



## Teacher Perspectives on the Contemporary Life Studies Curriculum in Northern Cyprus

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores primary school teachers' perceptions of the Life Studies Curriculum implemented in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) since 2016. Grounded in eclectic and culturally responsive educational theories, the study aims to evaluate the curriculum's functionality, applicability, and the challenges encountered during its implementation. The primary research questions focus on teachers' evaluations regarding the curriculum's objectives, content, and implementation, as well as their suggestions for improvement. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 primary school teachers and analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicate that teachers generally view the curriculum positively due to its structured and student-centered design. However, they also highlighted several significant issues, including misalignment between the curriculum and textbooks, insufficient attention to national values and cultural elements, abstract and developmentally inappropriate content, and a lack of instructional materials and technological infrastructure. These deficiencies have led teachers to rely predominantly on traditional teaching methods. Teachers recommended strengthening an experiential, interdisciplinary, and value-oriented curriculum structure; incorporating contemporary themes such as environmental issues, technology, and space science; developing visually rich and activity-based textbooks; and increasing opportunities for in-service training. In conclusion, ensuring coherence between the curriculum, textbooks, and classroom practices, along with enhancing pedagogical support for teachers, would significantly improve the effectiveness of the Life Studies course.

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### 1. Introduction

Following the technological advancements after the Second World War, industrial society gave way to an entirely new era the information society (Erkan, 1998, p. 134; Yılmaz, 1998, p. 147; Aktan & Tunç, 1998, p. 118). During the transition to this period, waves of transformation occurred in both environmental and cultural spheres. These waves are defined as follows: the first wave refers to agricultural society; the second wave to industrial society; and finally, the third wave to the information society (Toffler & Toffler, 1996, p. 88). As these definitions suggest, knowledge plays a vital role in shaping these transformations. Each new piece of knowledge contributes to making human life more comfortable. However, in order to benefit from this knowledge, individuals must know how to access

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it or be educated in that regard. In this context, education plays a key role. Today, education is considered the most critical factor accelerating social, cultural, and economic development by increasing individuals' levels of knowledge and transforming them into qualified members of society (Öztürk, 2005; O'Donoghue, 1991; Barro, 2002).

These ongoing technological, cultural, and societal transformations directly impact the structure of educational systems in the contemporary world, necessitating the upbringing of individuals not only with academic success but also with a sense of social responsibility, value-based living, and democratic participation (Schulz et al., 2016). Within this transformative context, the stage of primary education assumes a crucial role in enabling individuals to internalize value systems, build healthy relationships with their environment, and develop a sense of citizenship. One of the core curricular areas that serves this purpose is the Life Studies course.

The Life Studies course adopts a multidimensional structure that supports students' social, emotional, and ethical development. It aims to equip them with both individual life skills and the capacity to adapt to the broader social structure (Erbaş & Başkurt, 2022). Comparable courses in international contexts, such as "Social Studies" or "Civic Education," have been shown to produce significant outcomes in terms of democratic participation, citizenship awareness, and social integration (Alemnge & Oben, 2024; Kerr, 2002; Print, 2007; Ross, 2007). For instance, Torney-Purta and colleagues (2001), in their "Civic Education Study" conducted across 28 countries, revealed a direct relationship between students' levels of civic engagement and the citizenship values embedded in educational programs. In a study conducted in Cameroon, the pedagogical content knowledge provided in teacher education programs was found to significantly influence the effectiveness of civic education practices in classrooms.

Research conducted in Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) shows that the Life Studies course is not limited to the transmission of academic knowledge; it also contributes significantly to students' development of citizenship awareness, sense of social responsibility, and value systems (Aykaç, 2011). This course, which imparts essential life skills and promotes healthy relationships with others and harmony with democratic society, supports the holistic development of individuals (Öztürk & Kalafatçı, 2017).

However, during the implementation phase of the Life Studies curriculum, several factors may hinder the attainment of intended outcomes. These include teachers' interpretations of the curriculum, their in-class instructional strategies, and their approaches to student diversity (Çelik, 2021; Ekmen & Demir, 2019; Yılmaz, 2017). For example, studies specific to the TRNC have shown that although teachers find the new curriculum pedagogically sufficient and culturally appropriate, they experience challenges related to lack of materials, misalignment between textbooks and curriculum, and mismatches between content and students' developmental levels (Güllühan & Bekiroğlu, 2022). Similarly, the study by Alak and Nalçaçı (2021) supports these findings, revealing that teachers face both structural and practical challenges in achieving the curriculum outcomes in Life Studies instruction. In another study, Çelik (2021) found that teachers appreciated the student-centered structure and relevance of current content in the curriculum but emphasized material shortages, lack of time, and insufficient content for diverse learning profiles as significant obstacles to successful implementation.

Considering the unique socio-political and historical context of the TRNC, Life Studies instruction holds a particularly special significance in this region. The TRNC, which declared independence in 1983 and struggles for recognition as a sovereign state, has shaped its education system largely through historical ties with Turkey. For many years, education in the TRNC was carried out through textbooks and curricula imported from Turkey, which often failed to adequately reflect the local cultural codes, social structure, and political distinctions of the TRNC (Çağlar & Reis, 2007). This pedagogical disconnect has hindered the internalization of identity development, citizenship awareness, and a sense

of belonging within the individual–society framework. To address this gap and develop a curriculum tailored to the TRNC's specific context, the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC introduced a new Life Studies Curriculum in 2016. This new program is structured around the axes of individual, society, and nature and adopts a student-centered approach, emphasizing 21st-century skills and values education (Güllühan & Bekiroğlu, 2022).

