

Teachers' views on the use of museum and historical site trips in social studies teaching†

Erkan Kormaz^{1*}  and Görkem Avcı² 

1 Bartın University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Türkiye.

2 Bartın University, Faculty of Education, Türkiye

* **Correspondence:** Bartın University, Kutlubey Yazıcılar Campus, 74100, Bartın, Türkiye, email: 170101053@ef.ibu.edu.tr

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Highlights:

- Museums and historical sites develop students' historical empathy and cultural awareness skills.
- Out-of-school learning environments support permanent learning by concretizing abstract social studies concepts.
- Teachers encounter security, cost, and organizational challenges during museum trips.
- Pre-trip preparation and digital technology integration are essential for effective museum education.

Abstract

The primary goal of this research is to demonstrate how museums and historical sites are used in social studies instruction and to thoroughly explore classroom teachers' perspectives on this practice. Using a case study approach, one of the qualitative research methods, the study involved 10 classroom teachers from different socio-economic regions during the 2024–2025 school year. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed with content analysis. The findings reveal that teachers see field trips to museums and historical sites as helping students understand historical concepts better and promoting long-term learning by making these concepts more concrete, while also significantly contributing to social studies instruction. Additionally, it was found that careful planning before trips and the use of digital technologies improve the quality of education. However, challenges such as security concerns, transportation issues, and organizational difficulties limit teachers. Despite these operational challenges, the strong positive effect of field experiences on student engagement suggests that the educational benefits outweigh the logistical problems. Overall, the study shows that place-based learning can not only support but also transform social studies teaching by shifting from a traditional classroom setting to a more interactive, experience-based approach.

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1. Introduction

Recent technological and scientific developments have significantly influenced educational practices, encouraging a shift from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward more student-centered models. Traditional education has centered on the teacher and textbooks, pushing students into a passive position, limiting their creativity, and confining learning within the school-classroom framework (Üztemur et al, 2021). Instead of relying on isolated facts that lack relevance to the learner, today's dynamic world requires students to engage with ill-defined, real-world problems to truly internalize knowledge and remain competitive (Lombardi, 2007). Addressing this specific need is the core of authentic learning, which transforms theoretical knowledge into practical skills by grounding education in real-life contexts (Dinç & Üztemur, 2017; İneç, 2020; Sevigen et al., 2022). Through such authentic tasks, learners do not merely memorize; they acquire the necessary competencies to actively produce solutions to real-world issues (Rule, 2006). However, constructivist educational philosophy encourages individuals to discover information through experience and integrate it into their lives (Seyhan, 2020).

Throughout history, traditional teaching methods have played a vital role in fostering an active sense of citizenship, responsibility, and cultural values in social studies and history courses (Ata, 2002). However, in a globalized world, individuals are expected not only to be good citizens but also to develop an active international citizenship awareness (Çerkez, 2011). In this context, restricting educational processes to the classroom is considered insufficient, emphasizing the need for alternative learning environments where students can engage with the real world (Foran, 2008). One of the most important areas addressing this need is out-of-school learning environments. Museums and historical sites are unique educational spaces that enhance students' understanding by making historical concepts more concrete, positively influence their attitudes toward the lesson, and support lasting learning (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014; DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008). These environments make the learning process more meaningful by increasing students' curiosity and motivation (Piscitelli & Anderson, 2001).

The main goal of the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum is to develop students' discipline-specific skills such as chronological thinking, historical empathy, and evidence-based inquiry. The curriculum emphasizes integrating these skills into daily life to ensure they are more than just abstract ideas. Achieving these competencies through both theory and real-world experiences forms the core of the program (MEB, 2024). Following constructivist educational principles, the program promotes active student participation and learning through hands-on experience. Museums and historical sites play a vital role in reaching these objectives. Literature highlights that museums and historical sites boost students' motivation in social studies, enhance critical thinking and collaboration skills, and foster 21st-century skills (Çalışkan et al., 2016; Kashchak, 2014; Meydan & Akkuş, 2014; Öztürk, 2017; Üztemur et al., 2017). Supported by methods like creative drama, educational games, and field trips with observation activities, these environments encourage students' active engagement in learning (Tezcan-Akmehmet, 2017). However, research shows that although museums and historical sites are valued in social studies lessons in theory, they are not used enough in practice (Avcı & Gümüş, 2019). Most teachers still prefer traditional methods, limiting museum visits to brief and superficial activities (Alkış & Oğuzoğlu, 2005). This limits students' ability to connect knowledge, skills, and values to real life and contradicts the core idea of constructivist teaching (Simsek & Kaymakçı, 2015).

