



Cultural heritage from the local to the universal in social studies teaching: A qualitative study on the case of Göbeklitepe

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Abstract: This study examines the place of Göbeklitepe in social studies education as a cultural heritage site that brings together local identity and universal heritage. The research was conducted using a basic qualitative design with 25 social studies teachers working in public middle schools in Malatya and Şanlıurfa during the 2025–2026 academic year. Maximum variation sampling was used to include teachers with different professional backgrounds, work locations, experiences of visiting Göbeklitepe, and experiences of teaching about the site. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicate that teachers associated local cultural heritage with continuity, belonging, social memory, educational value, and universal significance. They regarded Göbeklitepe both as an important part of the cultural identity of its region and as a heritage site with meaning for humanity as a whole. Teachers also stated that using Göbeklitepe in social studies lessons could support students' historical consciousness, cultural identity, sense of belonging, and awareness of heritage protection. Although students were generally described as curious about Göbeklitepe, teachers believed that their knowledge was often limited and superficial. Participants also considered the coverage of Göbeklitepe and similar local heritage elements in the curriculum and textbooks insufficient. They especially emphasized the need for richer visuals, more activities, and stronger links with students' everyday lives. Suggested practices included field trips, projects, drama, virtual tours, documentaries, museum activities, and ready-to-use teaching materials. The study shows that Göbeklitepe can provide a meaningful context for connecting local heritage with the wider human past in social studies education through active, experience-based, and context-sensitive learning opportunities.

Research Article



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Göbeklitepe, social studies teaching, cultural heritage, local cultural heritage, historical consciousness

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Introduction

Cultural heritage brings together the values and collective memories that societies pass down through generations (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). UNESCO distinguishes between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage includes monuments, buildings, archaeological sites, and other physical cultural assets (UNESCO, 1972), while intangible heritage refers to practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their culture (UNESCO, 2003). In practice, these forms of heritage are closely connected. A historical place carries meaning not only through its physical remains but also through the beliefs, stories, and traditions associated with it.

Education helps people understand why cultural heritage matters and how it relates to their lives. Social studies brings together history, geography, culture, and social life, giving heritage an important place in the curriculum (Kafadar, 2021; Şen et al., 2025). Learning about heritage can connect past and present, reveal cultural continuity, and strengthen belonging (Akhan, 2014; Çengelci, 2012). Göbeklitepe offers a concrete example: its archaeological remains and monumental T-shaped pillars represent tangible heritage, while questions about its builders' beliefs, rituals, and daily lives encourage students to explore the meanings behind those remains. Added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018 for its outstanding universal value (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018), the site can help students understand how a place in their own country forms part of humanity's shared past.

Studies on cultural heritage education have explored teachers' views, teaching methods, heritage literacy, family support, and classroom challenges. They show that teachers consider cultural heritage important, yet often struggle with limited time, inadequate materials, and few opportunities for activities outside school (Avcı & Memişoğlu, 2016; Azrak & Yalçınkaya, 2020; İnanlı & Türe, 2025; Metin Göksu, 2021; Sağ & Kaymakçı, 2024). Field trips, drama, and family involvement can help support learning (Akhan, 2014; Demirezen & Aktaş, 2020). Teaching resources also matter: Batmaz and Yurtbakan (2023) found that textbooks needed a wider range of cultural heritage content, while Utkugün and Yıldırım (2024) highlighted the educational potential of virtual museums through pre-service social studies teachers' experiences. Although these studies offer useful insights into cultural heritage education, they give less attention to how teachers might use a particular local heritage site in social studies lessons.

Local cultural heritage offers a useful starting point for social studies, linking history, geography, culture, and citizenship to students' surroundings. Place-based education builds on these connections by drawing on everyday experiences (Gruenewald, 2003; Resor, 2010; Smith, 2002), while local heritage sites help students relate the past to the present and explore connections between cultural identity and place (Güler-Bıyıklı & Aslan, 2013; Kafadar, 2021). Göbeklitepe allows students to consider local heritage within a broader context: it reflects the region's history and has outstanding universal value as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018). Activity-based teaching about Göbeklitepe may deepen students' understanding of local history and cultural heritage (Yolaçan & Aktın, 2024), offering opportunities to explore historical consciousness, belonging, and heritage preservation. However, research has largely focused on broader aspects of heritage education, including teachers' views, curricula, textbooks, and digital museums (Akhan, 2014; Avcı & Memişoğlu, 2016; Batmaz & Yurtbakan, 2023; Çengelci, 2012; Demirezen & Aktaş, 2020; Utkugün & Yıldırım, 2024), with less attention to Göbeklitepe's specific role in social studies teaching.