However, according to the qualitative analysis by Güllühan and Bekiroğlu (2022), the implementation processes of this curriculum have not yet been adequately evaluated. Questions regarding its applicability in the field, teachers' perceptions, and the extent to which it aligns with classroom practices remain unanswered. Indeed, Life Studies instruction is influenced not only by the written curriculum but also by teachers' pedagogical competencies, their adoption of the curriculum, and their in-class strategies (Altınyelken, 2011; Erbaş & Başkurt, 2022).

### **1.1. Purpose of the Study**

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) has maintained strong cultural and political ties with the Republic of Turkey throughout its historical development. Within this framework, the TRNC's education system was, for many years, shaped by curricula and instructional materials developed in Turkey. Particularly at the primary school level, the teaching process relied heavily on textbooks sent from Turkey, which often failed to adequately reflect the local social and cultural context of the TRNC (Çağlar & Reis, 2004). To address these shortcomings, the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC introduced an original Life Studies Curriculum in 2016. This curriculum stands out with its student-centered approach, emphasis on contemporary instructional strategies, 21st-century skills, and values education (Güllühan & Bekiroğlu, 2022).

The implementation of this curriculum represents not only a change in content but also a pedagogical paradigm shift in the TRNC's education system—from textbook-based instruction to program-based teaching. However, the extent to which this transition has been successful, how teachers perceive the new curriculum, and what challenges and needs arise during implementation have yet to be sufficiently investigated.

The primary aim of this study is to comprehensively evaluate the Life Studies Curriculum, which has been implemented in the TRNC since 2016, based on teachers' perspectives. The study seeks to uncover teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the curriculum, to understand how the program is reflected in actual classroom practice, and to identify potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, it also focuses on how and for what purposes teachers use textbooks, the challenges they encounter in implementing the curriculum, and their expectations for its further development.

In this context, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are teachers' views regarding the Life Studies course and its curriculum?
- For what purposes and in what ways do teachers use textbooks?
- What challenges do teachers face during the implementation of the curriculum, and what are their expectations for improvement?

### **1.2. Significance of the Study**

The success of educational curricula depends not only on the quality of their content but also directly on how teachers those responsible for implementing them in practice perceive the program, their competencies, and their instructional practices (Fullan, 2007). Especially during times of structural transformation in an education system, it becomes critically important to understand how teachers respond to these changes, how they manage the process, and what kinds of needs they express.

Considering the unique context of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), this research gains even greater significance. For many years, the instructional process in the TRNC was conducted using textbooks developed in Turkey, which failed to provide an educational model tailored to the TRNC's own socio-cultural realities. The new Life Studies Curriculum, implemented in 2016, is one of the first comprehensive programs developed in alignment with the TRNC's specific historical, cultural, and pedagogical context. In this respect, the curriculum represents a crucial step in the TRNC's efforts to construct its own educational identity.

However, the success of a curriculum cannot be achieved solely through its theoretical robustness; it also depends on how it is interpreted and implemented by practitioners—namely, the teachers. In this regard, identifying teachers' perspectives is of utmost importance to understand how the program's strengths and weaknesses are reflected in the field, to uncover existing gaps, and to develop concrete suggestions for enhancing its functionality.

Furthermore, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature, as it is one of the few empirical investigations conducted within the context of the TRNC. There is a limited number of studies in the current literature that systematically examine teachers' views on the Life Studies course. From this perspective, the study provides an original and timely contribution by offering one of the first practitioner-based evaluations of the curriculum. The findings to be obtained will not only contribute to the evaluation of the current program but also provide valuable insights for teacher education, instructional material development, and future curriculum reforms.

## **2. Methodology**

The scientific validity of a study is closely linked to how well the chosen method aligns with the research problem. In this context, a qualitative research approach was adopted to deeply explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and expectations regarding the Life Studies Curriculum. This section presents detailed information about the research design, data collection process, participants, data analysis techniques, and strategies employed to ensure validity and reliability.

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study was structured based on the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methodologies. Phenomenological design aims to reveal individuals' lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and personal interpretations concerning a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Accordingly, the present study was designed to understand the experiences, perceptions, and expectations of primary school teachers in the TRNC concerning the Life Studies Curriculum. From this perspective, the study aims to access the subjective world of the participants in a contextualized manner.

### **2.2. Study Group**

The study group consisted of 29 primary school teachers working in the regions of Lefke, Güzelyurt, Nicosia (Lefkoşa), and Kyrenia (Girne) in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) during the 2022–2023 academic year. The participants were selected using the maximum variation sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling techniques frequently employed in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). This sampling method was preferred to contribute to a multidimensional and in-depth understanding of individual experiences, which is the central aim of the phenomenological design.

