

Enhancing Practices in Social Studies Education: An Examination of Graduate Dissertations Employing Action Research

Ahmet SAĞLAMGÖNCÜ¹, Handan DEVECİ²

¹ Ministry of National Education, Adana, Türkiye  0000-0003-4767-1795

² Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Türkiye  0000-0001-9765-2117

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ABSTRACT

Practice-based research is perceived as significantly important to enhance the quality of social studies education in the literature. In particular, graduate dissertations have great potential for contributing to the literature, and using research methods, and designs that improve practice is valuable in graduate-level research. This study focuses on dissertations that employ action research. This practice-based research design can be used to find solutions to instructional problems and improve the quality of social studies instruction. The study's primary aim is to examine the graduate dissertations with action research design completed in the field of social studies education in Turkey in terms of various variables. Document analysis, a qualitative research method, was used, and 82 graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education were examined. Descriptive analysis was performed in data analysis. The results showed that only few graduate dissertations were completed by using action research in social studies education, these dissertations were mostly at the master's level, qualitative research methods were employed in most of the dissertations, teaching-learning approaches, methods, and techniques were mostly addressed in the data collections processes, and most of the dissertations did not involve an action or lesson plan. In addition, it was found that in more than half of the dissertations, cycles were not used, researchers were in the role of practitioner-researchers, and the most commonly used data collection tool was interviews. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended to follow processes and report findings following the nature of action research.

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Keywords:

Social studies education, graduate education, action research.

1. Introduction

Social studies is a course that encourages individuals to be sensitive to their environment, pay attention to social problems, develop problem-solving and decision-making skills, and grow as global citizen (Russell, Waters, & Turner, 2014). It is a discipline that deals with human beings and their place in society by using various social sciences, strengthening their role in society by equipping them with relevant knowledge, skills, and values, and thus enabling them to occupy a happy, peaceful, and secure place in life while being sensitive to the rights of other living beings (Deveci & Bayram, 2022). The social studies course exploits the contents of history, geography, law, philosophy, psychology, economy, political science, literature, anthropology, and natural sciences so that individuals can achieve these outcomes. These contents constantly change with current developments in those disciplines (NCSS, 2022). Social studies educators should be aware of this changing nature and make the course content meaningful for students with the methods, techniques, and materials they adopt.

¹Corresponding author's address: Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Eskişehir/Türkiye

e-mail: hanil@anadolu.edu.tr

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Findings from scientific research are of great importance for effective practices in social studies education. For social studies education to achieve its objectives and be more effective, scientific research studies in which different approaches are employed to identify and solve instructional problems and to improve social studies education should be carried out by field experts.

Social studies is a course that is inherently for a social life due to its content. In the 21st century, technological developments lead to rapid changes in societies in terms of social, cultural, and economic aspects. Therefore, for effective social studies education, teachers should implement practices that put students in the center of instructional processes and attract their attention to the content (Russell, Waters & Turner, 2014).

Scientific research is divided into two groups: theoretical and empirical. While theoretical research is about producing knowledge, empirical research is for improving practice and solving problems in practice (Karasar, 2017). One approach to research that field experts can use to find solutions to problems experienced in social studies education is action research, an empirical research approach (Deniz, 2021).

Action research was first conducted by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, in the 1940s (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007). In the field of education, action research was carried out systematically for the first time by Stephen Corey in the 1950s (Mertler, 2017). In the Turkish context, graduate dissertation studies adopting action research design in educational sciences have existed since 1997, while those in social studies education have been carried out since 2007 (YÖK, 2022).

Action research involves two basic concepts: action and research. While the "action" aspect is about enhancing practice, the "research" aspect is about creating knowledge about practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Action research is philosophically based on critical theory, which provides philosophy and methods for research focusing on change and development (Glesne, 2020; Patton, 2018). The basis of action research is the understanding of being changed, changing and developing (Ekiz, 2020). Action research studies in social studies education are used in this concept to improve social studies practices.

Action research is a systematic research design adopted to gather data about how schools work, what is done in the instructional processes, and how students can learn better (Mills, 2014). Thus, various practices are implemented in real classroom environments or schools to understand and improve the quality of teaching through action research (Elliott, 2001; Johnson, 2019). Findings obtained from such practices allow teachers to solve problems they experience in their classrooms (Ekiz, 2020; Uzuner, 2005). Likewise, findings revealed from various applications in action research studies on social studies education offer solutions to issues experienced by social studies teachers in instructional processes.

Teachers sometimes think that educational theories proposed by experts do not relate to practice (Elliott, 2001). This idea arises when the relationship between educational theories and practice cannot be established. In this sense, action research is a collaborative research attempt. It ensures that the link between theory and practice is strengthened by enabling cooperation between education experts and teachers (Johnson, 2019; Uzuner, 2005). In particular, the cooperation between field experts and social studies teachers in action research studies strengthens the relationship between educational theories and practices of social studies education.

Action research to be conducted in social studies classes is important to understand the quality of social studies education in schools and to ensure that these classes are more effective with various practices. However, valid and reliable results will only come out if action research attempts are in accordance with the nature of action research. However, various studies that examined action research studies in education in Turkey showed that these studies did not have a cyclical or spiral process, the implementation periods were short, the validity and reliability analyses were not comprehensively reported, and the procedures were not described in detail (Çalışkan & Serçe, 2018; Kayır, 2021; Flood, 2022; Turhan Tuerkkan, Yolcu, and Karataş, 2019). Researchers in the field of social studies education who plan to conduct action research should reflect the philosophy and characteristics of action research in their studies (Zuber Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). The basic characteristics of action research can be listed as follows (Berg, 2001; Freankel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012; Johnson, 2019; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mertler, 2017; Uzun, 2016):

- It aims to produce solutions to the problems experienced in practice.
- It is application-based research. The implementation process is critically observed.