Previous studies show that cultural heritage education can become more effective when it goes beyond identity development and includes direct engagement with heritage sites, digital resources, and experience-based activities (Valencia Arnica et al., 2023). Göbeklitepe offers an important context in this respect. Firat (2024), for example, describes the site not only as an archaeological area but also as a space where cultural knowledge, symbols, narratives, and social practices were produced and passed on. Research on visitor experiences also points to the educational value of Göbeklitepe. Nguyen et al. (2023) found that visits to the site contributed to learning about history, architecture, and beliefs, while also supporting feelings of belonging and shared history. In the field of social studies education, Yolaçan (2024) and Yolaçan and Aktın (2024) examined Göbeklitepe as a local historical site through activity-based practices with fifth-grade students and reported positive educational outcomes. Overall, the existing literature highlights the potential of Göbeklitepe for cultural heritage education. However, most studies have focused on students, instructional activities, or visitor experiences. Less attention has been given to how social studies teachers understand Göbeklitepe both as a local cultural value and as part of universal cultural heritage. Examining teachers' views in these two dimensions may therefore help clarify how Göbeklitepe can be used more meaningfully in social studies teaching.

The problem addressed in this study concerns how Göbeklitepe is approached in social studies education. It also examines how Göbeklitepe, as a local cultural asset with universal heritage significance, is reflected in the teaching process. The aim of this study is to examine, based on teachers' views, the role of Göbeklitepe in social studies education as an element of both local and universal cultural heritage. The study addresses Göbeklitepe's educational value, its visibility in the curriculum, and opportunities for its more effective use in the teaching process. In line with this aim, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do social studies teachers define local cultural heritage, and how do they evaluate Göbeklitepe within this context?
2. Why do social studies teachers consider it important to address Göbeklitepe in social studies education?
3. How do teachers evaluate Göbeklitepe as both a local cultural asset and an element of universal heritage?
4. According to teachers, how can Göbeklitepe contribute to students' development of historical consciousness, cultural identity, and heritage awareness?
5. How do teachers evaluate students' interest in and awareness of Göbeklitepe?
6. How do teachers evaluate the visibility of Göbeklitepe and other local cultural heritage elements in the social studies curriculum and textbooks?
7. What activities, materials, and instructional practices do teachers recommend for the effective use of Göbeklitepe in social studies education?

Method

Research Method and Design

The aim of this study is to examine how social studies teachers evaluate Göbeklitepe as an element of both local and universal cultural heritage. A basic qualitative research design was employed within the qualitative research approach. Basic qualitative studies aim to reveal how individuals interpret their experiences and what meanings they attribute to a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2018).

The study focused on teachers' evaluations of the place and function of Göbeklitepe in social studies education. It examined how teachers interpret Göbeklitepe within the context of local and universal heritage. Their views on Göbeklitepe's educational contributions, its visibility in the curriculum and textbooks, and the possibilities for its use in teaching were also investigated. Therefore, the basic qualitative research design was considered appropriate for the study's aim and the nature of the data.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from İnönü University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 58, taken at the meeting numbered 11 on 19.06.2026.

Study Group

The study involved 25 social studies teachers working in public middle schools in Malatya and Şanlıurfa in the 2025–2026 academic year. Maximum variation sampling was used to include teachers with different genders, levels of professional experience, work locations, histories of visiting Göbeklitepe, and experience of teaching about the site. The two provinces offered different perspectives: teachers in Şanlıurfa worked within the site's local cultural setting, whereas those in Malatya viewed it from a more distant regional context. This allowed exploration of how proximity and familiarity were reflected in their views. Teachers from provincial centres, districts, and rural settlements were included because access to heritage sites and out-of-school learning opportunities may vary by location. All participants volunteered and received information about the study's purpose, scope, and interview process. Interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical principles, and teachers' identities were kept confidential using codes such as T1, T2, and T3.

