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Research Article

Concept-Teaching Practices in Social Studies Classrooms: Teacher Support for Enhancing the Development of Students' Vocabulary

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe social studies teachers' perceptions related to their practices in teaching concepts within the context of social studies instruction in order to enhance students' vocabulary development in their classes. The study focuses on how students' breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge is supported by teachers' experiences and their self-reported practices in relation to teaching social studies content. The study has a qualitative research design and has been conducted with 35 middle-school social studies teachers selected in accordance with maximum variation sampling. A semi-structured interview form has been used to determine teachers' perceptions and viewpoints, and data has been analyzed using content analysis techniques. Results show that the teachers' espoused practices for enhancing social studies vocabulary and for assessing its overall development process supports widely accepted understanding and ideas on effective concept teaching and alternative assessment procedures. Some examples of these practices and assessment measures include interactive word-walls (ABC graffiti), contextualized vocabulary instruction, word analogy, semantic maps, vocabulary self-collection strategy, and concept circles. However, the majority of practices reported by the teachers reflect traditional tasks and methods that ignore how new concepts were acquired and also focus more on the definitional knowledge of words. Further research should include teacher observations along with interviews to validate actual classroom practices.

Keywords

Vocabulary • Vocabulary development • Concept teaching and learning • Reading and vocabulary in social studies • Vocabulary instruction practices

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Information acquired over vocabulary development is based on extensive research that supports widely accepted instructional practices for teaching new words to children. Teaching students about new vocabulary terms is widely accepted by many vocabulary researchers to be grounded in the universal belief that knowing the meaning of a word is fundamentally most important for understanding concepts presented in texts (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991). Research has indicated a positive correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension, which supports common ideas regarding students needing to learn new words in order to help them understand what they've read (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Hedrick, Harmon, & Linerode, 2004).

Reading skills researchers have identified that teaching students how to use context clues to derive the meaning of unknown words they encounter while reading can help students develop the strategies needed for monitoring their reading comprehension and vocabulary development (Goerss, 1995; Vacca & Vacca, 2002). Given students' reading needs and school curricula, vocabulary learning skills is clearly important for all students' reading comprehension as well as overall academic success for all grades and content areas (Hedrick et al., 2004; Nagy & Scott, 2000). In particular, such skills are needed more in heavy, text-based, content-area classrooms. For this reason, the unique aspect to consider for vocabulary instruction in content areas is the optimal time spent devoted to concept teaching in present-day classrooms for reaping the greatest benefits from understanding content without taking away from content instruction (Hairrell, 2008).

Researchers have pointed out that one of the greatest contributions to students' lives and future reading success is the development of vocabulary knowledge in primary education (K-12). However, these researchers argue that the knowledge-building dimension in todays' schools is achieved through academic word-learning (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 2011). The main goal of vocabulary instruction is to increase students' understanding of content alongside their development of word knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and text structure. In this respect, studies that link teaching vocabulary-learning strategies or skills to students' improvements and acquisitions in concept and content knowledge is much more important (Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2005). The National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000) emphasized that students of all grade levels should construct new meanings from the different styles of texts encountered in school curricula. The panel suggested that teachers should use effective and useful practices by devoting more of their in-class time to improving students' reading skills and vocabulary. However, professional teaching standards and current educational policies clearly emphasize that all teachers be good literacy teachers (e.g., aware of applying higher-level cognitive skills; [Billmeyer & Barton, 1998]). By supporting this opinion, Vacca and Vacca (2002) suggested that content-area teachers should

be aware of the importance of not just textbooks in class but also aware of learning academic vocabulary and employing current and effective pedagogic practices for developing vocabulary. Taken as a whole, these ideas and literature review show the importance of understanding how teachers apply their curricula, teach students the curriculum, and assess all their students' outcomes during teaching (Burke, 2012).

