

Skills Education through Geography Curriculum in Turkey

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We will talk about...

- Why a new geography curriculum?
- The new curriculum's general approach to geography education
- Old curriculum
- Skills, Geographic Skills and Geography Curriculum
- Geographic Skills in 2005 Geography Curriculum



Why a new geography curriculum?

- Today, we have to deal with change and issues associated with it such as new developments and technologies in our societies more than ever.
- Dealing with the change needs an ongoing learning and problem-solving skills.
- In order to prepare pupils to the expectations of changing society, there have been recently fundamental innovations being carried out in all subject curricula in Turkey.



The new curriculum's general approach to geography education

- Student-centred, enquiry-based and more flexible (NGC, 2005).
- It brought a new approach, method and content for geography education in Turkey.
- It provides a holistic approach through which aims to develop geographic **knowledge base, skills, values and attitudes** in students with particular attention to pedagogical concerns and in the context of contemporary geographic content.




Old curriculum...

- The traditional nature of geography education in Turkey often disregarded the humanistic, utilitarian and questioning functions of geography
- Geographic skills, fieldwork and inquiry-based activities (including decision-making and problem solving activities) were also completely neglected in the curriculum.
- Such content and practice has led people (society, stakeholders, students and even geography teachers) to have an incomplete image of geography as a discipline, that it is a purely a general knowledge subject



Four axes of 2005 curriculum

1. **Location analysis:** Places/spaces, Turkey, Regions and countries
2. **Geographic Themes:** Climate, landforms, soil, plants, water...Population, settlements, economy, politics, governing...Environment and society
3. **Geographic Skills:** Methods, Techniques, Applications
4. **Attitudes and Values:** Towards the nature, Towards the people

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- In the last twenty years, in the world there have been significant developments with respect to pedagogy in that wide range of active learning strategies are adopted
 - ‘....pupils are involved in handling and presenting data, participating in discussions, critically evaluating alternative views, role-playing, problem-solving, and decision-making, as well as in the more traditional essay writing and note taking activities. The intention is to widen the potential learning outcomes attainable through geography’ (*Burkill, et al., 1999: Internet*)




The new curriculum

- Emphasis is on geographical enquiry and progress rather than delivering some concrete body of geographical knowledge.
- Then it gives a great deal of importance that various learning methods should involve students actively through an activity-based and constructivist education.
- These are possible only by developing skills that will enable students to observe patterns, associations, and spatial order. In fact, many of the skills that students are expected to learn involve the use of tools and technologies that are part of the process of geographic inquiry.



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- Delivery of geographical and transferable (key) skills, that is skills for employability and life, namely critical thinking, creative thinking skills, communication and empathy skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, ICT skills, skills of using Turkish effectively, entrepreneurship skills through geography education is strongly embedded in the curriculum. Likewise, it is stressed and, when necessary, given guidelines throughout the curriculum that students are to be encouraged to make geographical enquiry using geographical skills



Skills, Geographic Skills and Geography Curriculum

- Geography has a utilitarian value for our lives.
- It helps us to get by in a complex world by providing us necessary skills for that.
- Geography is a very good tool to equip pupils with the skills of new world especially in terms of life-long learning and problem-solving,
- And it is essential that students develop the skills that will enable them to observe patterns, associations, and spatial order. In fact, many of the skills that students are expected to learn involve the use of tools and technologies that are part of the process of geographic inquiry.



Previously skills in Turkish context

- Skills have traditionally been neglected in Turkish context.
- Skills were ill-defined and were not understood well by geography teachers.
- Ozturk (2005) found that many geography teachers who took part in his research could not understand what it was meant by geographical skills so further explanation had to be given during the interviews to make the concept known. These teachers did not seem to recognise that geography has a big potential to enable students to process information, do critical thinking, navigate their way or communicate effectively.



Skills?

Skill could be defined as an individual's ability to do something easily and competently resulting from intellectual and psycho-motor efforts created in appropriate learning environments (NGC, 2005).



Skills help us ...

- understand the world around us.
- in sustainable management of the world's resources such as effective use of water and energy sources.
- the cultural environment that is created by interaction of people and environment.
- understand data gathered on the nature and humans' work on that.
- Therefore, skills are related with collecting information and data, processing them, presenting them and finally evaluating them in order to make best use of them in different contexts.



By sum

As seen in above discussion geographic skills provide us necessary tools and techniques to think geographically. Using these ideas, a set of geographic skills is developed when writing 2005 Geography Curriculum of Turkey. During the development process, we first look at how skills are conceptualised in different nations' geography curriculum such as USA and England. Then, geographic skills for Turkish context are developed as will be seen next.