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	12	48
	Male	13	52
Professional Seniority	1–5 years	5	20
	6–10 years	7	28
	11–15 years	6	24
	16 years and above	7	28
Place of Duty	City Center	11	44
	District	8	32
	Rural Area	6	24
Status of Conducting Educational Activities Related to Göbeklitepe	Yes	14	56
	No	11	44
Status of Visiting Göbeklitepe On Site	Yes	10	40
	No	15	60

Table 1 presents the participants' sociodemographic characteristics. It shows variation in gender, professional seniority, work location, and experience of visiting Göbeklitepe or addressing it in lessons. This diversity allowed different perspectives to be represented in the study. Since the study aimed to explore the views of teachers with varying levels of experience

rather than evaluate the effectiveness of a specific instructional practice, neither visiting Göbeklitepe nor conducting teaching activities related to the site was required for participation.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview form. Interviewing is an effective data collection method for examining individuals' experiences, thoughts, interpretations, and meaning-making processes in depth (Patton, 2014). Semi-structured interviews also provide the researcher with flexibility to follow a predetermined framework while asking additional probing questions when necessary (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013).

During the preparation of the interview form, national and international literature on local cultural heritage, cultural heritage education, social studies teaching, and Göbeklitepe was reviewed. The interview form was developed by the researcher and consisted of seven open-ended questions. It was then submitted to three faculty members at İnönü University, including one professor and two associate professors with expertise in the field. Based on their feedback, the questions were reviewed in terms of scope, clarity, and consistency with the purpose of the study, and the form was finalized after the necessary revisions.

The semi-structured interview form included the following questions:

1. How do you define the concept of local cultural heritage? How do you evaluate Göbeklitepe within this concept?
2. To what extent do you consider it important to address Göbeklitepe in social studies teaching? Why?
3. What do you think about evaluating Göbeklitepe not only as a local cultural value but also as an element of universal heritage?
4. What role do you think Göbeklitepe has in developing students' historical consciousness, cultural identity, and heritage awareness?
5. How do you evaluate students' levels of interest and awareness regarding Göbeklitepe?
6. Do you think that cultural heritage elements such as Göbeklitepe are sufficiently included in the social studies curriculum and textbooks? Please explain.
7. What activities, materials, or instructional practices do you think should be implemented to integrate Göbeklitepe more effectively into the teaching process?

Data Collection

The research data were collected after ethical approval had been obtained. Before the interviews, the teachers were contacted, and suitable dates and times were arranged. The participants were informed about the aim of the study, the interview process, audio recording, and confidentiality principles. The interviews began after their voluntary informed consent had been obtained.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, either at the schools where the participants worked or in quiet settings free from distractions. Each interview lasted approximately 25–35 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded. When necessary, probing questions were asked to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which involves systematically coding responses and organizing related codes into categories and themes (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). After transcribing the audio recordings, the researcher read the transcripts several times, identified statements relevant to the study's aim, and coded them. Categories and themes were developed inductively from participants' responses rather than established in advance. Frequencies indicated the number of participants expressing views in each category, helping clarify the findings and compare perspectives (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). They were not used for statistical inference or generalization. As responses could fall into multiple categories, total frequencies in some tables exceeded the number of participants. Direct quotations supported the credibility of the findings, and participants were identified using codes such as P1, P2, and P3 to protect their identities.

Trustworthiness

Various measures were taken in this study to ensure validity and reliability. First, in order to ensure the content validity of the interview form, the opinions of three faculty members at İnönü University, including one professor and two associate professors who are experts in the field, were sought. During the interview process, the participants were allowed to express their views in detail, and the data were recorded with an audio recorder. After the obtained data were transcribed into written text, the coding process was carried out carefully by the researcher through repeated readings.

In order to increase the transferability of the study, the study group, data collection process, interview questions, and data analysis stages were explained in detail. In the analysis of the data, the content analysis technique was used. After the interview recordings were transcribed into written text, they were read carefully, meaningful statements were coded, and then similar codes were brought together to form categories and themes. In order to increase the credibility of the findings, direct quotations from the participants' views were included.

In order to increase the reliability of the study, a second researcher experienced in qualitative research was also included in the coding process in addition to the researcher. The interview transcripts and the code-category structures created were examined independently by the two researchers. Then, in order to determine the agreement between the researchers, the reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. This formula is as follows: $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{(\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})} \times 100$. The reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994), "reliability = number of agreements / total number of agreements + number of disagreements," was used in the calculation. According to the reliability formula, the reliability value of the study was determined as 90%. Since the agreement between the coders in the study was 91%, it was determined that the desired level of reliability was achieved. According to Saban (2009), in qualitative research, the desired level of reliability is achieved when the agreement between expert and researcher evaluations is 90% or above.

Results

The findings are organized under seven subheadings aligned with the research and interview questions. These serve as reporting headings, not predetermined analytical themes; themes, categories, and codes were developed inductively from participants' responses through content analysis. Tables present participant codes and frequencies, followed by explanations of the main patterns and supporting quotations. Some frequency totals exceed the number of participants because responses could be coded under multiple categories.