- The implementation process is observed from a critical perspective. It aims to find solutions to problems identified as is experienced in practice.
- It enables the enhancement of practice. It strengthens the relationship between educational theories and practices in instructional processes.
- It contains steps such as identifying the problem, developing an action plan to solve the problem, implementing the action plan, examining the implementation in depth, re-planning to improve the implementation, and implementing the new plan. Action research is of better quality as the cycle repeats.
- Various data collection tools are developed to improve practice. When, how, and how often the data will be collected is laid out within a plan.
- Reflective inquiries are performed on the data collected during the implementation to enhance the process. With these inquiries, new implementation plans that are expected to be more effective are prepared and put into practice.
- Problems experienced in the research setting are intervened within a plan. The implementation of the prepared action plans contributes to the development of both the researcher and the participants. It contributes to social and cultural change in the research context. Practice is improved with the change experienced.
- It brings together education experts and teachers. This cooperation motivates education experts and teachers in a planned manner.
- It takes into account the history and culture of the environment in focus, individuals' communication with each other and their emotional state. Thus, the development in the research environment is ensured as a whole.

An examination of social studies as a field of study reveals the need for research studies that involve practices that would enhance the instruction of the social studies course and social studies education, address the content in the context of teachers, students, families and the society in a multidimensional way and are structured in a methodologically rigid way (Deveci & Bayram, 2022). In this regard, action research has been increasingly preferred by researchers in graduate dissertations (Kayır, 2021; Namlı Altıntaş & Koçak, 2021). The graduate dissertations adopting an action research design in social studies education should strengthen the relationship between theory and practice and offer solutions to the problems experienced in the classroom. Examining the graduate dissertations making use of action research in social studies education from various aspects based on the characteristics and philosophy of this would reveal the understanding of action research in social studies education. At the same time, such an attempt would contribute to better quality action research in the field.

In the literature, there are studies examining graduate dissertations and research articles with the action research design in the field of education (Çalışkan & Serçe, 2018; Kayır, 2021; Namlı Altıntaş & Koçak, 2021; Sel, 2022; Turhan Türkkkan, Yolcu & Karataş, 2019). Various studies report that action research is the least preferred research design in educational sciences (Selçuk, Palancı Kandemir, & Dündar, 2014; Çalışkan & Serçe, 2018). Similarly, there is a limited number of graduate dissertations completed with action research in social studies education (Çakmak & Taşkıran, 2020; Dilek, Baysan & Öztürk, 2018; Oğuz Haçat & Demir, 2018; Şimşek, 2019). The first thesis using action research in Social Studies education in Turkey was written in 2007. Between 2007 and 2021, 1687 postgraduate thesis studies were conducted on social studies education. Out of these 1687 graduate dissertations, 82 dissertations adopted an action research design (Turkish Council of Higher Education -YÖK, 2022). In this context, a detailed analysis of the studies on social studies education with an action research design is thought to promote a holistic perspective on the realization of action research in this field and would guide the action research studies planned to be conducted in the future.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the graduate dissertations adopting action research design in the field of social studies education in Turkey. The following research questions were addressed based on this aim. What is the distribution of action research studies at the graduate level in social studies education in terms of:

- year,
- level of graduate study,
- university,

- educational stage focused,
- type of instructional implementation,
- research method,
- model,
- cycle,
- sampling method,
- having a pilot study or not,
- the researcher's role,
- data collection tools,
- validity and reliability studies of data collection tools,
- methods of data analysis,
- research validity and reliability,
- having a validity committee or not,
- number of class hours during the procedure,
- reporting information on learning outcomes or not,
- using a lesson/action plan or not,
- and how the decision is made to terminate the implementation process?

2. Methodology

This section presents explanations regarding the research model, data collection tools, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study.

2.1. Research Model

Document analysis, a qualitative research method, was used in this study to examine graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education in Turkey. Thus, it aimed to reveal the understanding of using action research patterns in this field.

2.2. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

All the electronic documents examined in this study were obtained through the Dissertation Database of Turkish Higher Education Council on 25.01.2022. The keywords "social studies" and "action research", both in English and Turkish, were used to reach the dissertations in the database. The keywords were searched in the dissertations' titles, abstracts and indices. In this way, a total of 84 electronic files of dissertations completed between 2007-2021 were retrieved. A preliminary analysis of the dissertation files was performed in terms of set criteria including the availability of the dissertation content, relating to social studies education and adopting the action research design. Consequently, one dissertation with no available content and two dissertations that did not employ action research were excluded for not meeting the criteria. Thus, the dataset contained 82 graduate dissertations that adopted action research in social studies education and were completed between 2007 and 2021. Each file was given a number between 1 and 82.

An analysis form was developed to examine the graduate dissertations carried out following the action research design in social studies education. The form was prepared before the dissertations were examined. While developing this form, themes from the literature on action research were used. In this way, it was ensured that the graduate dissertations were examined in line with the characteristics of action research.

The draft form was presented to experts with experience in action research for their feedback. The final version of the analysis form was then finalized in light of the expert opinion. The form consisted of 20 items developed following the aims of the study. Using this form, all the dissertations included in the study were examined separately. The number of the dissertation examined was noted on each analysis form.

Limitations: This study is limited to the graduate dissertations adopting action research on social studies education between 2007-2021 in Turkey. To retrieve the dissertations, the keywords "social studies" and "action research", both in English and Turkish, were searched in title, abstracts and indices on 25.01.2022 from the Dissertation Database of Turkish Higher Education Council. The data on the number of dissertations in social studies at the graduate level were obtained using the keyword "social studies" in dissertation titles.

2.3. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was performed in data analysis. Therefore, the data obtained in the scope of the study were summarized and interpreted considering the themes determined following the research questions. The data were presented in tables in the form of frequencies (f) and percentages (%).