This study adds to the literature by providing a detailed understanding of how classroom teachers view and carry out field trips to museums and historical sites. It also offers practical insights into the pedagogical, organizational, and contextual challenges faced in out-of-school learning settings, thereby guiding more effective planning and policy making. Additionally, within the framework of place-based and authentic learning, the findings support ongoing discussions on how learning environments outside the classroom can change teaching methods in social studies education. Finally, by recognizing the variety of socio-economic contexts in the study group, the research presents a more detailed understanding of how these factors influence the use of such learning environments. This study aims to explore classroom teachers' perspectives, experiences, and challenges when using museums and historical sites in social studies instruction. Specifically, the research seeks to understand how these environments help students develop historical and cultural understanding and how teachers incorporate these experiences into their teaching practices. The research problem of the study can be summarized as follows:

What are the views and experiences of classroom teachers regarding the use of museums and historical sites in social studies teaching? Based on this general problem, the following sub-problems (research questions) were addressed:

1. What are classroom teachers' views on the role of museums and historical sites in social studies education?
2. How do museum and historical site visits affect students' perceptions toward social studies courses?
3. What are the teachers' views on the effective and efficient use of museums and historical sites in the teaching process?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter during the implementation of museum and historical site visits?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore classroom teachers' perspectives on incorporating museums and historical sites into social studies lessons. Qualitative research is defined as an approach that relies on interpretive data collection techniques conducted in natural settings, aimed at understanding individuals' experiences and perceptions of events within their specific contexts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The case study design, a method within qualitative research, was employed in this study. While Yin (2009) describes a case study as a strategy that facilitates a comprehensive examination of a current phenomenon within its real-life context, Creswell (2007) describes this design as a qualitative approach that analyzes specific events through various data collection tools. The choice of this design was motivated by its suitability for deeply exploring classroom teachers' views on museums and historical sites from multiple perspectives within their own environments. A case study involves an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon by integrating multiple data sources (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this context, assessing teachers' experiences within their natural settings directly supports the research's objectives.

2.2. Study Group

The study group for this research includes classroom teachers working in various provinces, districts, and rural areas across Türkiye during the 2024-2025 academic year. Participants were selected using criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling, which are types of purposive sampling. Criterion sampling involves choosing individuals from the research population who meet specific predefined qualitative criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this case, the criteria were being a classroom teacher and teaching social studies. The study group comprised 10 teachers aged 25 to 39, with six males and four females. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 14 years. This diversity in age, gender, and professional background helped incorporate a range of perspectives, leading to a more nuanced, comprehensive, and multidimensional understanding of the case under study.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form designed for classroom teachers served as the data collection tool in this study. The form was created to explore teachers' perspectives on integrating museums and historical sites into social studies lessons. During its development, a thorough literature review was conducted, similar studies were analyzed, and the research problem was clearly defined. Additionally, the content validity of the interview form was enhanced based on feedback from two field experts and classroom teachers with master's degrees. A personal information form was also used to gather demographic data about participants, and the information collected was organized and incorporated into the analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is a reliable technique that allows data to be examined systematically, converted into meaningful codes, and grouped under themes (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). During the analysis process, open coding was initially performed by identifying key expressions in the transcripts. Similar codes were then grouped together to form sub-themes, and conceptually related sub-themes were organized under broader themes. The emerging themes were repeatedly compared with the original data to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' views. Finally, the findings were presented in a thematic structure and supported with direct quotations from participants, who were coded as T1, T2, ..., T10 to maintain confidentiality. Several strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and dependability of the study. The entire research process, including data collection and analysis procedures, was documented in detail to ensure transparency. The coding scheme and thematic structure were also reviewed with the help of a field expert, which contributed to the consistency of the interpretations. In addition, direct participant quotations were included in the findings to demonstrate the relationship between the data and the

interpretations. Detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were provided to support the transferability of the findings.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Several strategies were used to improve the credibility and reliability of the study. The research process, including data collection and analysis methods, was thoroughly documented to ensure transparency. The coding scheme and thematic framework were also reviewed with a field expert, which helped ensure consistent interpretation. Additionally, direct participant quotations were included in the findings to show the connection between the data and the interpretations. Detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were provided to support the transferability of the findings.

