

Opinions of the Classroom Teachers about Oral History Method in Social Studies Courses

Sosyal Bilgiler Dersinde Sözlü Tarih Yöntemi Kullanımına İlişkin Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri

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İlk Kayıt Tarihi:16.10.2015

Yayına Kabul Tarihi:13.12.2015

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the opinions of the classroom teachers concerning the use of oral history as a teaching and learning method in social studies courses. The participants of the study were a total of 120 classroom teachers working in public basic education school in Afyonkarahisar. The data were collected by using an open - ended questionnaire in the research and the data were analysed through descriptive statistics. The findings of the study showed that although the participants employed the oral history activities in social studies course they experienced certain problems such as lack of source people, ignorance by family members and students, students' inability to comprehend what was told to them, inconsistency between topic and interviewees, lack of optimal interview setting, time constraints, students' inability to bring the source to the classroom, limited nature of topics, and financial constraints.

Keywords: Classroom teachers, social studies, oral history as teaching method.

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, sınıf öğretmenlerinin sosyal bilgiler dersinde sözlü tarih yöntemi kullanımına ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, Afyonkarahisar il merkezindeki ilkokullarda görev yapmakta olan 120 sınıf öğretmeni oluşturmuştur. Veriler açık uçlu soru formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde betimsel analiz tekniği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonucunda; sınıf öğretmenlerinin sosyal bilgiler dersinde programda belirtilen kazanımların işlenmesinde sözlü tarih yönteminden yararlandıkları fakat kaynak kişinin bulunamaması; aile ve öğrencinin görevi önemsememesi; öğrencilerin anlatılanları anlamaması; sonuca ulaşılamaması; konu ile görüşülen kişi arasında uyum olmaması; görüşme için uygun ortam bulunamaması; zamanın sınırlı olması; kaynağın sınıf ortamına getirilememesi; konuların sınırlı olması ve maddi zorluklar gibi sorunlarla karşılaşıldığı tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınıf Öğretmeni, Sosyal Bilgiler, Sözlü Tarih Yöntemi.

1. Introduction

Kyvig and Marty (2000) considered oral history to be a method of recording the first-hand data about historical events collected from the source people and of connecting these data with the previous ones (cited in Sari, 2011). Oral history is an approach in which personal memories of the individuals or communities about an event or events and the views of them about the effects of these events (Creswell, 1998). Thompson (2000) defined oral history as an interpretation of people's memories and experiences based on recorded data. On the other hand, oral history does not only cover descriptions but also analyses of the past events in detail and in a comprehensive manner through recordings, allowing for developing a collective memory (Ritchie, 2003, cited in Akbaba and Kılcan, 2012). In a sense oral history is a type of history which is constructed around people. It connects life with history and expands the scope of history. The heroes of oral history are not only known people, but also unknown and ordinary people. In addition, oral history encourages collaborative studies by teachers and students in an educational environment (Sari, 2007).

In addition to being a method for researchers to collect data about past events and being a method of writing the history it is learning and teaching approach that can be employed in such courses as history and social studies. Through the use of oral history as a teaching method the students at the levels of primary school, secondary school as well as at university level may acquire numerous knowledge, skills and behaviors (Demircioğlu, 2005). Specifically in social studies courses people may act as a source people in the oral history activities. For instance, various people from different occupations (i.e. lawyers, painters, farmers), elderly in the community may provide first-hand information about past events through interviews which may be carried out either in their environment or in classrooms (Sari, 2007). The ultimate goal of social studies course that is one of the basic lessons in basic education is to produce individuals who are productive citizens (Barth and Demirtaş, 1997). The program for the course which was developed based on the constructive premises in 2005 in Turkey ended the teacher- and textbook-based approach and supported student-centered activities to allow for students to learn by doing. The program also encourages the use of in-class and out-classes activities which make students active participants of their learning process, supporting for the view that learning may or may not occur in the school context. Examples for those activities which may occur out of school include oral history activities, family tree construction, keeping diary and projects. More specifically, the activities related to oral history are recommended for the learning domain of learning culture and inheritance and for the unit "I am learning my past" covered in the fourth grade social studies course. The related gains about these activities are also given in the program. These gains are as follows: Students develop a family history using oral history method and based on past objects, recognize those elements which reflect the culture, give examples for games which were played in past by Turks and which are being still played, provide evidence for the fact that cultural elements change over time, describe both their immediate environment and Turkey based on past experiences and visual materials and recognize the role played by Atatürk in the national struggle and in the declaration of the Republic (Ministry of National Education, 2005).