2.4. Trustworthiness

Re-analysis and receiving expert opinions were used to ensure the study's trustworthiness. All the documents handled with the analysis form were re-analyzed after two months. The results of the second analysis were compared with the initial analysis. The differences between the analyses performed at different times were reviewed. An independent field expert was asked to analyze all the documents using the analysis form after the re-analysis by the researcher. The results of the analyses conducted by the two experts were seen to be almost the same. Regarding the results that were different were discussed to reach an agreement.

2.4. Ethical

To ensure the compliance of the research with the ethical rules, a decision document was obtained from Anadolu University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with the date 02.05.2022 and protocol number 14799.

3. Findings

The findings revealed through the data analysis are presented in this section. The research findings are summarized in tables and interpreted.

The yearly distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education is presented in Table 1:

Table 1. *Distribution of Dissertations by Years*

Year	f	%
2007	2	2.44
2009	1	1.22
2010	5	6.10
2011	4	4.88
2012	3	3.66
2013	2	2.44
2014	2	2.44
2015	5	6.10
2016	5	6.10
2017	3	3.66
2018	10	12.20
2019	27	32.93
2020	9	10.98
2021	4	4.88
Total	82	100

The highest number of dissertations adopting action research in social studies education were completed in 2019 and the lowest number was in 2009. Since 2009, there has been an increase in the number of dissertations using the action research design. However, following 2020, there has been a decrease in number. The interruption of face-to-face education in schools with the worldwide pandemic in 2020 can be said to have decreased the number of practice-based action research studies in recent years.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on the level of graduate study is presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Level of Graduate Study*

Level of Graduate Study	f	%
Master's	57	69.51
PhD	25	30.49
Total	82	100

Most of the graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education and completed between 2007-2021 were at the Master's level (69.51%). Those at the Ph.D. level were in the minority (30.49%).

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on universities is presented in Table 3:

Table 3. *Distribution of Theses by Universities*

University	Master's		PhD		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Marmara University	21	36.84	9	36	30	36.59
Sakarya University	9	15.79	1	4	10	12.20
Gazi University	-	-	6	24	6	7.32
Erciyes University	4	7.02	-	-	4	4.88
Usak University	3	5.26	1	4	4	4.88
Anadolu University	-	-	3	12	3	3.66
Adiyaman University	3	5.26	-	-	3	3.66
Bartın University	2	3.51	1	4	3	3.66
Necmettin Erbakan University	2	3.51	1	4	3	3.66
Adnan Menderes University	2	3.51	-	-	2	2.44
Afyon Kocatepe University	2	3.51	-	-	2	2.44
Ataturk University	-	-	2	8	2	2.44
Eskisehir Osmangazi University	2	3.51	-	-	2	2.44
Akdeniz University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Ankara University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Istanbul University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Kirsehir Ahi Evran University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Kütahya Dumlupınar University	-	-	1	4	1	1.22
Mugla Sitki Kocman University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Nigde Omer Halisdemir University	1	1.75	-	-	1	1.22
Total	57		25		82	100

As is seen in Table 3, more than one thirds of the dissertations were completed at Marmara University (36.59%) followed by Sakarya University (12.20%) and Gazi University (7.32%). Other universities, including Erciyes University, Uşak University, Anadolu University, Adyaman University, Bartın University, Necmettin Erbakan University, and Adnan Menderes University, have also undertaken dissertation studies using the action research design in social studies graduate education.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on the educational stage in which the instructional activities were conducted are presented in Table 4:

Table 4. *Distribution of Dissertations by Educational Stage Focused*

Educational Stage	<i>f</i>	%
Middle school	56	68.29
Elementary school	11	13.41
University	9	10.98
Preschool	6	7.32
Total	82	100

As is seen in Table 4, the implementation of the action research in the scope of dissertation research in social studies education was mostly conducted in middle schools (69.29%) followed by elementary schools (13.41%) and universities (10.98%). There were also action research studies at the pre-school level (7.32%), covering content of social studies education.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on the research method is presented in Table 5:

Table 5. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Research Method*

Research Method	<i>f</i>	%
Qualitative	65	79.27
Mixed-Method	9	10.98
Not specified	8	9.76
Total	82	100

Most graduate dissertations adopted a qualitative research method (79.27%). While a limited number of dissertations reported using mixed-method design (10.98%). However, some of the dissertations (9.76%) had no specification for a research method.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on the content being taught in the implementation process is presented in Table 6:

Table 6. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Type of Instructional Implementation*

Implementation	<i>f</i>	%
Teaching-Learning Approaches, Methods and Techniques	33	38.82
Teaching Skills	15	17.65
Teaching Concepts	8	9.41
Values Education	7	8.24
Out-of-School Learning	7	8.24
Literacy Education	5	5.88
Socio-Cultural Education	3	3.53
Philosophy Education	2	2.35
Measurement and Evaluation	2	2.35
Material Development	1	1.18
Character Education	1	1.18
Citizenship Education	1	1.18
Total	85	100

As seen in Table 6, dissertations adopting action research in social studies education mostly addressed teaching-learning approaches, methods, and techniques (38.82%) in their implementation processes. This was followed by teaching skills (17.65%), teaching concepts (9.41%), values education (8.24%), and out-of-school learning (8.24%). The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on whether a pilot study was conducted or not is presented in Table 7:

Table 7. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Using Pilot Study*

Pilot Study	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	66	80.49
Yes	16	19.51
Total	82	100

No pilot study on the instructional process was conducted in most of the graduate dissertations (80.49%) in social studies education. However, there was a pilot study in almost one-fifth of the dissertations (19.51%).

Table 8 presents the distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on action research models.