In content classes, creating independent students is an important objective of schooling; this is also valid for vocabulary-instruction objectives (Vacca & Vacca, 2002, p. 172). Students be able to read different types of content-area texts and build new meanings in class in order to construct new meanings related to a specific subject or issues is expected from all teachers (Dieker & Little, 2005). Accordingly, a logical place to teach reading skills and concept learning strategies is in content-area classes such as social studies, where students can learn how to be strategic thinkers and learners while gaining content knowledge (Anderson, 1985, as cited in Hedrick et al., 2004). Today's reading strategies in the area of content are an important issue for interdisciplinary interaction and learning. For instance, reading in social studies as a content area is different from reading in other content areas. Reading for social studies requires students to use higher reading comprehension and reading sub-skills (e.g., inquiry, comprehension, word-learning skills) in order to embrace the materials. Social studies courses emphasize that young children learn a variety of specific concepts, phenomena, and generalizations including content on the environment, nature, the world, the country, citizenship, economy, and the earth (Deveci & Bayır, 2011). Researchers have advocated that students must use good strategies in social studies classrooms that model vocabulary learning and effective reading and vocabulary skills (Baer & Nourie, 1993; Ciardiello, 2002). This situation can be conceptually challenging for students in middle and secondary school, as well as for those in K-12 education (Graves & Avery, 1997). Achievement in social studies classrooms is often dependent on the student's ability to use these skills while reading. One factor in the difficulty understanding social studies reading comprehension is students' poor vocabulary and lower-level reading strategies (Vacca & Vacca, 2002).

A literature review shows that for teachers to teach social studies terminology, students must effectively understand it. When explaining vocabulary instruction in social studies classrooms, Parker (2012, p. 371) points to the importance of terms and concepts in the social sciences. However, Candan (1998) notes that, without understanding social studies concepts, students would be severely limited in understanding who they are and what the social word is about; they would have many major problems structuring their knowledge and solving the problems encountered in the future. For instance, students with low vocabulary levels often think that social studies textbooks and reading these social studies texts are boring; they have problems comprehending expository texts due to a variety of unknown words and complex facts being included (Massey & Heafner,

2004). According to Fordham, Wellman, and Sandmann (2002), this is also due to the many social studies teachers who are unable to provide the necessary in-class reading support and do not employ well the effective strategies that model word-learning. Ciardiello (2002) concluded that reading comprehension struggles are the result of the widespread use of various different types of texts and text structures (e.g., sequence/chronological ordering, cause/effect relationships, claims) in social studies. Other researchers (e.g., Cox, 1997; Gardner, 1990) have explained that these problems in content-area classes stem from a lack of strategic teaching activities. Previous research has demonstrated that reading strategies and teaching concepts in social studies classrooms do not attract interest, and a particular concern and gap in this field stems from teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices (Harmon, Katims, & Whittington, 1999; Harmon, Wood, & Hedrick, 2006; Hedrick et al., 2004). This situation does not fully illuminate how teachers clarify instructional practices, nor does it help guide teachers in teaching academic concepts or vocabulary specific to social studies (Milligan & Ruff, 1990). For this reason, many students may lack higher-level strategies and skills such as paraphrasing, dialoguing with the text, deriving word meanings, summarizing, taking concise notes, or making generalizations in social studies that include intensive informative text-types and technical vocabulary (Ciardiello, 2002). The reason for this situation is assumed two ways: First, vocabulary is considered to be a skill that students naturally have or acquire through reading, writing, or talking. Along with this perception, other reasons include teachers not feeling a need to teach reading strategies within the context of social studies instruction and teachers often using traditional reading tasks when teaching content in order to conserve time for the curriculum.