By using maximum variation sampling, it was ensured that participants differed in terms of demographic variables such as age, professional experience, gender, and region of employment. This diversity enabled a comparative examination of the contextual factors that shape teachers' experiences

with the Life Studies Curriculum. Working with teachers who have varying levels of experience allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the curriculum's reflection in practice, revealing both common themes and divergent perceptions and attitudes. This approach provided a strong foundation for achieving the core objective of phenomenology—understanding the essence of lived experience (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The following table presents the demographic characteristics of the participants:

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

| Teacher | Gender | Age | Experience (Years) |
|---------|--------|-----|--------------------|
| T1      | F      | 30  | 8                  |
| T2      | F      | 32  | 9                  |
| T3      | M      | 35  | 11                 |
| T4      | F      | 38  | 16                 |
| T5      | F      | 36  | 10                 |
| T6      | F      | 42  | 18                 |
| T7      | F      | 45  | 22                 |
| T8      | M      | 52  | 27                 |
| T9      | F      | 45  | 23                 |
| T10     | M      | 48  | 25                 |
| T11     | M      | 50  | 28                 |
| T12     | M      | 54  | 30                 |
| T13     | M      | 47  | 22                 |
| T14     | F      | 45  | 23                 |
| T15     | M      | 50  | 26                 |
| T16     | F      | 49  | 24                 |
| T17     | M      | 48  | 26                 |
| T18     | F      | 54  | 31                 |
| T19     | M      | 50  | 26                 |
| T20     | F      | 47  | 25                 |
| T21     | F      | 52  | 29                 |
| T22     | M      | 38  | 12                 |
| T23     | F      | 35  | 13                 |
| T24     | F      | 43  | 17                 |
| T25     | M      | 45  | 20                 |
| T26     | M      | 48  | 25                 |
| T27     | F      | 55  | 32                 |
| T28     | F      | 46  | 24                 |
| T29     | M      | 39  | 16                 |

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

In this study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. During the development process of the form, the TRNC Life Studies Curriculum, literature on qualitative analysis of teacher opinions, and methodological resources on qualitative interviewing techniques were reviewed. Based on this review, an initial draft of the form was prepared, addressing topics such as how teachers perceive the curriculum, what kind of implementation experiences they have had, and what their expectations are.

The draft form was submitted for expert review to two academics one a full professor specializing in curriculum and instruction, and the other an assistant professor with expertise in qualitative research methods. These field experts recommended expanding the scope of some questions, simplifying certain expressions, and making abstract concepts particularly those related to "expectations" more explicit. Based on their suggestions, revisions were made to the language, sequencing, and overall coherence of the questions. The revised form was then piloted with three teachers from different regions and levels of seniority. Feedback obtained during this pilot study was used to finalize the interview form.

The finalized form consists of 10 open-ended questions. These questions address teachers' thoughts about the Life Studies course and its curriculum, their instructional practices before and after the 2016 curriculum change, how they use textbooks, the challenges they face, and their expectations regarding the curriculum. The final version of the semi-structured interview questions is presented below:

#### ***Semi-Structured Interview Questions***

1. What are your thoughts on the Life Studies course?
2. How would you describe the Life Studies curriculum?
3. What are your opinions on the Life Studies curriculum introduced in 2016?
4. How did you conduct the Life Studies course prior to 2016?
5. How do you use the course textbooks?
6. What approach do you follow when implementing the Life Studies curriculum?
7. What challenges have you encountered in teaching Life Studies?
8. What topics would you like to see included in the Life Studies course?
9. What aspects of the Life Studies curriculum would you like to see changed?
10. What are your personal expectations from the Life Studies curriculum?

The interviews were conducted during the spring term of 2023 after obtaining the necessary permissions from the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC and approval from the ethics committee. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with individual teachers, recorded with their informed consent, and later transcribed verbatim.

#### **2.4. Data Analysis and Reliability**

The data collected in this study were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis allows for the interpretation of data based on predetermined themes and supports findings with direct quotations from participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this study, each question in the interview form was treated as a thematic framework during the analysis process. In the initial stage, the researcher read the teachers' responses multiple times, segmented them into meaning units, and classified these units under headings corresponding to the interview questions.

The coding process was initiated by the researcher and later conducted collaboratively with an academic expert (at the level of assistant professor) specializing in curriculum and instruction. Both the researcher and the expert independently coded the data. The resulting codes and themes were then compared, and consensus was reached through discussion. In cases of disagreement, joint decisions were made through deliberation.

The data set was first processed through open coding, after which the codes were grouped into categories based on conceptual similarities. Within each category, meaningful sub-themes were developed and structured in alignment with the interview questions. Concepts frequently emphasized by the teachers (e.g., "curriculum complexity," "lack of textbooks," "need for local content") played a decisive role in the categorization process.

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the inter-coder agreement formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used: **Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)**. An agreement rate of **92%** was achieved between the researcher and the expert coder. This rate exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 80% in qualitative research, indicating a high level of reliability (Saban, 2008).

### 2.5. Ethical Statement

This study was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of the European University of Lefke with the decision dated 13.05.2022 and numbered BAYEK007.05. Additionally, permission was obtained from the Primary Education Department of the Ministry of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on 03.11.2022 to conduct interviews with teachers working in public schools. All interviews were conducted in accordance with the principles of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all ethical principles were observed throughout the research process.

## 3. FINDINGS

The data collected within the scope of this study were analyzed using content analysis, and teachers' opinions regarding the *Life Studies Curriculum* were presented under specific themes and categories. The participants' responses were carefully examined, similar expressions were coded, and these codes were grouped under meaningful themes for systematic analysis. The findings were structured according to the research questions and supported by direct quotations from teacher statements under each theme.

This section systematically presents teachers' evaluations regarding their conceptualizations of the course, their perceptions of the curriculum and its content, their views on textbooks, the methods they use during implementation, the challenges they face, and their suggestions and expectations.