Kabapınar (2012) argued that the social studies program developed in 2005 provides students with an opportunity to use the methods of social sciences. The students are expected to have information about near past of their community, recognizing certain concepts and experiencing the method of history. Oral history allows students to develop empathy towards historical events and to be informed about the differences between past life and present life. They also understand the reasons for past values, life-styles and human behavior. Major advantages of the oral history for students are given as follows: improvement of students' research skills, question-asking skills, social skills; improvement of their understanding of chronology; learning by doing; learning significant history concepts such as continuity and change, and development new perspectives (Demircioğlu, 2005). One of the pedagogical advantages of oral history is to understand social studies concepts. Students may be more interested in interviews with their family members or neighbors (Neuenschwander, 1976). The process involved in the oral history activities is made up of the following four steps (Kabapınar, 2012):

	Selection of the topic
Preparation	Review of primary and secondary sources
	Selection of interviewees
	Selection of interview items
Implementation	Making interviews and recording them (i. e. taking notes and recording the interview)
	Analysis of the data recorded
	Organization of the data
Reporting	Comparison of data with the primary and secondary sources
Presentations	Writing the report
	Presentation of the report to the class

The purpose of this study is to determine the opinions of the classroom teachers concerning the use of oral history as a teaching and learning method in social studies courses. In parallel to this aim the following questions were asked to the participants in the interviews:

1. What are the views of the classroom teachers about the use of oral history activities in social studies course?
2. For them which topics can be covered in the oral history activities in social studies course?
3. What are the views of the participants about their roles in preparation process of oral history activities carried out in the social studies course?
4. What are the views of the participants about the advantages of the oral history activities in the social studies course for the students?
5. What are the views of the participants about the potential problems faced in

the oral history activities in the social studies course?

6. What are the views of the participants about their role in finding materials used in the oral history activities in the social studies course?
7. What are the views of the participants about the evaluation of student work in the oral history activities in the social studies course?

2. Method

The study which aims at identifying the views of the classroom teachers about the use of oral history activities in the social studies course is a descriptive research based on qualitative data. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as a scientific process which questions social life and human-related problems using its own methods and makes sense of both. The process used in such studies is inductive, being from parts to the whole. Major ways of obtaining data in qualitative research are observations, interviews and document analysis which are used to account for concepts, meanings and relationships (Merriam, 1998).

Participants

The participants of the study were a total of 120 classroom teachers working in public basic education schools in Afyonkarahisar/Turkey during the school year of 2013-2014. Of them 74 were females, while 46 males. Concerning experience in teaching profession 32 had a teaching experience of 1-10 years, 47 had a teaching experience of 11-20 years and 41 had a teaching experience of 21 years or more.

Data Collection

Teachers' opinions were collected by using a questionnaire. Answers to open-ended items provide researchers with an opportunity to understand the perspectives of the participants. Given that items used in the structured interviews are developed in advance the categories are clear and researchers interpret the data without any prediction, allowing them to be informed about and understand the perspectives of other people (Patton, 2002). The form was developed by the author. In the questionnaire, there were two questions to determine participants' demographic data and there were seven open-ended questions to determine their opinions about the use of oral history activities in the social studies course.

