grade objectives in the Life Sciences Curriculum are suitable for out-of-school learning activities. Out-of-school educational activities primarily focus on a nature-education perspective (Ürey & Kaymakçı, 2020); it states that the learning outcomes for the third-grade "Life in Nature" learning area of the Life Sciences Curriculum can be taught through out-of-school learning activities (Karbeyaz et al., 2023). Additionally, some studies have addressed learning areas specific to the history discipline ("Culture and Heritage"). Ayyıldız (2023) examined the learning outcomes of the 6th-grade "Culture and Heritage" learning area in the social studies course through out-of-school educational activities. Güngörmüş (2024) showed that museum-based activities—one out-of-school learning environment—yielded positive results in the social studies course. In the studies examined, attitudes toward the course and academic achievement are among the most frequently used variables.

5. Conclusion

Postgraduate studies on out-of-school learning methods in the 2018-2023 Social Studies curriculum focused on learning areas including history, geography, economics, and citizenship. Experimental studies were conducted to reveal the levels of knowledge and perception variables related to attitudes toward tangible cultural heritage, academic achievement, the ability to perceive change and continuity, attitudes toward intangible cultural heritage, attitudes toward tangible cultural heritage, concept perception, attitudes toward social studies, attitudes toward the environment, civic awareness, attitudes toward the environment, environmental literacy, and green skills in these learning areas.

6. Future Research Implication

Studies could measure students' environmental awareness, attitudes toward the environment, and awareness of cultural heritage in learning areas such as Our Home, Our World, and Our Common Heritage, which are seen as related to history and geography, in the 2024 curriculum. Additionally, variables such as Financial Literacy Skills, Savings, Consumption, and Economic Sustainability within the economics learning

area of our lives can be studied through out-of-school learning activities. Out-of-school activities that develop social sustainability, respect for diversity, cooperation, communication, and solidarity skills within the Living Together learning area can be measured. Applications that measure variables such as active citizenship and civic awareness within the Living Democracy learning area can be included.

Statement of Researchers

The researcher is responsible for conceptualization, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript writing.

Researchers' contribution rate statement:

NA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Visualization, Writing.

Conflict statement:

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest

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Author Biographies:

Nalan Altay conducts research in the fields of Social Studies Education, Geography Education, and Educational Sciences.

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