### *Teachers' Definitions of the Life Studies Course*

**Table 2.** Teachers' Definitions of the Life Studies Course

| Themes and Categories                              | Pertenage(%) | Frequency |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>1. Preparation for Life and Basic Knowledge</b> | <b>35.59</b> | <b>21</b> |
| – A course for preparing students for life         |              | 7         |
| – An important and necessary (foundational) course |              | 6         |
| – A course for everyday (basic) knowledge          |              | 5         |
| – A course teaching personal care                  |              | 2         |
| – A course on health knowledge                     |              | 1         |
| <b>2. Social and Cultural Development</b>          | <b>22.03</b> | <b>13</b> |
| – A course teaching social and cultural values     |              | 7         |
| – A course teaching personal values                |              | 2         |
| – A course promoting national and spiritual values |              | 2         |
| – A course providing family-related knowledge      |              | 1         |
| – A course supporting social adaptation            |              | 1         |
| <b>3. Environmental and Spatial Awareness</b>      | <b>16.95</b> | <b>10</b> |
| – A course about the environment                   |              | 8         |

| Themes and Categories                     | Pertenance(%) | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| – A course about countries                |               | 1         |
| – A course on the sky and space           |               | 1         |
| <b>4. Skills and Personal Development</b> | <b>15.25</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| – A course on self-awareness              |               | 3         |
| – A course that develops skills           |               | 2         |
| – A course enhancing social participation |               | 2         |
| – A course fostering sensitivity          |               | 1         |
| – A course enhancing creativity           |               | 1         |
| <b>5. General Evaluations</b>             | <b>10.17</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| – An observational course                 |               | 3         |
| – A beneficial course                     |               | 1         |
| – An enjoyable course                     |               | 1         |
| – A key course                            |               | 1         |

An examination of Table 2 reveals that teachers' descriptions of the *Life Studies* course were grouped under five main themes. The most frequently emphasized theme was **"Preparation for Life and Basic Knowledge"** (f=21; 35.59%). Teachers defined this course as one that prepares students for real life (f=7), provides essential and everyday knowledge (f=5), is important and necessary (f=6), and includes content related to personal care (f=2) and health education (f=1). The second most emphasized theme was **"Social and Cultural Development"** (f=13; 22.03%), which highlights the course's role in fostering understanding of social and cultural values (f=7), personal values (f=2), national and spiritual values (f=2), knowledge about family structure (f=1), and social harmony (f=1).

Under the theme of **"Environmental and Spatial Awareness"** (f=10; 16.95%), teachers noted that the course covers topics such as the environment (f=8), countries (f=1), and space (f=1). The theme of **"Skills and Personal Development"** (f=9; 15.25%) includes contributions to self-awareness (f=3), skill development (f=2), civic participation (f=2), sensitivity (f=1), and creativity (f=1). Lastly, the theme of **"General Evaluations"** (f=6; 10.17%) reflects that teachers also described the course as one that allows for observation (f=3), is beneficial (f=1), enjoyable (f=1), and a key subject (f=1). These findings indicate that teachers perceive the *Life Studies* course as a holistic discipline that supports multifaceted, practical, cultural, and individual development. Some of the teachers' statements are as follows:

*"I think it's a course that helps children become more successful in life, but we tend to neglect its practical side." (T16)*

*"Life Studies guides students to observe and explore their country in historical and geographical terms, helping them adapt to the society they live in while fostering creativity." (T20)*

*"It's an essential course that teaches students basic knowledge on environment, nature, family, health, and safety—preparing them for life." (T23)*

*"I see it as indispensable in primary education—it's the starting point of children's social and cultural development." (T29)*

The second prominent theme is social and cultural development. Teachers described the course as a key tool for fostering social values, cultural awareness, and national-spiritual identity.

*"Life Studies prepares children for real life, encouraging learning through experience. It allows them to internalize social and cultural values and supports the development of environmentally and socially conscious individuals." (T7)*



*Third, teachers pointed out the course's role in developing environmental and geographical awareness, helping students learn about their immediate surroundings and the broader world.*

*"This course is important for students to learn about their nearby and distant environments, their country, and even about the sky and space." (T11)*

The fourth theme, skills and personal development, includes areas like self-awareness, creativity, and participation. Teachers indicated that the course improves students' observational skills and fosters engagement and enjoyment:

*"This course helps children explore living and non-living beings and understand nature. It feeds their curiosity." (T18)*

In the general evaluations, some teachers referred to the course as observational, useful, enjoyable, and foundational.

When teachers were asked about the curriculum, the analysis of their responses resulted in the following table:

**Table 3.** Teachers' General Perceptions of the Curriculum

| Themes and Categories                    | Pertenage(%) | Frequency |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>1 – Planning and Organization</b>     | 48.0         | 12        |
| – It is a plan                           |              | 8         |
| – It is a system and arrangement         |              | 3         |
| – It is organized with a spiral approach |              | 1         |
| <b>2 – Guidance and Support</b>          | 32.0         | 8         |
| – A guide                                |              | 7         |
| – Assists the teacher                    |              | 1         |
| <b>3 – Content and Structure</b>         | 20.0         | 5         |
| – Consists of four main components       |              | 4         |
| – Consists of necessary topics           |              | 1         |

In Table 3, teachers' overall perceptions of the curriculum are categorized under three main themes: **"Planning and Organization"** (f=12; 48%), **"Guidance and Support"** (f=8; 32%), and **"Content and Structure"** (f=5; 20%). The most frequently mentioned theme was **Planning and Organization**. A significant portion of the teachers described the curriculum as a *plan* (f=8), a *system* or *structure* (f=3), and as a spiral approach that systematically structures the teaching process step by step (f=1). This finding reveals that teachers perceive the curriculum as an organized process that progresses within a defined order and structure.