Data Analysis

The data collected through a questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics techniques. In descriptive technique research may make use of direct quotations in presenting the findings. In this technique the ultimate goal is to introduce basic findings to readers in a brief manner (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In the current study the findings are presented through frequency tables and the direct quotations from the statements of the participants are also given. Patton (2002) regarded the direct quotations as the basic source for raw data and as a tool to reflect the feelings and comprehensions of the participants about the topic studied. In the study the direct

quotations are followed by the codes used for each participant (i.e. Teacher 1= T.1).

Analyses of Validity and Reliability

In regard to the internal validity of the study the data collection tool was examined by five field specialists. The specialists are asked to review the form in terms of the intelligibility and consistence of the open-ended items. Based on their views the items were modified and redesigned. In order to establish the understandability of items the interview form was administrated to ten classroom teachers before the implementation. After reviewing the results obtained in the pilot study the data collection tool was administrated to the participants.

In regard to the reliability of the study the forms filled by the participants were coded from one to 130. Of them incomplete ones were excluded, giving 120 forms for analysis. Each form was read and each answer was analysed in terms of its relation to the topic. Then these forms were analysed and coded by both the author and a field specialist. Both codes were compared and their reliability was found using the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The formula includes the following equality: "reliability= agreement / (agreement+ disagreement)". It was found that the reliability of the study was 87%. This result shows that the study is a reliable one.

3. Findings

The views of the classroom teachers sampled were grouped into positive views and negative views. Table 1 below provides the views of the participants about the use of oral history as a teaching/learning activity in the course of social studies:

Table 1. Views of the participants about the use of oral history as a teaching/learning activity in the course of social studies

Views of the participants	f
Positive views of the participants	
It allows for students to develop empathy towards historical events	42
It allows for students to collect information from primary sources	40
It attracts student interest about past events	20
It directs students to make research	8
It is one of the major steps in history education	5
Negative views of the participants	
Students cannot realize all the steps involved in the process of oral history	18
Teachers do not fully make use of oral history	15

Table 1 shows that the classroom teachers viewed the oral history in the framework of social studies course as follows: oral history method allows for students to develop empathy towards historical events; it allows for students to collect information from primary sources; it attracts student interest about past events; it directs students to make research and it is one of the major steps in history education. Some of the

participants stated this method is not fully employed by either teachers or students.

The examples from the reports by the participants who had positive views about the technique are given as follows:

“Oral history is a method which helps in producing those individuals who could evaluate and criticize the past events based on the related conditions.” (T-25).

“Oral history is an activity which makes students to understand the topic better and which directs them to make research.” (T-78).

The report by the participant who stated that this method is not so much used is as follows: *“This method is included in the program for social studies course, but we could not find enough time to employ it. In addition, there occur some problems related to students or to families. We know it, but we could not use it.” (T-102).*

Table 2 gives the views of the participants about the topics which can be covered in the oral history activities in social studies course.

Table 2. Views of the participants about the topics which can be covered in the oral history activities in social studies course

Views of the participants	f
Topics	
Cultural elements	54
Weddings	15
Holidays	13
Food culture	8
Folk dances	3
Local clothing	1
Developing family history	48
Comparing past and present	35
Life-styles of past people	10
Old games	8
Old objects	4
Old communication tools	2
Occupations	15
Proverbs, rhymes	4

As can be seen in Table 2 the classroom teachers sampled mostly make use of the oral history method for the unit “I am learning my past” included in the fourth grade social studies course. They reported that they employed this method for the following topics: cultural elements (weddings, local clothing, food culture, folk dances and ho-

liday), family history, comparisons between past times and present time (in terms of life-styles, materials and objects, games, communication devices), occupations, proverbs and rhymes.

Examples from the reports by the participants in this regard are given as follows:

"I use this method in the unit "I am learning my past" covered in the social studies courses for the topics of food culture, folk dances, holidays, weddings and games." (T-61);

"I am using this method for the topics such as developing family albums, old games, and old communication devices." (T-76);

"It can be used in such topics as comparisons of old and new games, holidays of past and of present time." (T-80);

"I am using it in such topics as developing family trees, traditions, proverbs, occupations, etc." (T-36).

Table 3 presents the views of the participants about their roles in preparation process of oral history activities in social studies course.