Table 8. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Action Research Models*

Action Research Model	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	44	52.38
Emancipatory/Enhancing/Critical	14	16.67
Practice/Mutual Cooperation/Discussion	13	15.48
Practitioner-Researcher Model	5	5.95
Participatory	3	3.57
Technical/Scientific/Collaborative	3	3.57
Collaborative	2	2.38
Total	84	100

The action research model was not specified in more than half (52.38%) of the dissertations. In those where the model was mentioned, the most common model (16.67%) was emancipatory/enhancing/critical action research, which was followed by the practice/mutual cooperation/discussion model (15.48%), the practitioner-researcher model (5.95%), participatory model (3.57%), technical/scientific/collaborative model (3.57%) and collaborative model (2.38%). There were also dissertations in which more than one model was adopted.

Table 9 presents the distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on the cycles used in action research.

Table 9. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Action Research Cycles*

Cycle Used in Action Research	f	%
No Cycles Used	44	53.66
No Reference	14	17.07
Yıldırım & Şimşek	7	8.54
Mills	7	8.54
Kemmis & McTarget	3	3.66
Büyüköztürk	2	2.44
Elliot	1	1.22
Johnson	1	1.22
Guba	1	1.22
Stringer	1	1.22
Berg	1	1.22
Total	82	100

As is seen in Table 9, more than half of the graduate dissertations (53.66%) adopting action research in social studies education did not use any cycles, while some of the dissertations (17.07% did not refer to the cycle(s) being used. Of those that made use of a cycle, most (8.54%) employed the cycles of Yıldırım and Şimşek, and Mills. Cycles developed by Kemmis and McTarget, Büyüköztürk, Elliot, Johnson, Guba, Stringer, and Berg were also used in the dissertations analyzed.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on researcher roles is presented in Table 10:

Table 10. *Distribution of Dissertations by Researcher Roles*

Researcher Role	f	%
Practitioner-Researcher	53	64.63
Not specified	21	25.61
Observer	8	9.76
Total	82	100

In most dissertations examined, the researchers took on a practitioner-researcher role (64.63%) while a role was not specified in nearly one-fourth of the dissertations (25.61%). There were also those in which the researchers had the role of an observer during the implementation process (9.76%).

Table 11 presents the distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on sampling methods.

Table 11. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Sampling Methods*

Sampling Method	f	%
Convenience	28	33.33
Not specified	25	29.76
Criterion	16	19.05
Purposive	9	10.71
Maximum variation	2	2.38
Homogeneous	2	2.38
Snowball	1	1.19
Random	1	1.19
Total	84	100

The most widely used sampling method in the dissertations was convenience sampling (33.33%). In contrast, nearly one-third did not specify any sampling method (29.76%), and no explanation regarding the sampling procedure was provided. Other sampling methods employed included criterion, purposive, maximum variety, homogenous, and snowball sampling. More than one sampling method was used in some of the dissertations.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on whether a validity committee was present is shown in Table 12:

Table 12. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Having a Validity Committee*

Validity Committee	f	%
Not specified	66	80.49
Yes	16	19.51
Total	82	100

Most of the dissertations adopting action research (80.49%) did not form a validity committee. Only a limited number of dissertations (19.51%) had this committee during their procedures.

The distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on data collection tools is presented in Table 13.

Table 13. *Distribution of Dissertations by Data Collection Tools*

Data Collection Tools	f	%
Interviews	69	22.12
Achievement Tests	46	14.74
Journals	44	14.10
Observations	39	12.50
Students works (worksheets, activities, etc.)	35	11.22
Video/audio/photo records	24	7.69
Students words-supplementary data (caricatures, poems, pictures, etc.)	17	5.45
Questionnaires	15	4.81
Scales	14	4.49
Information forms	9	2.88
Total	312	100

Interviews (22.12%) were the most common data collection tools in the dissertations, followed by achievement tests (14.74%) and journals (14.10%). Observations (12.50%) and student works (11.22%) were also used as data collection tools in action research. Moreover, video/audio/picture records were used in 7.69% of the dissertation, and other tools included questionnaires, scales and information forms. In some dissertations (5.45%), student works were used as supplementary data without being analyzed.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education based on whether reliability and validity studies were used is presented in Table 14.

Table 14. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Reliability and Validity Studies*

Validity and Reliability Studies	Total	Yes		Not specified	
	f	f	%	f	%
Interviews	69	29	42.03	40	57.97
Achievement Tests	46	19	41.30	27	58.70
Student's works (worksheets, activities, etc.)	35	16	45.71	19	54.29
Questionnaires	15	7	46.67	8	53.33
Scales	14	14	100	-	-
Observations (through a form)	11	5	45.45	6	54.55

According to the data shown in Table 14, validity and reliability studies were not conducted in more than half of the interviews (57.97%) used as data collection tools in the dissertations. Similarly, more than half of the instruments for evaluating achievement (58.70%) were used without a validity and reliability study. Moreover, no reliability and validity studies were reported in more than half of the questionnaires (53.33%) and observations made through a structured form (54.55%) in the dissertations. As for the scales, reliability and

validity studies were conducted in all the dissertations examined. Table 12 presents the distribution of graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education based on data analysis methods.

Table 15. *Distribution of Dissertations by Data Analysis Methods*

Data Analysis Methods	<i>f</i>	%
Qualitative Data Analysis Methods	104	82.54
Content	52	50
Descriptive	43	41.35
Interpretive	4	3.85
Discourse	3	2.88
System	2	1.92
Quantitative Data Analysis Methods	20	15.87
T-test	10	50
Percent/Frequency	4	20
Mean/Standard Deviation	3	15
Correlation	1	5
Mann-Whitney U Test	1	5
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test	1	5
Not specified	2	1.59

Qualitative data analysis methods (82.54%) were the most commonly used in the graduate dissertations by adopting the action research design. Quantitative data analysis methods were used in 15.87% of the dissertations. In some dissertations (1.59%), the data analysis method was not mentioned. The most common approach in the dissertations with the qualitative data analysis method was content analysis (50%). Descriptive analysis (41.35%) was also used in the dissertations. Apart from these two qualitative data analysis methods, interpretive, discourse, and system analysis were performed.