The second most frequently cited theme, **Guidance and Support**, reflects that teachers often view the curriculum as a *guide* (f=7) and as a tool that directs the teacher (f=1). This perspective suggests that teachers see the curriculum not merely as a content provider but also as a pedagogical resource that offers instructional direction. Finally, under the theme of **Content and Structure**, teachers noted that the curriculum consists of four main components (f=4) and includes essential topics (f=1). These findings indicate that teachers interpret the curriculum through both structural and functional lenses and consider it a supportive tool for classroom practice. The expressions *"a plan"* and *"a system"* were frequently repeated by participants:

*"It is a plan that assists the teacher and includes objectives, content, methods, and evaluation." (T27)*

*"It is a guide and a supportive tool for the teacher." (T26)*

*"It is a system that is systematic but with certain deficiencies and debatable adequacy." (T21)*

*"It is a planned framework that includes all activities designed to achieve the goals of the educational program." (T18)*

*"Due to its structure, the program is complex. The sequence of the units should be appropriate for our country and the students' level." (T14)*

*"It is a plan that assists the teacher and includes objectives, content, methods, and evaluation." (T27)*

The opinions of participating teachers regarding the new Life Studies Curriculum, which was put into effect in 2016, were collected. The themes and categories resulting from the content analysis of the data are as follows:

**Table 4.** Teachers' Opinions on the 2016 TRNC Life Studies Curriculum

| Themes and Categories                          | Pertenage(&) | Frequency |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>1 – Positive Views</b>                      | 67.61        | 48        |
| a. Teaching Approaches and Methodology         |              | 14        |
| – Promotes learning by doing and experiencing  |              | 6         |
| – Keeps students actively engaged              |              | 3         |
| – Important for self-awareness                 |              | 3         |
| – A contemporary curriculum                    |              | 1         |
| – Provides up-to-date content                  |              | 1         |
| b. Cultural and Regional Alignment             |              | 10        |
| – Reflects our own culture                     |              | 8         |
| – Introduces the local environment             |              | 1         |
| – Promotes national and geographical awareness |              | 1         |
| <b>2 – Negative Views</b>                      | 32.39        | 23        |
| – Lacks national days and weeks                |              | 6         |
| – Departed from the spiral approach            |              | 4         |
| – Topics are insufficient or lacking           |              | 3         |
| – Too abstract                                 |              | 2         |
| – Complex structure                            |              | 2         |
| – Theoretical but lacking in practice          |              | 2         |
| – Distant from children's realities            |              | 1         |
| – Content is too heavy                         |              | 1         |
| – Not aligned with technological developments  |              | 1         |
| – Mismatch between textbook and curriculum     |              | 1         |

An examination of Table 4 reveals that participant teachers' views regarding the Life Studies Curriculum, which was implemented in the TRNC in 2016, are grouped under two main themes: **positive opinions** and **negative opinions**. According to the content analysis of the data, the majority of teachers ( $f=48$ ; 67.61%) evaluated the program within a positive framework. At the forefront of the positive views is the category of **"instructional approaches and methods"** ( $f=14$ ). Teachers stated that the program encourages learning by doing and experiencing ( $f=6$ ), activates student participation ( $f=3$ ), supports the development of self-awareness ( $f=3$ ), reflects a contemporary structure ( $f=1$ ), and offers up-to-date content ( $f=1$ ). In addition, under the sub-theme of **"cultural and regional alignment"**

(f=10), teachers emphasized that the program reflects local culture (f=8), introduces the environment (f=1), and fosters national and geographical awareness (f=1).

The remaining group of participants, who made up 32.39% of the responses (f=23), expressed various criticisms of the program. The most frequently mentioned critique was the **absence of national holidays and commemorative weeks in the curriculum content** (f=6). Other critical points included: a lack of adherence to the spiral structure (f=4), insufficient topic coverage (f=3), high level of abstraction (f=2), structural complexity (f=2), lack of practical application to support theoretical content (f=2), misalignment with children's realities (f=1), excessive content load (f=1), insufficient alignment with technological developments (f=1), and inconsistency between the textbook and the curriculum (f=1).

These findings indicate that while teachers strongly perceive the program as student-centered and culturally responsive, they have also observed several deficiencies related to content design and implementation processes. Some of the positive features were expressed as follows:

*"It's good that the objectives and behaviors focus on speaking, research, and learning about life. The program particularly emphasizes students' psychological and physical self-awareness." (T23)*

*"It is student-centered and enables students to participate actively in the lesson. It allows children to learn by doing and experiencing." (T18)*

*"The program prepared in 2016 has been more effective because it was tailored to our country and helps students learn about their country and nearby environment." (T9)*

*"Students learn about their surroundings by doing and experiencing." (T13)*

*"The program prepared in 2016 has been more effective because it was tailored to our country and helps students learn about their country and nearby environment." (T9)*

The negative opinions were expressed by six teachers and focused on the shortcomings and challenges of the curriculum. Teachers viewed the **exclusion of national days and commemorative weeks** from the program content as a significant deficiency. Additionally, some teachers criticized the **abandonment of the spiral approach** traditionally used in the teaching of core subjects, noting that this shift undermined pedagogical continuity and curriculum progression.