Teachers' Views on the Concept of Local Cultural Heritage and the Evaluation of Göbeklitepe within This Scope

The first question aimed to determine how social studies teachers define local cultural heritage and evaluate Göbeklitepe within this context; the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Teachers' Views on the Concept of Local Cultural Heritage and the Evaluation of Göbeklitepe within This Scope

Theme	Category	f
Historical and cultural continuity	A set of values transmitted from the past to the present	7
	An element reflecting the historical memory of society	6
Locality and belonging	Being an identity element belonging to a region	6
	Creating a sense of social belonging and ownership	5
Universal value and uniqueness	Having the quality of human heritage despite being local	7
	Göbeklitepe being a unique cultural heritage site	5
Educational and awareness dimension	Providing students with cultural heritage awareness	7
	Being an example that concretizes abstract historical concepts	5

Table 2 presents teachers' views on local cultural heritage and Göbeklitepe under four themes.

Under "Historical and Cultural Continuity," teachers described local cultural heritage as values transmitted from the past (f=7) and reflections of social memory (f=6), identifying Göbeklitepe as an example of this continuity.

In my opinion, local cultural heritage is the historical and cultural accumulation that a society carries from the past to the present. Göbeklitepe is one of the oldest and strongest examples of this accumulation (P10).

Under "Locality and Belonging," teachers emphasized regional identity (f=6) and social belonging and ownership (f=5), noting Göbeklitepe's potential to strengthen students' connections with their surroundings.

Göbeklitepe is not only a historical site but also a value that reflects the identity of these lands. As students learn this, they may feel a stronger sense of belonging to the place where they live (P19).

Under "Universal Value and Uniqueness," teachers viewed Göbeklitepe as shared human heritage (f=7) and a unique cultural site (f=5), emphasizing its significance beyond local boundaries.

Göbeklitepe is a local value, but its impact and significance exceed local boundaries. It is not only a center belonging to Şanlıurfa, but also one that sheds light on the shared past of all humanity (P7).

Under “Educational and Awareness Dimension,” teachers highlighted Göbeklitepe’s role in developing cultural heritage awareness (f=7) and making abstract historical concepts concrete (f=5).

Thanks to Göbeklitepe, students can understand more concretely what historical heritage means. Information they read in the textbook gains meaning through a real cultural value (P23).

Teachers’ Views on the Importance of Addressing Göbeklitepe in Social Studies Teaching

The second question aimed to reveal teachers’ views on the importance of addressing Göbeklitepe in social studies teaching; the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Teachers’ Views on the Importance of Addressing Göbeklitepe in Social Studies Teaching

Theme	Category	f
Making historical content meaningful	Contributing to understanding the early periods of human history	7
	Enabling students to establish a relationship between the past and the present	6
Cultural heritage and identity awareness	Developing cultural heritage awareness	7
	Strengthening local identity and sense of belonging	5
Concretizing teaching	Concretizing abstract history and civilization topics	6
	Supporting permanent and meaningful learning	5
Developing a perspective from the local to the universal	Showing that a local value can have universal importance	6
	Creating a broad historical and civilizational perspective in students	5

Table 3 presents teachers’ views on the importance of Göbeklitepe in social studies teaching under four themes.

Under “Developing Historical Consciousness,” teachers emphasized understanding early human history (f=7) and connecting the past with the present (f=6).

It is very important to address Göbeklitepe in the course because students can better understand how far back human history goes and the connection between today’s life and the past (P13).

Under “Cultural Heritage and Identity Awareness,” teachers highlighted Göbeklitepe’s role in developing cultural heritage awareness (f=7) and strengthening local identity and belonging (f=5).

When students learn that such an important heritage exists in the geography where they live, it provides them both with cultural heritage awareness and increases their sense of belonging to the place where they live (P21).

Under “Concretizing Teaching,” teachers noted that Göbeklitepe makes abstract historical and civilizational topics concrete (f=6) and supports lasting, meaningful learning (f=5).

When Göbeklitepe is explained, students learn information written in the textbook not in an abstract way, but through a real historical site. This makes learning more permanent (P6).

Under “Developing a Perspective from the Local to the Universal,” teachers emphasized Göbeklitepe’s universal significance as a local heritage site (f=6) and its contribution to broadening students’ perspectives on history and civilization (f=5).

Thanks to Göbeklitepe, students can see how important a place located in their own country actually is for the history of all humanity. This broadens their perspective (P24).