3. Results

In this study, classroom teachers' views on the use of museums and historical sites in social studies lessons were investigated. In this section, the study's findings are presented in detail, organized into themes, sub-themes, and teacher views.

3.1. The Role of Museums and Historical Sites in Education

This section discusses the contributions of museums and historical sites to students in social studies teaching.

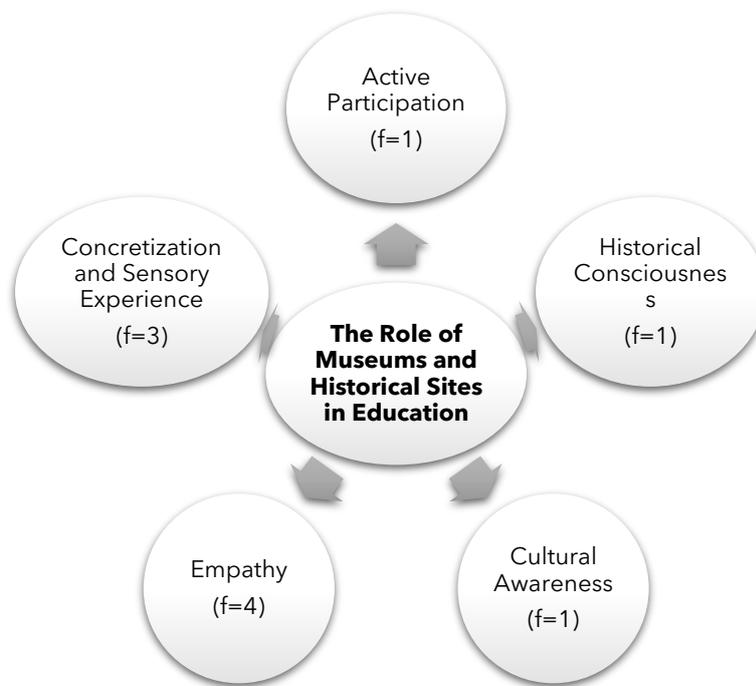


Figure 1. The Role of Museums and Historical Sites in Education

Figure 1 shows that teachers' views on the educational role of museums and historical sites are categorized into five sub-themes: empathy, concretization and sensory experience, active participation, historical consciousness, and cultural awareness. The most prominent view among participants is that these locations help develop students' historical empathy (f=4). For instance, Teacher (T5) mentioned that museums enable students to gain a deeper understanding by forming an emotional bond with the past. Likewise, Teacher (T8) highlighted that museums enhance empathy by making theoretical knowledge more concrete. Thirty percent of the teachers (f=3) stated that museums and historical sites provide concrete experiences and sensory engagement. Teacher (T1) expressed that students learn better by experiencing the texture and feel of the past. Teachers (T4) and (T7) noted that this experience enhances retention by vividly presenting information. The research also highlighted the effects of museums and historical sites on active participation, historical awareness, and cultural understanding. Teacher (T2) mentioned that trips make the learning process enjoyable, thereby increasing active participation. Teacher (T3) stated that

students develop historical awareness by forming a strong connection with history, and Teacher (T10) emphasized that these sites play a crucial role in transmitting cultural heritage.

3.2. The Effect of Museum and Historical Site Trips on Student Perceptions

This section examines the effect of museum and historical site trips on students' Perceptions in social studies teaching.