*"National days and weeks are not included. The textbooks cannot be used. Teachers have to write notes about these events in student notebooks." (T12)*

*"The program has lost its spiral structure." (T8)*

*"The program content is not adequate. It should include topics about our island." (T17)*

Criticisms also included that the program had become abstract, complex, and lacked practical application:

*"Compared to the pre-2016 curriculum, topics have become more detached from children and their local environments. For example, there's no topic about our school anymore. The content has become abstract, especially in grade one. The number of topics has increased... but application is lacking." (T1)*

When participating teachers were asked about textbooks, their responses were as follows:

**Table 5.** Teachers' Views on Textbooks

| Themes and Categories                                | Pertenance(%) | Frequency |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| <b>1 – Positive Views</b>                            | <b>77.78</b>  | <b>35</b> |
| a. In-Class Use of Textbooks                         |               | 29        |
| – I use them for activities                          |               | 7         |
| – I use them when the activities are appropriate     |               | 6         |
| – I use them as a resource                           |               | 5         |
| – I use them for conducting experiments              |               | 4         |
| – I use them for visual support                      |               | 4         |
| – I use them to talk about the images                |               | 3         |
| b. Out-of-Class Use of Textbooks                     |               | 6         |
| – I use them for reinforcement                       |               | 4         |
| – I use them for assigning homework                  |               | 2         |
| <b>2 – Negative Views</b>                            | <b>22.22</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| a. Insufficient Activities                           |               | 4         |
| – Some activities are unnecessary                    |               | 1         |
| – Speaking and discussion activities are problematic |               | 1         |
| – The books should be simplified                     |               | 1         |
| – Theoretical information is insufficient            |               | 1         |
| b. Visual Deficiencies                               |               | 3         |
| – Images should be more detailed                     |               | 1         |
| – Images are unclear                                 |               | 1         |
| – There should be more images of nature              |               | 1         |
| c. General Drawbacks in Use                          |               | 3         |
| – I do not use them                                  |               | 2         |
| – I cannot benefit from them                         |               | 1         |

An examination of Table 5 reveals that participant teachers' views on the use of textbooks are predominantly positive. The majority of the responses (f=35) fall under the **positive** theme, which includes two subcategories. The first subcategory, **"In-Class Use"** (f=29), shows that teachers primarily use textbooks to conduct activities (f=7), selectively use appropriate exercises (f=6), refer to them as a resource (f=5), carry out experiments (f=4), provide visual support (f=4), and initiate discussions based on images (f=3).

The second subcategory, **"Out-of-Class Use,"** includes responses where teachers stated they used textbooks for reinforcement (f=4) and as a source for assigning homework (f=2). On the other hand, **negative views** (f=10) were categorized under three sub-themes. Under the theme of **"Activity Deficiencies"** (f=4), some teachers reported that the activities included in the textbooks were insufficient, unnecessary, or poorly supported by theoretical content. Under **"Visual Deficiencies"** (f=3), teachers criticized the textbooks for lacking clear illustrations, missing natural imagery, and offering insufficient visual detail. Lastly, in the category of **"Negative Experiences with Textbook Use"** (f=3), some teachers stated that they either never used the textbooks or found them unusable in practice. These findings indicate that while teachers generally find the textbooks useful, limitations in content and visual quality restrict their overall effectiveness and use in the classroom:

*"The textbooks are useful because they are aligned with the curriculum. We do the activities together in class, and projects are given as homework." (T16)*

In addition, the use of visuals during classroom discussions can support visual learning and enhance critical thinking skills:

*"I guide students through the visuals in the textbooks and help them understand the content. I also use methods such as reading, Q&A, and brainstorming." (T9)*

*"After presenting the topic, I use the visuals actively at the end of each lesson to reinforce learning." (T8)*

Using textbooks for reinforcement and homework also highlights their role as a complementary component of instruction. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that activity content and visual materials need to be reviewed and improved. Inadequate visual elements and a lack of detailed images point to the need for more engaging and effective textbook design. Some teachers reported avoiding textbook use altogether, citing a lack of alignment with their instructional needs:

*"The textbooks are not creativity-oriented. I don't benefit from them much." (T17)*

*"Right now, I rarely use the textbooks because they mostly include discussion-based and individual activities. Since the students are very young, these cause classroom management issues. Also, the lack of sufficient theoretical knowledge prevents full understanding." (T23)*

The qualitative data obtained regarding the implementation process of the 2016 Life Studies Curriculum in the TRNC were analyzed under two main themes:

**Table 6.** Challenges in Program Implementation and Teachers' Expectations

| Themes and Categories                               | Pertenage(%) | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>1 – Challenges Encountered in Implementation</b> | <b>41.07</b> | <b>46</b> |
| – Content-related challenges                        |              | 22        |
| – Lack of materials and technology                  |              | 11        |
| – Inadequacy of activities                          |              | 7         |
| – Student diversity                                 |              | 3         |
| – Time management                                   |              | 3         |
| <b>2 – Teachers' Requests and Expectations</b>      | <b>58.93</b> | <b>66</b> |
| – Practice-oriented approaches                      |              | 23        |
| – Content and up-to-dateness                        |              | 21        |
| – Social and moral values                           |              | 10        |
| – Student development                               |              | 6         |
| – Instructional materials                           |              | 5         |

An analysis of Table 6 shows that participant teachers' views on the implementation of the 2016 Life Studies Curriculum in the TRNC are grouped under two main themes: **"Challenges Encountered During Implementation"** (f=46) and **"Teachers' Requests and Expectations"** (f=66). The most frequently mentioned area of difficulty was **"content-related issues"** (f=22). In this context, teachers stated that the curriculum was not appropriate for students' developmental levels, there were inconsistencies between the textbook and the curriculum, and some topics did not align well with those of other courses. Under the theme of **"lack of materials and technological resources"** (f=11), teachers

noted that the absence of adequate tools and technological infrastructure posed a barrier to implementing contemporary teaching methods. Additionally, sub-themes such as **“appropriateness of activities”** (f=7), **“student diversity”** (f=3), and **“time management”** (f=3) emerged as other key challenges in the instructional process.