Table 3. Views of the participants about their roles in preparation process of oral history activities in social studies course

Views of the participants	f
In developing interview forms	91
In guiding their practice	27
In selecting the source people	5

Table 3 shows that the classroom teachers participated in the study mostly helped students in developing interview forms, in guiding their practice and in selecting the source people. The following examples show the views of the participants in this regard:

T-1 "I help my students in developing and printing the interview forms."

T-15 "I tell them how to implement the process of oral history activities using examples from previous studies."

T-56 "I help them in developing interview items and in taking necessary permissions."

Table 4 shows the views of the participants about their help in finding necessary materials used in oral history activities.

Table 4. Views of the participants about their help in finding necessary materials used in oral history activities

Views of the participants	f
Camera	43
Sound recording tool	27
Photographs	20
Computer	15
Visual aids	10
Source people	8
Old objects	4

As can be seen in Table 4 the participants reported that they mostly help their students in finding cameras, sound recording equipment which should be used in interviews. They also stated that they assist their students in identifying and finding old pictures, photographs, computers, visual aids, and old materials as well as in selecting proper source people or interviewees. Related statements from the reports by participants are given as follows:

T-55 "I help them in finding old materials, objects, tools and photographs."

T-7 "I assist them in finding sound recording equipment and camera to be used in interviews."

Table 5 below presents the views of the participants about advantages of the use of the oral history method in social studies course.

Table 5. Views of the participants about advantages of the use of the oral history method in social studies course

Positive views of the participants	f
It provides long-lasting learning.	36
It provides learning by doing.	14
Students learn the past from primary sources.	13
It attracts student interest and motivates students to learn.	11
It directs students to make research.	9
It makes students more active.	9
It enables students to develop a historical empathy.	7
Through these activities students acquire the skills of scientific process.	5
It allows for making concrete the abstract topics.	4
It enables students to socialize.	4
It allows students for making connections between present time and past.	2

Negative views of the participants	
I do not think that it is useful	2

As can be seen in Table 5 the participants have mostly positive views about the oral history method used in social studies courses. The advantages of the oral history activities used in social studies course reported by the participants are as follows: long-lasting learning; learning by doing; being informed about the past based on primary sources; increases in student interest and student motivation; increases in student desire to make research; active student participation in the learning process; development of an empathy towards historical events and scientific process skills; making abstract topics more concrete, socialization of students and development correlations between past and present. On the other hand, two of the participants argued that this method is not useful for students due to the fact all steps included in the method are not fully realized. Some of the reports by the participants who regarded the use of the oral history method in the context of social studies course are given as follows:

T-4 "Given that students are active participants of the process the long-lasting learning occurs."

T-13 "Students are given an opportunity to make comparisons between past and present."

T-15 "This method regards each student as a scientist and encourages his skills of making research, asking questions, speaking and listening. They also develop empathy towards the historical events."

T-45 "Given that students learn about events from primary sources their learning is long-lasting and also, their socialization and communicative skills improves."

T-55 "Students become more motivated as a result of listening to different people concerning past experiences."

One of two participants who did not regard the oral history activities as desired stated *"given that we cannot employ all the steps involved in the oral history activities I do not think it is not so much useful for students."* (T-46).

Table 6 below shows the views of the participants about the potential problems in using oral history activities.

Table 6. Views of the participants about the potential problems in using oral history activities

Views of the participants	f
Inability to find proper source persons	49
Ignorance by family members and students	20
Lack of comprehension of what has been told	12
Not reaching conclusions	10
Inconsistency between topic and interviewees	8
Lack of optimal interview setting	6
Time constraints	6
Inability to bring the sources to the classrooms	2
Limited nature of topics	2
Economic problems	2

Table 6 shows the major problems in the course of oral history activities reported by the participants. These are as follows: inability to find proper source persons; ignorance of the activities by both family members and students; lack of comprehension of what has been told among students; inability to reach conclusions; inconsistency between topic and interviewees; lack of optimal interview setting; time constraints; inability to bring the sources to the classrooms; limited nature of topics; economic problems. The examples from the statements of the participants about the problems experienced in the use of the oral history activities in the social studies courses are given as follows:

T-15 “Students employ the data they collected. However, they experience problems in reaching conclusions using these data and findings.”