In the dissertations with a quantitative data analysis method, the t-test was used the most (50%), which was followed by percentage/frequency (20%) and means/standard deviations (15%). Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, Mann-Whitney U Test, and correlation were among the quantitative analysis methods used in some dissertations. The distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on trustworthiness techniques is presented in Table 16.

Table 16. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Trustworthiness Practices*

Section on Trustworthiness Practices	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	43	52.44
Yes	39	47.56
Trustworthiness Practices	<i>f</i>	%
Expert opinion	31	17.51
Data triangulation	30	16.95
Inter-rater reliability	18	10.17
Presence in the research environment for a long time	17	9.60
Detailed description	15	8.47
Direct quotations	14	7.91
Member checking	11	6.21
Objectivity	9	5.08
Data consistency	7	3.95
Review	6	3.39
Persistent observation	4	2.26
Use of clear and intelligible language	4	2.26
Confirmability	3	1.69
Consistency	3	1.69
Selecting a purposive sample	3	1.69
Deep-focused data collection	1	0.56
Using mixed-methods	1	0.56

Almost half of the dissertations involved trustworthiness practices (52.44%), while the rest (47.56%) did not. The most common trustworthiness practice in the dissertations adopting action research was receiving expert opinion (17.51%). This was followed by data triangulation (16.95%), inter-rater reliability (10.17%), presence in the research environment for a long time (9.60%), detailed description (8.47%), direct quotations (7%, 91), member checking (6.21%), objectivity (5.08%), data consistency (3.95%), and review (3.39%). Persistent observations, using clear and intelligible language, confirmability, consistency, and deep-focused data collection were also among the trustworthiness practices. The graduate students who were the writers of the dissertations mentioned selecting a purposive sampling method and using mixed-method research.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on the number of lesson hours during the implementation process is presented in Table 17:

Table 17. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Number of Lesson Hours*

Number of Lesson Hours During the Implementation	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	29	35.37
1-10 hours	7	8.54
11-20 hours	23	28.05
21-30 hours	15	18.29
31-40 hours	2	2.44
41-50 hours	1	1.22
51-60 hours	2	2.44
71-80 hours	2	2.44
81-90 hours	1	1.22
Total	82	100

More than one-third of the graduate dissertations adopting action research (35.37%) did not include the number of lesson hours during the instructional implementation. The most common length in those that reported this information ranged between 11 and 20 lesson hours (28.05%). Those with 21 to 30 hours of implementation constituted nearly one-fifth of the dissertations (18.29%). There were also graduate dissertations (8.54%) involving instructional implementation for 1 to 10 lesson hours. Lastly, 9.76% of the dissertations were reported to have over 31 lesson hours of implementation.

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on whether information on learning outcomes was reported or not is presented in Table 18:

Table 18. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Reporting Information on Learning Outcomes*

Reporting Information on Learning Outcomes	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	47	57.32
Not specified	35	42.68
Total	82	100

While learning outcomes were reported in more than half of the graduate dissertations completed in the action research design in social studies education (57.32%), almost half (42.68%) did not make any reference to learning outcomes.

Table 19 presents the distribution of graduate dissertations in social studies education based on whether an action/lesson plan was used or not.

Table 19. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on Using Action/Lesson Plans*

Using an Action/Lesson Plan	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	55	67.07
Yes	27	32.93
Total	82	100

Most of the graduate dissertations (67.07%) conducted in the action research design in social studies education did not report having an action/lesson plan. Those including an action/lesson plan were in the minority (32.93%).

The distribution of graduate dissertations adopting the action research design in social studies education based on how the decision was made to terminate the implementation process is presented in Table 20:

Table 20. *Distribution of Dissertations Based on the Decision for Terminating the Implementation Process*

Decision to End the Implementation Process	<i>f</i>	%
Not specified	77	93.90
Yes	5	6.10
Total	82	100

Almost all of the graduate dissertations (93.90%) adopting the action research design did not specify how the decision to complete and terminate the implementation process was made. Only few dissertations (6.10%) reported no information regarding the decision to terminate the implementation process.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study attempted to analyze the graduate dissertations adopting action research that was completed in social studies education between 2007-2021 in terms of various variables. The dissertations were identified as documents, and document analysis was conducted through descriptive analysis. The results obtained from the study and the suggestions offered based on these results are presented in this section.

The results showed that the lowest number of dissertations adopting action research in social studies education were completed in 2009 and the highest number was in 2019. Between 2009 and 2019, there has been an increase in the number of dissertations using the action research design in social studies education. The number of dissertations completed in 2019 represents almost one-third of all dissertations analyzed for this study. In this sense, dissertation advisers and graduate students in social studies education appear to believe that action research is currently more significant than it was few years ago. A decrease was observed in the number of graduate dissertations using action research in social studies education in 2020 and 2021. However, it can be argued that the COVID-19 pandemic effectively decreased the number of dissertations in these years. The interruption of face-to-face education in schools due to the pandemic in 2020 prevented the implementation of action research, which is basically a practice-based research design. Likewise, Namlı Altıntaş and Koçak (2021) stated that there was an increase in graduate dissertations completed using action research in 2019, but there was a decrease the following year. They also argued that the reason why there was limited action research at the graduate level in 2020 could be that researchers were not able to go to schools and classrooms because of the pandemic.