Teachers’ Views on the Evaluation of Göbeklitepe as a Universal Heritage Element in Addition to Being a Local Value

The third question aimed to reveal teachers’ views on evaluating Göbeklitepe as both a local value and a universal heritage element; the findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Teachers’ Views on the Evaluation of Göbeklitepe as a Universal Heritage Element in Addition to Being a Local Value

Theme	Category	f
Local identity and belonging	Reflecting the historical and cultural identity of the region where it is located	6
	Creating a sense of local belonging and ownership	5
Universal heritage quality	Being a shared value that sheds light on human history	7
	Having a unique and important place within world cultural heritage	4
Developing awareness from the local to the universal	Showing students that a local value can carry universal meaning	5
	Enabling students to establish a relationship between the local environment and world history	5
Awareness of protection and responsibility	Being seen as a common responsibility of both local people and humanity	6
	Developing sensitivity toward the protection of cultural heritage	4

Table 4 presents teachers’ views on Göbeklitepe as both local and universal heritage under four themes.

Under “Local Identity and Belonging,” teachers emphasized Göbeklitepe’s role in reflecting regional historical and cultural identity (f=6) and fostering local belonging and ownership (f=5).

Göbeklitepe is a very important local value that shows the historical depth and cultural richness of the region where it is located. Through this site, people can establish a stronger connection with the geography in which they live (P13).

Under “Universal Heritage Quality,” teachers described Göbeklitepe as a shared value illuminating human history (f=7) and a unique, significant site within world cultural heritage (f=4).

Göbeklitepe is local in terms of where it is located; however, in terms of its meaning and importance, it belongs to all humanity. This is because the information revealed there concerns not only one region but also human history (P24).

Under “Developing Awareness from the Local to the Universal,” teachers noted that Göbeklitepe demonstrates the universal significance of local heritage (f=5) and helps students connect their local environment with world history (f=5).

When students see that a value which is part of their country, and sometimes even their immediate environment, is important for all humanity, they learn to think from the local to the universal (P9).

Under “Awareness of Protection and Responsibility,” teachers emphasized the shared responsibility of local communities and humanity to protect Göbeklitepe (f=6) and its role in developing sensitivity toward cultural heritage protection (f=4).

It would be incomplete to view Göbeklitepe only as a local historical site. Such places are shared values that need to be protected both on behalf of the people of that region and all humanity (P17).

Teachers’ Views on the Role of Göbeklitepe in Developing Students’ Historical Consciousness, Cultural Identity, and Heritage Awareness

The fourth question aimed to reveal teachers’ views on Göbeklitepe’s role in developing students’ historical consciousness, cultural identity, and heritage awareness; the findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Teachers’ Views on the Role of Göbeklitepe in Developing Students’ Historical Consciousness, Cultural Identity, and Heritage Awareness

Theme	Category	f
Developing historical consciousness	Enabling students to establish a connection between the past and the present	6
	Enabling students to recognize the depth of human history	5
Cultural identity and belonging	Developing belonging to the geography in which they live	6
	Enabling students to recognize their own cultural roots	5
Heritage awareness and protection consciousness	Developing awareness that cultural heritage should be protected	7
	Providing sensitivity toward historical values	4
Developing awareness from the local to the universal	Enabling students to recognize the universal importance of a local value	5

Theme	Category	f
	Providing students with a civilizational perspective	5

Table 5 presents teachers' views on Göbeklitepe's role in developing students' historical consciousness, cultural identity, and heritage awareness under four themes.

Under "Developing Historical Consciousness," teachers noted that Göbeklitepe helps students connect the past with the present (f=6) and recognize the depth of human history (f=5).

Göbeklitepe enables students to see history not merely as events that happened in the past, but as part of a long process that affects the present (P13).

Under "Cultural Identity and Belonging," teachers emphasized Göbeklitepe's contribution to students' sense of belonging to their surroundings (f=6) and recognition of their cultural roots (f=5).

When students learn that such a heritage exists in their own country, they both feel proud and establish a stronger connection with their own cultural roots (P19).

Under "Heritage Awareness and Protection Consciousness," teachers highlighted Göbeklitepe's role in promoting awareness of cultural heritage protection (f=7) and sensitivity toward historical values (f=4).

Thanks to Göbeklitepe, students can understand more clearly why it is important to protect historical artifacts and cultural sites (P24).

Under "Developing Awareness from the Local to the Universal," teachers stated that Göbeklitepe helps students recognize the universal significance of local heritage (f=5) and develop a civilizational perspective (f=5).