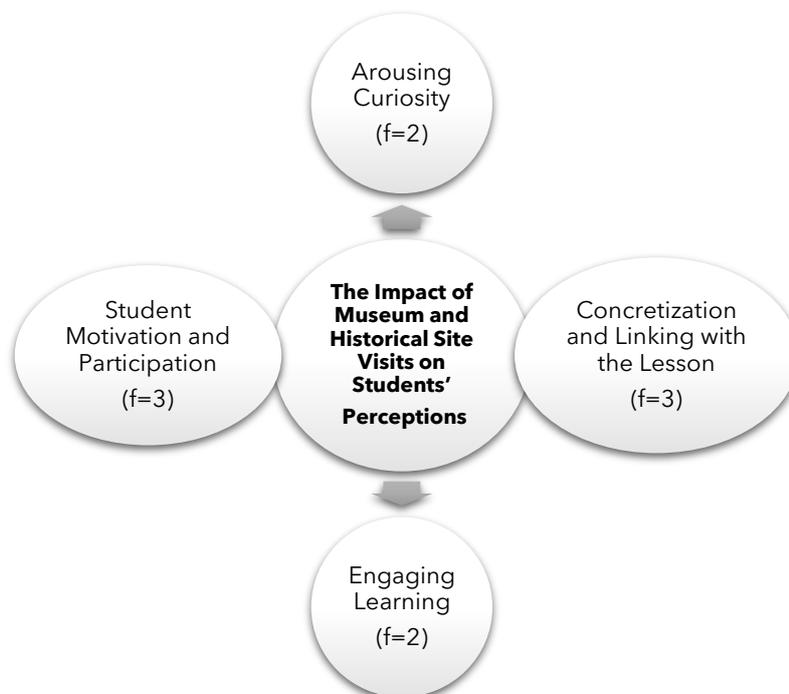


Figure 2. The Impact of Museum and Historical Site Visits on Students' Perceptions

Figure 2 shows that museum and historical site trips affect students' perceptions of the lesson in a multidimensional way. Teacher views are concentrated into four main themes: student motivation and participation, concretization and connection to the lesson, arousing curiosity, and engaging learning.

Thirty percent of participants ($f=3$) indicated that the most distinct effect of these trips is on motivation and participation in the lesson. Teachers emphasized that out-of-class environments trigger children's desire to learn. For example, while (T6) drew attention to the dynamism of the process by saying, "When children actively participate in lessons, their motivation increases." (T3) linked the source of motivation to concrete experiences. "Museum trips increase students' interest in examples, strengthening their bond with the lesson."

Parallel to this, 30% of teachers ($f=3$) focused on the function of trips in concretizing abstract information and connecting it with the lesson. It was stated that the abstract concepts inherent in social studies take on meaning through real objects in museums. While (T7) explained this by stating, "Social studies is generally associated with abstract concepts, but trips make these concepts concrete," (T10) stated that students learn deeply by experiencing knowledge through real objects.

Additionally, the research highlighted the curiosity-arousing ($f=2$) and engaging ($f=2$) aspects of the trips. It was observed that students, moving away from the monotony of the classroom environment, experienced increased curiosity, which reflected on their creativity. In this context, (T2) touched upon the positive effect reflected in the classroom by saying, "Museum and historical site trips attract students' attention and make them curious," while (T8) emphasized that this experience breaks the monotony of the lesson, enabling students to develop a more interested perception toward the lesson.

3.3. Effective and Efficient Use of Museums and Historical Sites

This section examines teachers' views on the effective and efficient use of museum and historical site trips in social studies teaching.