Teachers’ requests and expectations regarding the curriculum were primarily concentrated under the themes of **“practice-oriented learning”** (f=23) and **“curricular relevance and currency”** (f=21). Teachers emphasized the need for the curriculum to be more practice-based, to promote student-centered and experiential learning. They also expressed expectations that the content should be better connected to real-life experiences, made more concrete, and simplified. Some teachers emphasized that **“social and moral values”** (f=10) should be more explicitly integrated into the curriculum. Others pointed to the need for **flexible and differentiated learning outcomes** (f=6) that support **student development**. Finally, the theme of **“instructional material support”** (f=5) reflected teachers’ need for greater access to and ease of use of teaching resources. These findings reveal that teachers not only draw attention to the existing challenges in implementing the curriculum but also offer constructive suggestions aimed at creating a more effective teaching and learning process.

#### **Content-Related Challenges (n=22):**

This was the most significant difficulty reported by teachers. The topics were described as abstract, beyond students' age levels, and inconsistent with other courses, particularly Turkish:

*“After the Life Studies program was updated, the topics no longer aligned with the Turkish reading texts, and the abstract concepts in the textbooks prevented students from participating effectively.” (T29)*

*“The textbooks include scattered topics and disorganized activities, which makes it difficult for me.” (T23)*

#### **Lack of Materials and Technology (n=11):**

A lack of sufficient educational materials and technological tools was seen as a major obstacle to effective instruction:

*“Resources are limited. Most of the work is done through the teacher’s personal effort—both financially and emotionally.” (T19)*

*“I can’t benefit from technology. There’s no computer in my classroom. Showing videos related to the topics would grab the children’s attention.” (T4)*

*“I struggle to find ready-made content, activities, and presentations related to the topics. I also lack time for field trips and observations.” (T22)*

#### **Activity Suitability (n=7):**

Teachers found that the activities were mostly individual, did not address multiple intelligences, and created challenges during discussions:

*“I have difficulty managing time because there are too many individual activities.” (T10)*

*“There is a need for more activities that support learning by doing and experiencing.” (T9)*

#### **Student Diversity (n=3):**

The presence of students with different academic levels and multicultural backgrounds was perceived as a significant challenge:

*“There are multicultural and under-resourced classrooms.” (T21)*

**Time Management (n=3):**

Teachers mentioned the lack of time for supplementary activities like trips and observations due to the program's dense structure:

*"One of the problems is not having enough time for excursions and observations." (T22)*

**Practice-Oriented Approaches (n=23):**

Teachers stressed the need for hands-on learning, concreteness, and inclusion of field trips and museum education:

*"I would prefer to reduce the theoretical content and increase practical applications." (T16)*

*"Activities related to national days and weeks should be added... Museum education should be included in the program." (T18)*

**Content and Up-to-Dateness (n=21):**

Teachers called for a return to the spiral structure, content simplification, and removal of outdated material:

*"The program has lost its spiral nature." (T25)*

*"The topics should be shorter. Either the lesson time should be extended or the number of activities reduced." (T13)*

*"We expect more activities that make children think and encourage research." (T9)*

*"I would like to see topics on current technology, astronomy, and research added to the curriculum." (T19)*

*"Besides the current topics, there could be content on space science, astronomy, or preparation for life." (T21)*

**Social and Moral Values (n=10):**

Teachers emphasized the importance of promoting cultural awareness, human rights, anti-bullying strategies, and national-spiritual values:

*"We expect a curriculum that helps students embrace and preserve their own history and culture while also being tolerant and inquisitive toward other cultures." (T20)*

**Student Development (n=6):**

The curriculum should support creativity, self-awareness, and critical thinking:

*"We expect more activities that make children think and encourage research." (T9)*

**Instructional Materials (n=5):**

Teachers recommended including not only life skills but also contemporary scientific content. Specifically, they suggested integrating interdisciplinary topics like space science, astronomy, technology, and research skills to foster broader perspectives:

*"Besides the current topics, the curriculum could include space science, astronomy, or life-preparation themes." (T21)*

*"I would like to see topics related to today's technology, astronomy, and research added to the curriculum." (T19)*

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the Life Studies Curriculum implemented in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) since 2016 is generally perceived positively by primary school teachers. Teachers evaluate the curriculum as a multidimensional structure that promotes the acquisition of basic life skills, the transmission of social and cultural values, the development of environmental awareness, and the support of individual growth. This perception aligns with the official goals of the curriculum (Güllühan & Bekiroğlu, 2022) and is consistent with contemporary educational paradigms emphasized in both national and international literature (Schulz et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2015).

Despite this positive perspective, significant structural and pedagogical issues are evident in its implementation. Teachers particularly highlight the curriculum's failure to adequately incorporate national days and commemorative weeks, viewing this as a critical deficiency in the transmission of cultural identity. Given the unique historical and socio-political structure of the TRNC, this issue becomes even more pressing. In a country with limited international recognition, education plays a central role in both identity formation and cultural sustainability (Cağlar & Reis, 2004; Güllühan & Bekiroğlu, 2022).