Some students independently develop reading strategies while reading and completing activities at an early age prior to middle-school, but content-area teachers are responsible for supporting the development of these skills in those with poor reading comprehension. This responsibility requires teachers to have sufficient knowledge of the learning strategies that need to be taught regarding teaching techniques specific to a content area (Burke, 2012). For this purpose, employing more advanced and productive teaching strategies is important because teachers are considered experts and students will often emulate teacher behaviors that model learning. Therefore, teachers are suggested to use effective reading strategies, as well as the sub-skills they consider appropriate and useful in their classrooms in order to improve student learning and performance (Chang & Ku, 2014; Graves, 2006). In addition, investigating the practices and instructional materials that teachers employ in their content teaching is important so that students' reading experiences continue to increase with their grade levels. However, examining the relevant literature on the use of reading and concept-teaching procedures in content-area classrooms is necessary. Research in the field of vocabulary and content-area reading instruction may be insufficient (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; Burke, 2012; Gilford, 2016;

Hairrell, 2008; Hedrick et al., 2004; Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003); it may be more important, however, to investigate how these strategies are implemented, taught to students, and supported by appropriate materials and feedback. For reading skills, researchers have emphasized that reading is an ongoing process that requires readers to actively infer new meanings from text; for this reason, concept teaching and learning in content areas is extremely important for reading-comprehension success (Freire, 1985). However, Hairrell's (2008) view, which emphasizes the importance of teachers' perceptions and practices in teaching concepts, is important to consider. Hairrell asserts the importance of understanding the degree, quality, and current state of instructional practices for vocabulary instruction in content-areas and of discussing these under the light of previous research in order to support vocabulary. Given the significance of results from previous research (NRP, 2000) for students' reading comprehension success in content-areas such as social studies, science teacher effectiveness seems an important factor in developing academic vocabulary (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). The importance of investigating which vocabulary-learning strategies teachers use in their classrooms has been well-documented both in previous research and the literature (Massey & Heafner, 2004; Pedrotty-Bryant, Llnan-Thompson, Ugel, Hamff, & Hougen, 2001). In this respect, one can clearly see that if social studies teachers have a better understanding of the practices related to reading and concept teaching, students' academic demands may be met with less struggle and their future experiences strengthened as they pass to higher grades. Students exposed to various texts and sets of specific words or concepts can gain greater multiple perspectives by enriching people's knowledge of societal events, geographical locations, and historical incidents (Massey & Heafner, 2004). The purpose of this study is to investigate social studies teachers' practices related to concept teaching within the context of social studies instruction in order to develop and assess their students' vocabulary development in-class.

Method

Research Design

This investigation is based on the qualitative research method in order to provide a picture of the concept-teaching practices that middle-school social studies teachers use in their classrooms. Being among the qualitative research methods aimed at elucidating the meaning, essence, and structure of a person or group's direct experience of a phenomenon using an inductive method, the phenomenological research design was used for this study. A phenomenological study focuses on exploring the nature of a phenomenon by studying the investigated individual's direct experience related to a specific phenomenon or concept. In phenomenological studies, shared experiences are assumed to have one or more essences (Patton, 2002, p. 482; Sayre, 2001). As such,

this phenomenological study aims to investigate social studies teachers' viewpoints and experiences in relation to concept-teaching practices within the context of their in-class teaching in order to support and assess students' vocabulary development through different aspects and to elucidate the meaning of their experiences. For these purposes, the following sub-research questions were addressed: (a) How do social studies teachers describe their practices in-class related to concept teaching within the context of social studies instruction?, (b) How do these teachers asses each student's breadth and depth of vocabulary development so as to determine whether they understand the social studies content?, and (c) Do these practices reported by the teachers reflect current and effective procedures for academic vocabulary instruction?