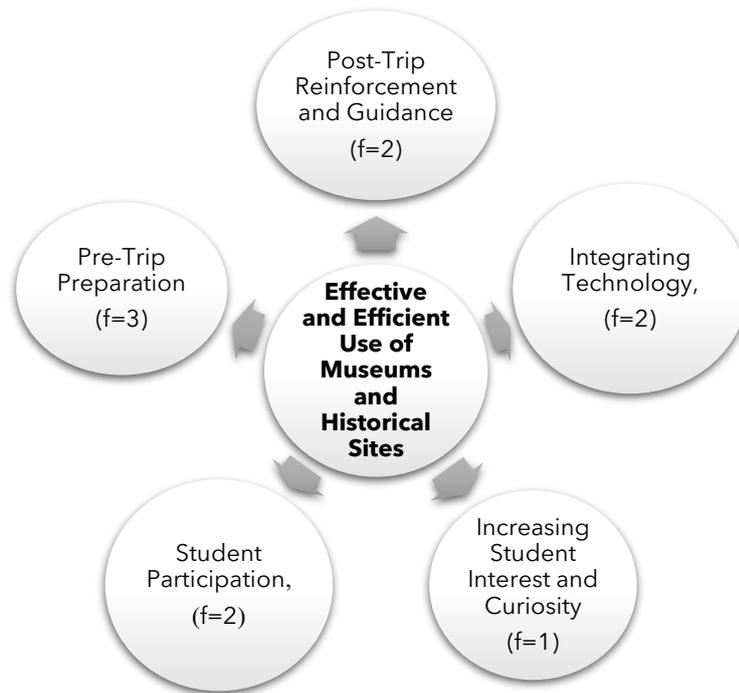


Figure 3. Effective and Efficient Use of Museums and Historical Sites

Figure 3 shows that classroom teachers' views on the effective and efficient use of museums and historical sites are grouped into themes such as pre-trip preparation, technology integration, student participation, post-trip reinforcement and guidance, and increasing student interest and curiosity. The stage generally focused on most is the pre-trip preparation (f=3), which is the foundation of the process. Teachers stressed that for effective museum education, students need to be cognitively prepared before visiting the site. In this context, while (T3) recommended integrating trips into the yearly lesson plan, (T5) suggested involving students in the research process: "Before the trip, students should be enabled to do research on the subject. Additionally, research can be done on guided tours and specific themes." Similarly, (T7) highlighted the importance of giving the trip a clear purpose, noting that providing students with questions to consider before the trip would deepen learning.

Regarding the improvement of the teaching process, technology integration (f=2) and student participation (f=2) emerged as key themes. Teachers proposed making use of digital opportunities, specifically mentioning that virtual tours could be an effective tool to overcome physical limitations. (T1) and (T9) indicated that adding digital tools and virtual tours would enhance efficiency. Concerning student participation, (T8) recommended using engaging videos and interactive activities to keep students interested, while (T2) emphasized that awareness-raising activities would boost students' motivation to participate.

In the post-trip reinforcement (f=2) theme, which ensures the permanence of the process, teachers hold the view that learning should not end when the trip concludes. (T6) stated that these activities should be continuous, suggesting, "Topics are reinforced by organizing a specific museum trip every month". (T10) summarized the process holistically, noting that pre-trip information, in-trip observations, and post-trip discussions should complement each other.

Finally, in line with increasing student interest and curiosity (f=1), a significant warning was issued regarding the quality of museum education. (T4) stated that students remaining solely in the position of watchers in the museum environment would prevent learning, making the following determination: "It is important to ensure students participate in activities rather than being merely passive viewers. Lack of interaction in museums and historical sites can reduce students' interest and prevent participation."

3.4. Challenges Encountered in Museums and Historical Sites

This section examines teachers' views on the difficulties encountered in museums and historical sites in social studies teaching.