T-2 “Family members do not pay necessary attention and ignore the oral history assignments assigned to their children.”

T-11 “Interviewees cannot provide students with information which students could easily understand. Therefore, students cannot comprehend this information and cannot present it in the classroom.”

T-16 “Students cannot easily access to necessary equipment to be used in interviews with their family members and other people. Therefore, they have to take notes during these interviews. Taking notes is long-lasting and a boring activity for students. In addition, the interviewees should repeat their reports in order to allow for students to write them completely. It is also boring for interviewees.”

T-48 “When the data obtained in the oral history activities are not dependent on documents or other evidences incorrect information may be given to students.”

T-64 “Problems experienced in regard to oral history activities include the inability to find proper source people or interviewees and ignorance of family members.”

Table 7 gives the views of the participants about the evaluation of student work in the oral history activities in the social studies course.

Table 7. Views of the participants about the evaluation of student work in the oral history activities in the social studies course

Views of the participants	f
Evaluation of student presentations	37
Evaluation of the reports based on the evaluation forms given in advance	7
Evaluation of the steps covered in the planning phase	5
Self-evaluation	2
Peer evaluation	2

As can be seen in Table 7 classroom teachers interviewed employed various evaluation techniques for the oral history activities. These techniques reported are as follows: evaluation of student presentations, evaluation of the reports based on the evaluation forms given in advance, of the steps covered in the planning phase, self-evaluation forms and peer-evaluation forms. Some reports of the participants concerning the evaluation of the student work in the oral history activities are as follows:

T-76 “Students share their findings with their peers in the classroom. I evaluate the presentation of the students.”

T-4 “In the evaluation process I employ self-evaluation forms and student evaluate their own work.”

T-75 “I evaluate the student work in oral history activities in terms of planning, being interested in the activity and presentation of the end-product.”

4. Discussion

The findings of the study which aims at identifying the views of the classroom teachers about the use of oral history activities in the social studies course showed that the participants are aware of the oral history method and they partly make use of it. Some of the participants stated that this method is not fully employed by either teachers or students and that they could not use it due to time constraints. The classroom teachers participated in the study viewed the oral history in the framework of social studies course as follows: oral history method allows for students to develop empathy towards historical events; it allows for students to collect information from primary sources; it attracts student interest about past events; it directs students to make research and it is one of the major steps in history education. Zarillo (2004) argued that oral history method provides an opportunity to develop a connection between elderly and younger people and to produce students who are efficient thinkers, researchers, readers, writers, speakers and experts in technology as well as good citizens.

In the study it was found that the classroom teachers sampled mostly make use

of the oral history method for the unit “I am learning my past” included in the fourth grade social studies course. They reported that they employed this method for the following topics: cultural elements (weddings, local clothing, food culture, folk dances and holidays), family history, comparisons between past times and present time (in terms of life-styles, materials and objects, games, communication devices), occupations, proverbs and rhymes. It is seen that topics covered in the oral history activities are mostly those which are related to daily life. Common topics studied in the oral history activities are life-styles of past, house-hold activities, life of women and children, education, traditions and customs, holidays, diseases and natural disasters. These topics allow to observe continuity and change over time and to make comparisons between past and present (Kabapınar, 2012).

The classroom teachers participated in the study reported that they mostly helped students in developing interview forms, in guiding their practice and in selecting the source people. As stated by Kabapınar (2012) the process of oral history in an educational context is consisted of four steps, namely preparation, implementation, reporting and presentation. In the first steps, namely preparation, the topic to be investigated is selected, primary and secondary sources are reviewed, interviewees and source people are selected and interview items are developed.