Study Group

Maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling method, was used in this study to determine which participants meet the specific criteria. Maximum variation sampling aims to capture any common traits or shared dimensions of phenomena among diverse cases and to illuminate the research by revealing different dimensions. Any common patterns that emerge from wide variations have a particular value for and interest in capturing the shared, central dimensions of a phenomenon or core experience (Patton, 1990, p. 172). The participants for this study consist of 35 middle-school social studies teachers (5th through 8th grades) in Bayburt, Turkey during the 2014-2015 school year. As qualitative approaches require detailed descriptions of a study's participants, the participating teachers' demographics have been described: 52.7% of them are male and 47.3% are female; 58.5% are graduates from education faculties, 39.4% from social sciences faculties (e.g., history, sociology, geography), and 2.1% from other faculties. Four of the 35 teachers have master's degrees in social studies education, and two teachers have PhDs. Three of the four teachers with a master's degree have studied special teaching methods in social studies. As for teaching experience, 22.5% have 1-5 years, 40.1% have between 6-10 years, and 37.4% have 11+ years.

Investigator

The author, as investigator in this study, has extensive experience as both a teacher-training educator and K-12 education teacher. The author's K-12 classroom experience includes five years working in settings for students with different learning abilities, as well as being a teacher educator for the past six years. This teacher-training education experience includes the skills of learning, reading practices, and cognitive strategic instruction related to evidence-based practices for teaching students.

Data Collection Tool and Collection Process

The interview method is used as the data source for exploring social studies teachers' self-perceptions of their planning, implementation, and evaluation practices for concept teaching and learning within social studies instruction. The goal of interviewing is to provide understanding about things that cannot be directly observed, such as a participant's opinions, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors (Sayre, 2001). Given this information, a semi-structured form was created for the study's sub-research questions.

Developing the interview form

While developing the interview form, pilot interviews were first conducted with seven social studies teachers in their respective middle-schools in Bayburt who had volunteered to participate in this study. All teachers were informed of the research questions and sub-questions. In line with the process of gathering data through open-ended condensed interviews, some focus questions were developed through the interview process. Data collected from the teachers in the pilot interviews allowed the investigator to discover and address some important points related to the study's sub-questions. In the pilot interviews, the teachers were asked how they think key concepts related to social studies content should taught be in their classrooms. In accordance with teachers' opinions, the following additional questions were presented to the teachers: What kind of practices do you use for acquiring a rich vocabulary? How frequently do you use these practices? How much time do you allow your students for these practices? The pilot interviews were conducted during the 2014-2015 school year. Interviews lasted between 15 and 20 minutes and were voice-recorded with the teachers' permission.

Validity and Reliability Study

The investigator attempted several ways to measure the interview form for its validity and reliability. Johnson and Christensen (2004) identified after a literature review that a researcher's presentation of their study and research methods to experts in the related field is a precaution that helps ensure credibility and reliability. In this reviewing, the expert plays a critical role during the data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting processes of research and provides feedback to the researcher. Accordingly, while preparing the interview form, the investigator (the author) conducted a literature review related to the study's aim in consideration of the data collected from the pilot interviews in order to establish the study's internal validity. The exploratory questions regarding teachers' practices in concept teaching within the context of their content-area are developed in the light of the collected data and feedback from the pilot interviews. Afterwards, a list of interview questions

developed by the investigator was presented to an expert panel consisting of two researchers with experiences in reading skills and qualitative research methods. The questions were reviewed by the experts in terms of their compliance with curriculum goals; Schmitt's (2011) criteria in vocabulary instruction were taken as the basis for checking the internal validity of the questions, such as their clarity or potential ambiguity, if they are testing practices used in a wide variety of vocabulary instruction procedures, and whether the questions reflect teachers' opinions or experiences in relation to current academic-vocabulary instruction. After this stage, the interview form was revised in line with the experts' opinions and suggestions and ready for use in the interviews. Finally, the interview questions were assumed to be reasonably valid with inter-rater agreement at 100%.