Geographic Skills in 2005 Geography Curriculum

- Map skills
- Observation skills
- Fieldwork skills
- Geographic inquiry skills
- Table, graphic and diagram preparing and recommendation skills
- Chronology Skills
- Skill of Using Evidence
- Skill of Perceiving Change and Continuity



Map Skills

Maps are very essential tools for geographic research and education because they assist in the visualization of space. With this skill, it is aimed that students will be able to transfer and process data on maps, to find location on maps, to distinguish different types of maps and select relevant maps for their specific use, to make calculations using maps (e.g. length, scale, direction), to perceive spatial distribution, to interpret maps correctly, and to create sketch maps.



Observation Skills

Students are expected to develop skills of perceiving geographic events around themselves. Once perceived, they should be able to define these events, explain their cause and effect, draw conclusions and make predictions. Students, then, are expected to compare and contrast similar events, constitute new relationships between them. They should, also, record their observations and transfer the data to different formats and mediums and make comparisons with previously known knowledge and observations. They should be able to use their observations in their research and future planning. Finally, they should draw conclusions on how to behave when they come across again with a similar event.




Fieldwork Skills

Geographers have realised outside school experience is one of the most important aspects of geography education for a long time. Fieldwork provides opportunities for students to examine the world at first-hand. Through fieldwork, student will be able experience natural world (e.g. landforms, rocks, rivers) and the concrete evidences of the interaction between humans and the environments such as bridges, roads, tunnels, houses, factories. While experiencing these, students can acquire fieldwork skills in practice. Fieldwork that is interactive and participative also allows a constructivist learning environment as aimed by the curriculum. Fieldwork skills consist of followings: determination of the objectives of the fieldwork; planning and designing the work; gathering necessary materials and preparing them for the work; the use of necessary tools, devices and technologies; collecting and recording data on the field; analysing data; drawing conclusions; developing recommendations and writing a report.



Geographic inquiry skills

Geography is concerned with describing and classifying natural phenomena and patterns, with explanation, analysis and interpretation, making decisions and predictions and making evaluations and personal judgements. Students, then, are expected to involve above stated higher-order skills when carrying out geographic inquiries. In fact, these could also be termed critical thinking skills. Such skills are not unique to geography and involve a number of generic thinking processes, such as knowing, inferring, analyzing, judging, hypothesizing, generalizing, predicting, and decision-making. These have applications to all levels of geographic inquiry and constitute the bases on which students can build competencies in applying geographic skills to geographic inquiry. A new and important tool in geographic inquiry is the spatial database, or geographic information system (GIS) whose use is strongly advocated in the curriculum when possible. Geographic information systems make the process of presenting and analyzing geographic information easier, so they accelerate geographic inquiry.



Table, graphic and diagram preparing and recommendation skills

As seen above, one of the most important aspects of geographic research is to collect data. But then, we need to present analysed data through appropriate means. In this respect, 'graphicacy' is a very important medium for geographers to present their data. Construction of wide range of graphs, tables, diagrams are very important for geography literate people. What are to be learned with this skill by students are: to select appropriate data and classification; to create table, graph and diagram appropriate to data; to use and select appropriate photos; to make cross-sections; to use tables, graphs and diagrams appropriately; to interpret them and to synthesise them by also making comparisons.



Chronology Skills

The sense of time might mean different things for different people. The development of geographic phenomena in time and their relationship with each other in terms of cause and effect could be described in different ways. In geography when talked about time, firstly geologic time zones need to be understood. Apart from that, students gain perception of long time periods in geography and perception of yearly, seasonally, daily periods. They also gain time perception of ecologic cycles.



Skill of Using Evidence

As stated earlier, fieldwork has an important place in geographic studies. During the fieldworks we collect primary data usually in the form of samples and evidences. In geography, we also use some archaeological and historic data that could be used as evidences. Furthermore, a newspaper report, picture or photograph could also be used as evidence. In this respect, students are supposed to use evidences of fossils, rocks that belong to geologic processes, evidences related to climatic conditions, and economic and politic phenomena.



Skill of Perceiving Change and Continuity

Both natural and human phenomena change in time because of their own dynamics and human effects. Human phenomena are especially changing rapidly. Thus, geography classes need to address the changes happening around us, the reasons for these changes and their possible consequences. Students, then, need to acquire skills of understanding and managing these changes. In this respect, students are expected to gain skills of finding similarities and differences, perceiving change and continuity in time and questioning of reasons for change and continuity in geographic processes.