It is widely emphasized in both national and international literature that curricula should not be confined to cognitive and academic goals but should also incorporate societal values, shared cultural heritage, and national memory (Banks, 2008; UNESCO, 2015; Öztürk & Kafadar, 2020). This view brings the concept of cultural citizenship to the forefront, advocating for curricula that not only transmit knowledge but also foster a sense of belonging and identity (Cayir, 2014; Print, 2007).

Studies conducted in Turkey also point to similar criticisms. Ürey and Kaymakçı (2020) found that Life Studies curricula failed to establish meaningful ties with local culture, underutilized out-of-school learning environments, and neglected elements crucial to cultural memory. Likewise, studies by Aykaç (2011) and Sağlam et al. (2019) highlight that teachers struggle with the value transmission process due to the program's inadequate cultural components. Similarly, in the TRNC context, there is a clear need for a curriculum that includes more national identity, traditions, and local symbols, thereby supporting cultural continuity.

Teachers' evaluations of textbooks are also noteworthy. Teachers in the TRNC context report that the textbooks are insufficient in terms of content, lack variety in activities, and do not adequately align with practice-based instructional models. These findings are consistent with studies conducted in Turkey (Batmaz, 2022; Yıldırım, 2006). For instance, Uçar (2004) identified that Life Studies textbooks in Turkey were developmentally inappropriate, lacked interaction, and were not designed with child-friendly materials. In both contexts, it appears that textbooks fall short in supporting the pedagogical structure envisioned by the curriculum.

At this point, a critical perspective may be introduced: the textbook is a tool, not an end in itself. However, due to the long-standing use of textbooks imported from Turkey, a culture of textbook dependency may have formed in the TRNC. This might explain teachers' high expectations of textbooks and their tendency to equate them with the curriculum itself. Apple (1985) argues that textbooks often represent "authority" rather than content, limiting the teacher's critical pedagogical approach. Similarly, in centralized systems, textbooks are often seen as the sole source of knowledge, weakening pedagogical flexibility and diminishing teachers' ability to adapt the curriculum to their students (Bümen & Yazıcılar; OECD, 2021). As Cağlar and Reis (2004) also noted, externally imposed content may be disconnected from the local context, prompting teachers to expect everything from the textbook. Therefore, it can be said that teachers' criticisms of textbooks are not only about content but also about



entrenched structural instructional habits. A more detailed and context-sensitive evaluation of textbook criticism is thus needed.

Although teachers' views on the implementation of the curriculum are generally positive, multidimensional challenges are experienced in areas such as content alignment, lack of materials, access to technology, and student diversity. "Content-related issues" are particularly emphasized. Some topics are presented in an abstract manner, are not developmentally appropriate, and do not integrate with other subjects (e.g., Turkish and Mathematics), which undermines instructional coherence. This finding is consistent with results from Turkey (Sağlam et al., 2019), where teachers emphasized the need to simplify content and establish stronger connections with students' daily lives.

Furthermore, the lack of teaching materials and technological infrastructure significantly limits teachers' pedagogical productivity and their ability to implement creative teaching strategies. This requires teachers to make individual efforts to obtain visuals and instructional tools, indicating a lack of systematic institutional support. Garay Abad and Hattie (2025) emphasized that instructional materials not only shape teaching design but also empower teacher agency and professional capital. Lee and Zuilkowski (2015) documented how teachers, in the absence of sufficient teaching materials, resort to "making do" strategies to conduct lessons with limited resources. These findings demonstrate that instructional materials are not just tools but critical components shaping instructional quality and teacher autonomy.

Teachers also call for more content related to real-life themes such as technology, traffic, safe living, cultural diversity, national history, and natural events. This reflects the need for content that supports not only environmental awareness but also experience-based learning. As emphasized by the OECD (2020), it is important to equip students with skills necessary for sustainable development and global citizenship from an early age.

Beyond content, teachers advocate for strengthening value-based learning outcomes, including more examples of hands-on activities, ensuring alignment between textbooks and the curriculum, and reintroducing the spiral structure. These demands stem from the understanding that education should support not only cognitive but also moral, cultural, and social development (Fullan, 2007).

Another issue raised by teachers is the necessity of integrating contemporary scientific and technological themes into the curriculum. This reflects a vision of education that not only imparts knowledge but also introduces students to scientific thinking, inquiry, and research culture. This approach conceptualizes education as a process that connects learners to universal concepts beyond their immediate environments.

In conclusion, the 2016 Life Studies Curriculum in the TRNC should be transformed into a more holistic, modern, student-centered, and interdisciplinary structure. Simplifying the curriculum, enriching it with material and technological support, and strengthening its practical dimension are essential steps toward creating a more functional instructional process aligned with teacher expectations.

## **5. Recommendations**

- **Curriculum content** should be updated with real-life topics such as traffic safety, health, technology, and communication.
- **Socio-cultural values** like family structure, national identity, and cultural diversity should be more explicitly emphasized.
- **Science-related subjects** (e.g., human body, nature, space) should be included due to the absence of a Science course in Grade 3 in TRNC.

- **Spiral and student-centered approaches** should be reinforced to ensure progressive and meaningful learning.
- **Local cultural and historical elements** specific to TRNC should be integrated into the curriculum.
- **Textbooks** should be revised to match developmental levels, include more visuals, and promote activity-based learning.
- **Instructional materials and technological tools** should be provided centrally to reduce teacher burden.
- **In-service teacher training** should focus on innovative teaching methods and educational technologies.

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