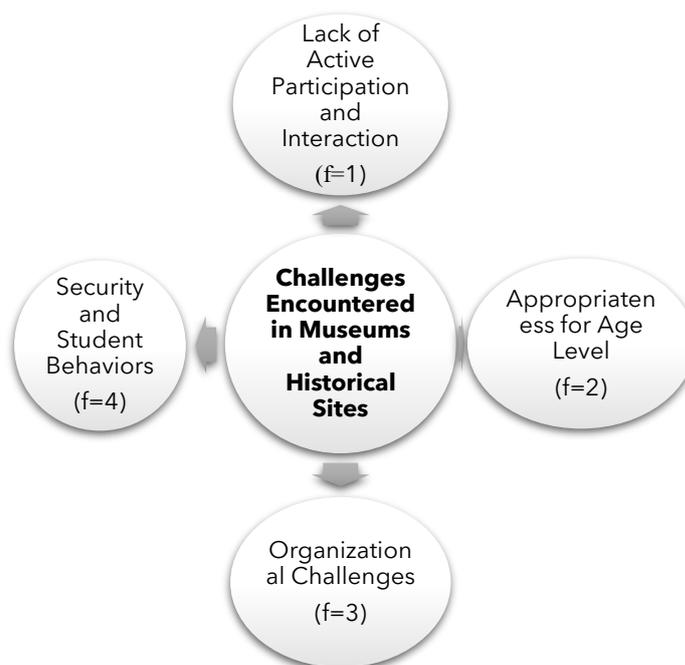


Figure 4. Challenges Encountered in Museums and Historical Sites

Figure 4 shows that classroom teachers' views on challenges are organized into the themes of security and student behaviors, organizational challenges, appropriateness for the age level, and lack of active participation and interaction. Security and student behaviors rank first among the problems teachers encounter in museum and historical site trips, with a rate of 40% (f=4). Teachers are concerned about the risk of students getting lost and the possibility of damaging historical artifacts, given the difficulty of controlling students in out-of-class environments. (T1) and (T5) described this situation as a fundamental problem in the context of getting lost and protecting artifacts. While (T6) stated that crowded environments cause noise and distract attention, (T2) linked the source of the problem to students not having a museum culture: "Students who do not possess a culture of visiting historical sites or museums can disrupt the class activity by distracting other students. Furthermore, these students try to touch artifacts that are forbidden to touch."

Thirty percent of the participants (f=3) highlighted organizational challenges related to the logistical dimension of the process. During the planning stage of trips, cost, transportation, permission procedures, and the physical capacities of the venues stood out as factors challenging teachers. (T3) stated that security measures and costs can be deterrents for administrators and teachers, while (T4) emphasized the difficulty in managing large groups. (T4) expressed that "The fact that museums and historical sites do not have the capacity to meet the number of students and the insufficiency of guidance services lead to organizational problems." Regarding the pedagogical dimension of the problems, 20% of teachers (f=2) raised the theme of appropriateness for age level. Exhibition styles and information presented in museums that are above students' cognitive level are seen as an obstacle that lowers learning motivation. While (T7) stated that this incompatibility prevents some trips from being made, (T9) detailed the negative effect created by the content remaining abstract: "When artifacts and information are not suitable for the student level, students may have difficulty understanding this content. This situation can lead to students losing interest and a decrease in their motivation for the lesson." Expressing views under the theme of lack of active participation and interaction (f=1), (T10) stated that the traditional understanding of museology pacifies the student. The teacher noted that environments without interaction and student participation make sustained learning difficult, stating, "The lack of interactive activities in museums and historical sites can reduce students' interest and prevent participation."

4. Discussion

The first sub-problem of the study aimed to examine classroom teachers' views on the role of museums and historical sites in education. The findings obtained show that teachers evaluate the role of these places in education on five main axes: concretization and sensory experience, empathy, historical consciousness, cultural awareness, and active participation. When teachers' views are examined, one of the

strongest emerging concepts is empathy. Teachers expressed that these trips help students understand the emotional dimension of the past. Students who observe historical events on-site better grasp the difficulties and successes people faced in the past, thereby developing their empathetic skills. This finding parallels the results of Meydan and Akkuş (2014), who found that museum visits strengthen historical empathy by enabling students to form emotional connections with people from the past. Similarly, while Filiz (2010) stated that museum environments facilitate students' development of historical empathy and diverse perspectives on past social events, recent studies such as Zotou (2025) emphasize that museum education strengthens social-emotional skills alongside cognitive development.

Another key theme is the concreteness of experience and sensory involvement. The abstract nature of the social studies course requires making this information more tangible. Participants noted that museums and historical sites give students the chance to experience historical events firsthand through observation, touching artifacts, and listening to narratives, supporting the idea that making abstract ideas concrete improves memory. Meydan and Akkuş (2014) also agree that turning abstract concepts into concrete ones helps prospective teachers achieve lasting learning. Regarding the theme of historical consciousness from the findings, teachers said these places help establish cause-and-effect links between the past, present, and future. Encountering real artifacts and documents in museums shows students that history is not just something in a book, but a real lived experience. This aligns with Ata's (2002) focus on developing historical thinking skills and Rösen's (2017) view of museums as "memory spaces where historical consciousness is built." Additionally, Seixas (2017) mentions that interpreting historical evidence strengthens critical history literacy. Teachers also highlighted that these visits promote cultural awareness. These trips, which help students learn about diverse cultures, contribute to raising individuals who understand the importance of protecting cultural heritage. This idea is supported by studies from Filiz (2010) and Çerkez (2011). Finally, in the context of active participation, it was found that museums boost students' interest in lessons and engage them in the learning process, shifting them from passive listeners (Liu et al., 2024).