When students learn about Göbeklitepe, they realize how important a local cultural value can actually be for all humanity (P8).

Teachers' Views on Students' Levels of Interest and Awareness Regarding Göbeklitepe

The fifth question aimed to reveal teachers' views on students' interest and awareness levels regarding Göbeklitepe; the findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Teachers' Views on Students' Interest in and Awareness of Göbeklitepe

Theme	Category	f
Perceived high level of interest	Göbeklitepe arousing curiosity among students	7
	Its historical and mysterious characteristics attracting students' attention	6
Perceived limited but improvable awareness	Students recognizing the name Göbeklitepe but lacking detailed knowledge about its significance	7
	Students' awareness being enhanced through courses and instructional activities	5

Table 6 presents teachers' views on students' interest in and awareness of Göbeklitepe under two themes.

Under “Perceived High Level of Interest,” teachers reported that Göbeklitepe aroused curiosity (f=7) and attracted attention through its historical and mysterious characteristics (f=6). Geographical proximity helped students connect the site with their surroundings, while documentaries, social media, internet content, and visual materials increased recognition and curiosity.

When students hear about Göbeklitepe, they are generally curious. The fact that it is a very ancient structure and that different interpretations exist about it particularly attracts their attention (P10).

Under “Perceived Limited but Improvable Awareness,” teachers noted that students recognized Göbeklitepe’s name but lacked detailed knowledge of its significance (f=7). Courses and planned instructional activities were considered effective in improving awareness (f=5). Proximity and media exposure supported recognition, although media exposure did not necessarily ensure in-depth understanding.

Most students know the name Göbeklitepe, but they do not have detailed information about why it is important. Their awareness increases considerably when the topic is addressed in class (P24).

Teachers considered structured instruction necessary to translate students’ high interest into a deeper understanding of cultural heritage.

Teachers’ Views on the Place Given to Local Cultural Heritage Elements Such as Göbeklitepe in the Social Studies Curriculum and Textbooks

The sixth question examined teachers’ views on the inclusion of Göbeklitepe in the curriculum and textbooks; the findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Teachers’ Views on the Place Given to Local Cultural Heritage Elements Such as Göbeklitepe in the Social Studies Curriculum and Textbooks

Theme	Category	f
Insufficient representation	Content being limited and superficial	6
	Local cultural heritage elements not being addressed in sufficient detail	5
Considering it partially sufficient	Being included indirectly within the learning outcomes	5
	Content being expandable through the teacher’s effort	4
Criticisms regarding the quality of textbooks	Insufficient visual and activity dimensions	6
	Content not being sufficiently associated with students’ lives	4
Expectation of enrichment	Need for more local examples and practices	7
	Increasing field trips, digital content, and activity-based materials	5

Table 7 presents teachers’ views on the representation of local cultural heritage, including Göbeklitepe, in the social studies curriculum and textbooks under four themes.

Under “Insufficient Representation,” teachers described Göbeklitepe-related content as limited and superficial (f=6) and local cultural heritage coverage as insufficiently detailed (f=5).

In my opinion, Göbeklitepe is included in the curriculum and textbooks; however, this inclusion remains quite limited. Such an important cultural heritage element should be addressed in more detail (P13).

Under “Considering It Partially Sufficient,” some teachers noted that local heritage is indirectly included in learning outcomes (f=5) and that teachers can expand the content through their own efforts (f=4).

I do not think it is completely ignored. There is an indirect place for it within the learning outcomes; but making it visible mostly depends on how the teacher teaches it (P17).

Under “Criticisms Regarding the Quality of Textbooks,” teachers highlighted insufficient visuals and activities (f=6) and weak connections with students’ lives (f=4).

There is brief information in the books, but activities, visuals, and the inquiry dimension that would attract students’ interest are not sufficient. Therefore, the topic often remains superficial (P24).

Under “Expectation of Enrichment,” teachers called for more local examples and practices (f=7), alongside field trips, digital content, and activity-based materials (f=5).

Examples such as Göbeklitepe should be included more in textbooks; they should be supported not only as texts but also with activities, digital content, and field trip suggestions (P8).