Between 2007 and 2021, a total of 1687 dissertations with the concept "social studies" in their titles were completed in Turkey (Turkish Higher Education Council - YÖK-, 2022). Action research was found to be used in only 82 of these dissertations. This number is quite low because at most universities in Turkey have graduate programs in social studies education. According to the results of studies conducted by different researchers in the literature, action research is the least preferred research design in the field of education in Turkey (Selçuk, Palancı, Kandemir & Dündar, 2014; Çalışkan & Serçe, 2018). Similarly, various papers have reported a low number of graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education (Çakmak & Taşkıran, 2020; Dilek, Baysan & Öztürk, 2018, Oğuz Haçat & Demir, 2018; Şimşek, 2019).

In a paper in which 797 articles were examined, Altay (2020) stated that studies in the field of social studies education in Turkey generally aimed at revealing participants' opinions or making an overall analysis of the documents used. Çakmak and Taşkıran (2020) also reported that research on social studies education in Turkey mostly focused on revealing the views of teachers and students by examining the curriculum and textbooks. Although action research has been perceived as important in social studies graduate education in recent years, researchers should conduct more action research to improve the practices of social studies education. Reasons such as the dissertation advisers and graduate students' concerns about the difficulties experienced in the implementation process or the lack of knowledge or experience to manage this process may be influential on the low number of dissertations carried out using action research. Similarly, Beyhan (2013) pointed out that action research may not be attractive to academics who are anxious to get published in a short time because action research can take a long time, the process ends late or sometimes not at all, and the results are not generalized.. In addition, Beyhan (2013) also stated that the disconnection between academics and practitioners prevents the realization of action research that requires long-term cooperation.

In the present study, it was found that most of the dissertations completed in social studies graduate education was at the master's level, and about a third were at the PhD level. This could be due to the fact that there are more Master's programs in social studies education than PhD programs. As is known, graduate dissertations in Turkey are completed at two different levels: Master's and Ph.D. Master's dissertation studies are carried out in the scope of graduate education to provide students with deep knowledge on professional issues and to show how to use the existing knowledge in practice. On the other hand, PhD dissertation studies are produced to gain the ability to conduct more independent research, to interpret scientific issues with a broad and deep perspective, and determine the necessary steps to reach new syntheses. Ph.D. dissertations are expected to bring innovation to science, develop a new scientific method, and/or extend the use of a scientific method to a new field (Erkul & Kanten, 2019). In fact, it is expected that the number of dissertations in which action research is used is higher at the Ph.D. level.

The most dissertations adopting action research in social studies education in Turkey were completed at Marmara University, İstanbul. It was followed by Sakarya University, Sakarya, and Gazi University, Ankara. Various studies in the literature report that most of the graduate dissertations in social studies education in Turkey were written at Gazi University and Marmara University (Şahin, Göğebakan Yıldız & Duman, 2011). Graduate programs were opened in these universities earlier than the others could be why they had more graduate dissertations.

According to Johnson (2019), action research is studying the actual classroom or school situation to understand and improve the quality of practices and teaching. In this respect, most dissertation studies adopting action research were conducted at the middle school level. Social studies is a course taught in elementary and middle schools in Turkey. While the social studies course is only in the 4th grade in elementary schools, it is taught in three different grades in middle schools 5th, 6th and 7th grades. Since the social studies course is widely taught in middle schools in Turkey, it is expected that action research designed based on practice is mostly carried out at the middle school level.

Within the scope of this study, it was found that most of the graduate dissertations using the action research design were carried out with the qualitative research method. According to Kuzu (2009), action research is one of the qualitative research methods. However, Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) state that although mostly qualitative research approaches are used in action research, quantitative data collection methods are also employed. In this study, some dissertations were found to use mixed methods in action research. In another study, Dilek, Baysan, and Öztürk (2018) revealed that qualitative research was the most commonly adopted method in social studies education at the graduate level in Turkey. Turhan Türkkan, Yolcu and Karataş (2019) stated that qualitative and quantitative methods were mostly used together in Ph.D. dissertations involving action research.

The present study reported that the most commonly focused issue in the implementation processes of the dissertations was learning-teaching approaches, methods and techniques. This was followed by teaching skills, concepts, values education and out-of-school learning. Namlı Altıntaş and Koçak (2021) also asserted that the most commonly studied issue in the social studies course was material design and the use of technology. The subject of action research can be related to anything that is interesting to the researcher. Moreover, in action research in the field of education, the research topic can be an evaluation or analysis of a teaching strategy or technique (Johnson, 2019). Implementing new instructional strategies or techniques is mostly within the scope of action research (Henning, Stone & Kelly, 2009). In action research, while determining the research topic, it is necessary to focus on the situations/issues that are desired to be changed or improved (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Dissertations adopting action research in social studies education are mostly aimed at improving the teaching-learning processes in social studies.

As seen in the present study's results, since social studies is an interdisciplinary course, research covers a wide variety of areas. On the other hand, applying action research in these areas can be considered as an utterly difficult and laborious task. Action research offers many opportunities such as teaching a subject in the social studies course and a skill or concept in line with the course outcomes. For this reason, research on the social studies course being towards action research (Namlı Altıntaş and Koçak, 2021) will make significant contributions to the literature on social studies education. As is also seen in the results, action research studies cover various fields such as teaching methods, learning strategies, assessment processes, attitudes and values,

continuing professional development of teachers, classroom management, and school management (Kaysılı, 2021). In a study examining 80 action research studies in the field of education in Turkey, Çalışkan and Serçe (2018) found that three-quarters of the articles focused on the effectiveness of learning-teaching approaches, methods or techniques in terms of achievement, skills, and attitudes. Since action research is a practice conducted to understand and improve the quality of actions and teaching (Johnson, 2019), it can be thought that most of action research studies touch upon teaching-learning processes.

The results showed that most graduate dissertations in social studies education were not piloted for the instructional practice. However, it is important to conduct a pilot study to determine possible physical, social, psychological issues concerning the educational environment (Yılmaz & Tuncer, 2020). Akdemir and Kılıç (2021) point out that better quality and systematic studies can be structured by conducting pilot studies to gain experience. Thus, it can be argued that pilot applications in a dissertation adopting action research in social studies education will contribute to the realization of the implementation process.