The second sub-problem of the research examines how museum and historical site visits influence students' perceptions of social studies lessons. As a result of the analysis, four themes were identified: student motivation, concreteness and connection to the lesson, curiosity stimulation, and engaging learning. Most teachers reported that these visits significantly boost motivation. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory (Falk & Dierking, 2013), which suggests that giving students control over their learning enhances engagement, and is further supported by Meydan and Akkuş (2014), who highlight that museum visits directly increase students' interest and motivation in social studies. Additionally, experiencing information through real objects (concretization) helps encode information into long-term memory, as noted by Bitgood (2013). Liu et al. (2024) also confirm that the discovery-based nature of museums strongly fosters students' conceptual curiosity.

The third sub-problem of the research concerns the effective and efficient use of these places. Teachers discussed this process under the headings of pre-trip preparation, student participation, technology integration, post-trip reinforcement, and student interest. Findings indicate that success largely depends on preparations and briefings made before the trip (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004). The fourth sub-problem relates to the challenges encountered. Teachers classified these difficulties as security and student behavior issues, organizational challenges, appropriateness for the age level, and lack of active participation. In particular, managing large groups and security risks increase the responsibility burden on teachers, causing them to shift away from the pedagogical focus (Rennie & McClafferty, 1996). Organizational obstacles such as cost, transportation, and bureaucratic permission processes are also among the deterrent factors (Şimşek & Kaymakçı, 2015). Moreover, content that is not suitable for students' levels and insufficient interaction contradict the goals of the constructivist approach (Hein, 1998).

This study reveals that museum and historical site trips are not merely supportive in social studies teaching but are a multi-dimensional educational practice that transforms the teaching process. These trips holistically support students' cognitive, affective, and social development, fostering historical empathy, cultural awareness, and lasting learning.

In light of the findings obtained from teachers' experiences and interpretations, several recommendations can be proposed, while acknowledging the context-bound nature of qualitative inquiry. The results suggest that providing students with preliminary information about the purpose and content of museum and historical site visits may enhance their engagement in the process. In addition, assigning active roles to students during the visits, such as asking questions, making observations, and taking notes, may support more meaningful participation and reduce passive involvement. Where available, integrating digital tools, such as digital guides and augmented reality applications, can enrich learning experiences

and sustain student interest. Furthermore, organizing post-visit instructional activities, such as classroom discussions, reflective writing tasks, or student presentations, may reinforce and structure the knowledge gained during these experiences. From an institutional perspective, museums and related organizations may benefit from developing guided tour programs tailored to students' developmental levels and the specific needs of school groups. The findings also point to the importance of expanding interactive and experience-based exhibition environments, moving beyond traditional "do not touch" approaches toward more participatory learning settings. Additionally, providing accessible digital materials, such as virtual tours and educational videos, may help teachers integrate museum experiences into classroom practices before and after visits.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that museum and historical site visits are not just supportive tools in social studies teaching but a multifaceted educational practice that changes the teaching process. These outside-of-school environments support students' cognitive, emotional, and social growth by offering historical empathy, cultural awareness, and lasting learning through hands-on experiences. Additionally, the findings emphasize that while the success of these trips relies heavily on thorough pre-trip preparation and active student engagement, tackling logistical and safety issues is also essential. Ultimately, incorporating place-based learning into social studies education helps students link theoretical knowledge with real-world experiences, deepening their understanding of historical concepts.

Statement of Researchers

Researchers' contribution rate statement:

EK: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Writing - original draft. **GA:** Data curation, Project administration, Resources, Writing - review & editing.

Conflict of interest statement:

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement:

The research data are not publicly available due to ethical confidentiality principles. However, they can be requested from the corresponding author upon reasonable demand.

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Author Biographies

Erkan Korkmaz is a master's student in the Department of Primary Education at Bartın University. His research interests include social studies education, out-of-school learning, and museum education.

Görkem Avcı is an associate professor in social studies education. He works in the Department of Primary Education. His research interests include social studies education, teacher training, outdoor education, disaster education, instructional technologies, life science teaching, sustainable development education, and geography teaching.

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