Teachers’ Recommendations for Including Göbeklitepe More Effectively in the Teaching Process

The seventh question examined teachers’ suggestions for using Göbeklitepe more effectively in teaching; the findings are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Teachers’ Views on Including Göbeklitepe More Effectively in the Teaching Process

Theme	Category	f
Activity-based teaching practices	Conducting research assignments, presentations, and project work	5
	Including drama, role-play, and classroom practices	4
Use of visual and digital materials	Using videos, documentaries, animations, and virtual tour applications	8
	Preparing rich visual content and digital teaching materials	5
Experiential learning opportunities	Organizing field trip and observation activities	7
	Developing teaching practices focused on museums and historical environments	3
Curriculum and material support	Giving more place to Göbeklitepe in textbooks	4
	Providing ready-made activity and material packages to guide teachers	7

Table 8 presents teachers' recommendations for teaching Göbeklitepe more effectively under four themes.

Under "Activity-Based Teaching Practices," teachers recommended research assignments, presentations, and projects (f=5), alongside drama, role-play, and classroom practices (f=4).

A topic such as Göbeklitepe can be taught more effectively not only by explaining it to students, but also by having them conduct research and supporting it with role-play activities in the classroom (P14).

Under "Use of Visual and Digital Materials," teachers recommended videos, documentaries, animations, and virtual tours (f=8), as well as rich visual content and digital teaching materials (f=5).

Göbeklitepe should definitely be supported with visuals, videos, and, if possible, virtual tour applications. Students understand better when they see it (P23).

Under "Experiential Learning Opportunities," teachers suggested field trips and observation activities (f=7) and teaching practices centered on museums and historical environments (f=3).

If possible, it would be very effective for students to see Göbeklitepe on site. Such an experience makes the information explained in class much more meaningful (P25).

Under "Curriculum and Material Support," teachers called for greater textbook coverage of Göbeklitepe (f=4) and ready-made activity and material packages to guide instruction (f=7).

If teachers had ready-made activity examples, worksheets, and digital materials, it would be possible to use Göbeklitepe in lessons more effectively and systematically (P22).

Conclusion

The teachers in this study saw local cultural heritage as a way of passing on collective memory and strengthening identity and belonging. They also considered it a valuable resource for teaching. Their accounts of Göbeklitepe brought these views together. While they described the site as part of the region's history, they also emphasized its importance for humanity as a whole. This understanding reflects approaches that view heritage in terms of its social meanings, extending beyond the preservation of physical remains (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). It is also consistent with UNESCO documents, which emphasize the shared value of cultural heritage and the responsibility to safeguard it for future generations (UNESCO, 1972, 2003, 2022).

These findings share several points with earlier research. Jiménez Pérez et al. (2010) argued that a holistic approach to heritage education can strengthen social identity and help learners understand the meanings attached to cultural values. Barghi et al. (2017) similarly showed that including heritage in the curriculum can raise students' awareness and deepen their understanding of why cultural assets should be preserved. Research on Göbeklitepe offers another perspective on the connection between heritage and belonging. In their study of domestic and international visitors, Nguyen et al. (2024) identified cognitive, emotional, and relational aspects of visitors' experiences and found that engagement with the site was associated with a sense of belonging. Although their study focused on visitors, it provides a useful point of comparison with the teachers' emphasis on the personal and social meanings

of heritage. Studies in Türkiye have also highlighted the role of cultural heritage education in developing identity, awareness, and a sense of responsibility for preservation (Akhan, 2014; Çengelci, 2012; Demirezen & Aktaş, 2020).

Göbeklitepe's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2018 formally recognized its significance beyond the region. UNESCO's assessment of its outstanding universal value draws attention to the site's monumental architecture and its contribution to understanding human history (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018). The teachers' views of Göbeklitepe as both a local heritage site and part of humanity's shared past are therefore consistent with this international recognition.

Teachers saw Göbeklitepe as a way to help students develop historical consciousness and better understand cultural heritage and identity. They also felt that the site could make lesson content more concrete by connecting local history with the wider human past. Earlier research has discussed the educational value of local surroundings and historical sites (Gruenewald, 2003; Resor, 2010; Smith, 2002, 2007). Other studies have emphasized connections between place and social well-being (Gruenewald et al, 2007) and the value of teaching cultural heritage through students' own environments (Avcı & Memişoğlu, 2016; Çengelci, 2012; Güler-Bıyıklı & Aslan, 2013). In this context, Göbeklitepe provides an opportunity to connect the history of a particular place with world history. Yolaçan's (2024) master's thesis, subsequently published by Yolaçan and Aktın (2024), offers evidence from teaching practice. Their activities with fifth-grade students helped students understand Göbeklitepe's historical development and relate it to Şanlıurfa's history. Students nevertheless had difficulty applying the skill of perceiving change and continuity. The study supports some of the educational possibilities described by teachers here, although the two studies provide different kinds of evidence: the present research examined teachers' perceptions, while Yolaçan and Aktın (2024) investigated the outcomes of an instructional implementation with students.