The action research model was not specified in about half of the dissertations examined in the present study. In the dissertation where the model was mentioned, the most commonly used model was the emancipating/enhancing/critical action research. Action research is classified in different ways, depending on the sample, the roles of the participants in the research process, and some variables such as the environment in which the action takes place (Balci, 2021). These classifications include participatory, collaborative, practical, critical, political, classroom and industrial action research (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2012; Freankel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012; Hendricks, 2017; Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014; Mills, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Uzuner (2005) argues that many of these classifications for action research in the literature may cause confusion in conceptualization. Deniz (2021), on the other hand, assert that the classifications for action research enrich action research over time, and researchers should be aware of these classifications, but the important thing is to ensure change and development in action research. Similarly, Uzuner (2005) states that it would be sufficient for researchers to clearly and in detail their purpose of systematically solving research problems and creating a change in the research environment in action research. Although these models developed by different experts may seem different from each other, there are planning, implementation, observation and evaluation stages in all action research models (Balci, 2021; Berg, 2001; Freankel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012; Mertler, 2017). Yet, it should be noted that in this study, a model was not specified in half of the dissertations adopting action research in social studies education.

No action research cycles were used in more than half of the graduate dissertations examined. However, active research has a cyclical structure by nature. In each cycle, more data are revealed concerning the implementation process. The increase in the number of cycles completed during implementation also enables the trustworthiness of action research (Mertler, 2017). The finding that no cycles were used in almost half of the dissertations can be interpreted as that researchers do not fully perceive the philosophical foundations and characteristics of action research. Another finding revealed that some dissertations did not reference any cycles being used. In those dissertations having cycles, the most commonly used cycles were the ones designed by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), and Mills (2014).

In most of the dissertations examined, the researcher (i.e. graduate students) took on the role of practitioner-researcher. In some of the dissertations, no role was mentioned for the researcher. There were also dissertations in which the researchers had the role of observer. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) indicated that practitioners could also conduct action research and added to this classification a role in which the practitioner is also the researcher.

In the dissertations, the most commonly used sampling method was convenience sampling. Patton (2018) and Baltacı (2018) point out that convenience sampling is the most frequently used but the least desirable sampling method in qualitative research. Baltacı (2018) asserts that the convenience sampling method directs the researcher to the easiest elements to form the sample from the target population and that this sampling method may negatively affect the trustworthiness of a study. In this sense, other and different sampling methods can be used to enhance trustworthiness in action research at the graduate level in social studies education. In nearly one-third of the dissertations examined in this study, there was no specification of a sampling method and no explanation regarding the sampling procedure.

In most dissertations, no validity committee was formed during the action research. In a study on action research studies in Turkey, Kayır (2021) reported that almost three fourths of dissertations did not have a validity or action committee. Baki Pala (2021) indicate that the committee, which can be termed differently such as the validity or advisory committee, has a critical importance in the action research process. Kayır (2021) state that using a validity or action committee is present in certain universities in Turkey such as Marmara University, Anadolu University, Gazi University and Çukurova University. Among these universities, Marmara University stands out as the university with the highest number of dissertations adopting action research in social studies education. Considering the rate of the dissertations with a validity committee (19.51%), it can be argued that using a validity committee is not regarded as important in social studies education in Turkey. Receiving feedback on the implementation of action research by having outside field experts other than the researcher and dissertation supervisor contributes to the development of new action plans (Sağlamgöncü, 2021). Validity committees that consist of field experts and provide feedback on the implementation by watching its video recording, make a great contribution to a study's validity, reliability and trustworthiness. These committees are important for the practitioner to feel secure with the recommendations made by committee members to improve the implementation process.

The most commonly used data collection tool in the dissertations analyzed in the study was interviews, followed by achievement tests and journals, respectively. Similar to this finding, Namlı Altıntaş and Koçak (2021) and Kayır (2021) also found that interviews and journals were the most commonly used data collection tools in dissertations adopting action research. On the other hand, Altay (2020) examined research articles in social studies education in Turkey, and highlighted that semi-structured interviews were the most frequently used data collection tool in qualitative studies. In another study examining research articles with action research in the field of education in Turkey, Caliskan and Serçe (2018) determined that a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, especially interviews, observations and documents, were used in the articles. Akkaş Baysal and Ocak (2018) found that teachers using action research benefited from both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, and that most of the teachers collected their data through interviews, journals, logs, field notes, and observations.

In the dissertations examined, no reliability and validity studies were performed for more than half of the data collection tools including interviews, achievement tests, student works and questionnaires. In half of the observations as a data collection tool, there were neither reliability nor validity studies. However, reliability and validity studies were conducted for all the scales used in the dissertations. In another study, Şahin, Calp, Bulut and Kuşdemir (2013) reported that the validity and reliability studies of the data collection tools were not referred to in approximately half of the dissertations examined. Yet, research studies should clearly explain how the data collection tools have been developed and which steps have been followed while developing the data collection tools (Şan, 2020). This result of the study may have a negative impact on the reliability of theses that use action research in social pedagogy. In the present study, the qualitative data analysis methods were the most common in the dissertations adopting action research in social studies education. Few dissertations did not make any reference to the analysis method used. The remaining dissertations employed quantitative data analysis methods. Likewise, Altay (2020) found that content analysis was the most commonly used data analysis method in research articles published social studies education in Turkey.

In the present study, content analysis was the dissertations' most common qualitative data analysis method. Content analysis was followed by descriptive analysis. Kayır (2021) also reported that content analysis and descriptive analysis were mostly used in the dissertations with an action research design. Other than these two qualitative data analysis methods, interpretive, system, and discourse analysis was also used in the dissertations. In those employing a quantitative data analysis method, t-tests and frequencies/percentages were the most used, respectively. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests, Mann-Whitney U test, and correlation were among the quantitative analysis methods in some of the dissertations.