The participants of the current study reported that they mostly help their students in finding cameras, sound recording equipment which should be used in interviews. They also stated that they assist their students in identifying and finding old pictures, photographs, computers, visual aids, and old materials as well as in selecting proper source people or interviewees. In the interviews carried out as part of the oral history activities old photographs, pictures and sound recording equipment should be employed (Welton and Mallan, 1999).

The classroom teachers took part in the present study reported that oral history activities in the course of social studies have numerous advantages for students. Such advantages reported include the following: long-lasting learning; learning by doing; being informed about the past based on primary sources; increases in student interest and student motivation; increases in student desire to make research; active student participation in the learning process; development of an empathy towards historical events and scientific process skills; making abstract topics more concrete, socialization of students and development correlations between past and present. Whitman (2000) argued that oral history activities are entertaining for students and that during these activities students are given an opportunity to take part in practices and to hold a responsibility. Therefore, students have an opportunity to make history through these activities. They also have a chance to make human connections with (cited in Avcı Akçalı and Aslan, 2012). Sarı (2007) analysed the effects of the oral history activities in social studies course on student achievement and student skills and attitudes. In the study it was concluded that student achievement in social studies course delivered through oral history method increased. It was also found that various skills of students improved, including organizing information, separating facts from views and related information from unrelated one, perception of past generations and of continuity and changes over time. İncegöl (2010) analysed the delivery of the unit “I am learning my

past” in terms of learning of the history of games and toys and aimed at improving the student attitude towards oral history activities. In the study the students were interviewed in regard to their views about oral history activities used. They reported that they entertained in the course, they felt themselves as researchers and historians, they satisfied with their work and they were proud of themselves. Therefore, it may be argued that in the courses where those learning techniques such as oral history activities which make students active participant of their learning process there are numerous advantages for students.

The major problems in the course of oral history activities reported by the participants are as follows: inability to find proper source persons; ignorance of the activities by both family members and students; lack of comprehension of what has been told among students; inability to reach conclusions; inconsistency between topic and interviewees; lack of optimal interview setting; time constraints; inability to bring the sources to the classrooms; limited nature of topics; economic problems. There may be several problems before the oral history activities such as problems of using recording equipment, lack necessary interview-related skills and experience, lack of well preparation for interviews, requirement of extensive time and effort for interviews and lack of student interest and motivation towards oral history activities. In order to avoid such problems there should a well-established planning and implementation. Those people who will conduct interviews should be carefully chosen and should be trained about how to make interviews. In addition, they should be ready to make use of primary and secondary sources and should have necessary qualities. Those people who will conduct interviews should be aware of which questions should be asked when and at which level they may intervene the interviewee. On the other hand, those people chosen for interviews should represent the related sample and the selection process should be carefully carried out. In addition, teachers should guide the students in this process and facilitate the preparation process to avoid the potential problems students may come across (Avcı Akçalı and Aslan, 2012).

The classroom teachers participated in the present study reported that in the evaluation process for the oral history activities they employed several evaluation tools such as self-evaluation forms and peer-evaluation forms for the student presentations. Kabapınar (2012) stated that students should present their end-product to the class following the oral history and that teachers may evaluate these products using several evaluation techniques, including “evaluation form for oral history activity”, “self-evaluation form” or “peer-evaluation form”. Fonsino (1980) argued that those teachers who plan to employ oral history should realize some certain steps. First, at the end of the study teachers should make an evaluation and give marks to the student work. Each of the decisions made about this topic should be justified and be based on a concrete basis. The process of assessment should be standardized and students must involve in this process (cited in Avcı Akçalı and Aslan, 2012).

The following suggestions were developed based on the findings obtained in the study:

- Classroom teachers may be informed about the steps involved in the method of oral history in in-service activities. However, instead of theoretical infor-

mation about oral history teachers may be offered opportunity to practice their information about it.

- Pre-service classroom teachers may be given opportunities to deal with oral history activities that can be used for social studies courses.
- In addition to teachers both students and parents may also be informed by the field specialists about the goals and significance of oral history activities.

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