The teachers believed that learning about Göbeklitepe could strengthen students' historical consciousness, cultural identity, and sense of belonging, while helping them understand why heritage should be protected. Their accounts suggest that they saw heritage education as having a purpose beyond conveying historical information. UNESCO documents similarly emphasize the role of education in passing on heritage and supporting belonging, social cohesion, respect for cultural diversity, and continuity between generations (UNESCO, 2003, 2022). Barghi et al. (2017) highlight its contribution to public awareness and an understanding of heritage preservation, while Koush (2025) draws attention to social cohesion and shared responsibility. Research in Türkiye also associates cultural heritage education with the development of identity, sensitivity towards heritage, and awareness of its protection (Akhan, 2014; Avcı & Memişoğlu, 2016; Demirezen & Aktaş, 2020). Taken together, these studies support the teachers' view that Göbeklitepe offers opportunities to develop both historical knowledge and a sense of responsibility for cultural heritage.

The teachers described students as interested in Göbeklitepe, although their understanding of the site often remained superficial. This distinction matters because curiosity does not necessarily lead to a deeper understanding of heritage without educational support. Hein (1998) and Falk and Dierking (2013) emphasize the roles of prior knowledge, context, and guidance in museum and heritage learning. Andre, Durksen, and Volman (2017) also point to the value of interaction, narrative, visual materials, and guided activities. In the present study, teachers reported that media coverage, social media, documentaries, and other digital content attracted students' attention to Göbeklitepe. They nevertheless stressed the need to build on this interest through classroom activities. Their observations suggest that such content can

provide a starting point for learning, but that students need opportunities to explore and discuss what they encounter. This emphasis on educational engagement is also consistent with UNESCO's "World Heritage in Young Hands" approach (UNESCO, 2002).

Another result of the study is that teachers do not find cultural heritage elements such as Göbeklitepe sufficiently functional in the curriculum and textbooks. The participants stated that the content often remains superficial. They also expressed that this content is not sufficiently associated with students' lives and that the visual and activity dimensions are limited. These results are parallel to the existing literature. Batmaz and Yurtbakan (2023) stated that cultural heritage elements are included in textbooks, but the scope should be improved. Güler-Bıyıklı and Aslan (2013) showed that cultural heritage is included in school knowledge but is often addressed within limited contexts. Pérez, Cuenca López, and Ferreras Listán (2010) emphasized that teacher training and the pedagogical framework directly affect heritage education. Therefore, it is important for Göbeklitepe to be more visible in the curriculum and textbooks. However, this alone is not sufficient. Göbeklitepe should be presented in an inquiry-based, experiential, and material-supported manner.

Teachers offered various suggestions for including Göbeklitepe more effectively in the teaching process. Research and project studies, drama and role-play, videos, documentaries, virtual tours, field trips and observations, museum activities, and activities related to historical environments are among these suggestions. It was also stated that guide material support should be provided to teachers. These suggestions show that heritage education should be planned in an activity-based and experiential manner. These results are consistent with the study of Şimşek and Elitok Kesici (2012), which indicates that the use of drama increases heritage awareness. They also support the research of Morentin and Guisasola (2015), which emphasizes the planned establishment of the school-museum relationship. Andre et al. (2017) also state that activities, guidance, and technological support are important in museum learning.

Research on digital platforms and virtual museums has shown that these resources can support meaningful learning (Koutromanos et al., 2023; Kayaalp, Başcı Namlı, & Meral, 2024). The teachers' views in this study indicate that students' curiosity about Göbeklitepe can serve as a useful starting point for lessons. Building on this interest requires activities that help students develop historical thinking, understand cultural heritage, and reflect on why it should be preserved. Giving greater emphasis to Göbeklitepe and similar sites in social studies courses may enable students to relate local heritage to its broader significance. Diversifying the visuals and activities in textbooks, providing practical teaching guidelines, and supporting teachers' preparedness to teach these topics may also be beneficial. While field trips, observation, drama, and project-based activities can provide students with opportunities to ask questions and discuss their interpretations, digital resources and virtual museums can offer alternative ways to explore the site.

Future studies may directly explore students' views and examine their experiences of Göbeklitepe in detail. The effects of Göbeklitepe-based activities on historical thinking and cultural heritage awareness may also be investigated. Experimental designs or action research may be employed for this purpose.

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