The rates of the dissertations with and without trustworthiness studies were close to each other. However, one of the most important characteristics of scientific research is its trustworthy results. Experts have put forward some measures and strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of results in qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In the present study, receiving expert opinion was the trustworthiness study that was the most frequent in the dissertations. Strategies such as being in the environment for a long time, obtaining in-depth information, constant and careful observation, asking for control of the environment, expert opinion,

video and audio recordings, reflecting the views of all participants, detailed description and having a comprehensive bibliography should be used to ensure the trustworthiness of research (Creswell, 2012; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Johnson, 2019; Mertler, 2017; Mills, 2014; Stringer, 2014; Uzuner, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, being in the research environment for a long time, data triangulation and inter-rater reliability were used to ensure trustworthiness of graduate dissertations in social studies education in the scope of action research. Unlike traditional research that observes what people do from the outside, action research is a method in which practitioners are involved in the research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). It is quite important for the researcher to be part of the institution where the research takes place to be fully involved in the process (Glesne, 2020). In order for researchers to be a part of the environment in which they conduct the research, they must be in that environment for a long time. Researchers being in the research environment for a long time reduces the initial effect of the research and ensures that the research participants behave naturally (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Exhibiting natural behaviors and having trust allow researchers to gain in-depth information (Stringer, 2013). The diversity of data sources in action research and the presence of data that support each other through different data collection tools also increase the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2012; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Johnson, 2019; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). More than one-third of the graduate dissertations adopting action research did not mention the number of lesson hours for the implementation process. In the dissertations mentioning the number of lesson hours, the implementation took place mostly from 11 to 20 hours. Namlı Altıntaş and Koçak (2021) found that the time allocated to action research was mostly between 1-10 weeks. More lesson hours for implementation in dissertations will increase the time the researcher is in the research environment and the number of research cycles, thus contributing to the trustworthiness and quality of action research.

The learning outcomes were not included in about half of the dissertations adopting action research in social studies education. In instructional processes, the aim is to ensure that students achieve the outcomes in the social studies curriculum for each grade level. Action research is a practice-oriented process (Elliott, 2001). All practices carried out in the instructional processes in action research should be in line with a learning outcome. The practices carried out within the scope of action research in undergraduate or graduate programs must also have a learning outcome/objective. Knowing about the learning outcomes during the implementation is important for researchers, teachers, or prospective teachers who read these dissertations to understand the implementation process.

Most graduate dissertations adopting action research in social studies education did not have an action/lesson plan. Researchers carry out their own practices to bring about change and improvement in action research. In order to reveal the change and improvement, new action plans are prepared in action research by making reflective inquiries over the data already obtained. The implementation process is constantly being enhanced with new action plans until there are adequate and iterative data (Gürgür, 2019). Action plans are the most difficult and time-consuming stage in this type of research. The path to be followed in educational research should be determined by creating practical action plans as part of overall action plans (Ocak & Akkaş Baysal, 2020). In action research, the researcher is in the research environment and actively plans the change, implements the plan and determines whether the implemented plan has positive results. In this aspect, the researcher should be the pioneer of change in the research environment with the action plans throughout action research (Güler, Halıcıoğlu & Taşgın, 2015). Moreover, action/lesson plans contribute to a better understanding of the implementation process by researchers, especially teachers. For these reasons, not including action plans in action research in dissertations is considered as a major shortcoming.

In almost all of the graduate dissertations using the action research design, how the decision to terminate the implementation process was made was not specified. Action research has a cyclical nature. Therefore, the implementation process is constantly being developed with the implementation of new action plans. This process can be terminated when the problems experienced are eliminated with planned and deliberate interventions by the researcher. In this context, completing the implementation process in action research may differ for every other research. However, some strategies can be developed to end the implementation process. Action research can be terminated when the implementation process starts to repeat the data in every cycle, that is, when there are adequate data. As the implementation process is improved, the duration of the validity committee meetings shortens as the members do not make many criticisms and suggestions. Gradually less time spent in the validity committee meetings is also an important indicator for ending the implementation

process of action research. In this case, the members of the validity committee may decide that the process should be terminated. It is worth noting that almost all of the dissertations examined did not inform readers about how the implementation process was ended.

In their study, Akdemir and Kılıç (2021) concluded that a significant part of the researchers who adopted the qualitative approach had misconceptions about this approach and that the methodology sections of the studies contained problems. Karadağ (2010) stated that the problems experienced in research processes are because researchers who conduct a dissertation study do not have sufficient knowledge about their research model. When the results obtained from this study are considered, it can be argued that the action research design is not used sufficiently in the dissertations in social studies education. Explanations that should be included in action research or any scientific paper were not provided in the dissertations examined. The number of action research studies is expected to increase to develop the literature on social studies education. Finally, researchers should be careful in the conducted studies, follow processes, and report necessary information in accordance with the nature of action research.

5. Recommendations

When the results revealed in the present study are evaluated overall, the following suggestions can be offered:

- Problems experienced in instructional processes in social studies education should be defined, and action research studies should be conducted to address these problems.
- Validity committee meetings should be held regularly during the process to increase the trustworthiness of action research and develop action cycles.
- Action/lesson plans should be prepared and included in reporting.
- In action research, the method, sample, cycles, model, data collection tools, validity and reliability studies of these tools, data analysis, and trustworthiness should be adequately explained.
- It should explain how an action research cycle ended and how the implementation was terminated.
- Studies that aim to contribute to the literature on social studies education should be analyzed in further studies in terms of various variables.
- Studies that reveal the experiences of researchers performing action research should be carried out.

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