The semi-interview form consists of two parts; the first includes questions related to teachers' gender, professional teaching experience, graduate program, in-service training programs, and which grades taught. The second part includes the actual interview questions related to the study's sub-research. These interview questions consist of three steps for discovering teachers' perceptions related to how they teach concepts in class: (a) choosing/introducing words, (b) teaching words to be taught, and (c) assessing vocabulary development. Choosing/introducing includes how teachers plan procedures before teaching new words or concepts. The teaching phase is how teachers expand word knowledge, reinforce wide and deep vocabulary development, increase word awareness, and develop word-learning skills. Measuring vocabulary development (i.e., breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge) determines how teachers assess the overall concepts that students have learned within the context of social studies instruction. The interview questions were considered to reflect typical pedagogical practices (e.g., word awareness, strategies, models, word-learning, etc.) based on current vocabulary learning experiences in content-areas (Allen, 1999; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2011).

Procedure

An interview plan was developed for the interview process by making appointments and meeting the voluntary participant teachers at appropriate times. The interviews were made in the teachers room of the identified schools outside of course hours. In order to communicate more effectively with the teachers, the investigator had a short conversation with them before the interviews to inform them of the importance and purpose of the study. All participants were informed that data would be audio recorded to avoid missing any useful data during the interviews. Potential participants were offered an educational gift for their involvement in the study as a way to increase the recruitment success rate. Two weeks were spent recruiting the 35 participants. During the interviews, teachers were given sufficient time to accurately report their

practices on teaching key concepts in their classrooms. In order to obtain more in-depth data, the investigator asked the teachers to support their descriptions with examples of activities, materials, or some keywords unique to their content teaching. The interviews were completed during the 2015 spring semester. The interviews lasted 20-25 minutes and followed Fraenkel and Wallen's (1993) guidelines for conducting interviews.

Data Analysis

At the end of the interviews, the teachers' voice recordings were analyzed through content analysis. Patton (2002, p. 452) defines content analysis as the process of discovering themes, patterns, and categories within collected data. In analyzing the data, the audio-recordings for each question in the semi-interview form were first listened to one by one. Then the investigator transcribed the data verbatim. After this, interview transcripts with similar meanings were merged into specific coding patterns (initial codes), grouped under certain categories in terms of content, and then interpreted by the investigator in order to create categories from the main concepts. Afterwards, these categories were merged into main themes that were then mapped onto the sub-research- questions.

Several procedures were followed to ensure the credibility and reliability of the study data. For this purpose, the raw data (recordings) collected through the interviews were presented to a reliability coder (RC) with experience in the fields of education and qualitative research methods to evaluate the data analysis results (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Both the investigator and the RC independently coded the data, and their consistency rates were calculated by comparing the produced codes, categories, and main themes with each other. After this stage, Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula (Reliability = Agreement / [Agreement + Disagreement]) x 100 was used in order to calculate agreement between coders. As a result, agreement between the coders was found to be 88%. Ethical considerations are important to the investigator. As such, the investigator has been as transparent as possible, sharing information about the study with the participating teachers by building rapport and establishing boundaries. In order to promote active participation and ensure participants' privacy in the interview process, teachers were guaranteed their responses would remain anonymous. The investigator attempted to ensure the teachers' opinions would be examined through mutual trust and honesty without any worry. In this way, the data collected in the interview process was ensured to reflect the teachers' real opinions and experiences. Within two weeks of completing their interview, a copy of the transcript was emailed to the teachers for review as a way of confirming the data. Moreover, relevant findings were provided directly by the investigator without interpretation in order to increase the study's internal reliability. To support the study's data, the results for each question in the interview form have

been presented using the descriptive approach, and the findings are explained using direct quotes from the teachers' responses. While presenting participants' descriptions, each teacher has been assigned a code (e.g., T1) to provide anonymity.

Results

The findings were systematically presented in accordance with the study's sub-research questions. The first of these purposes is to identify the activities that preceded teaching new social studies concepts, a second is the process of teaching and acquiring new concepts, and the third is assessing the development of contextual concepts (measuring depth and breadth of vocabulary development). As a result, some of the teachers in this study were found to mention more practices and strategies related to concept teaching in-class. Hence, because the responses of the teachers were in more than one category and theme, the sum of occurrences exceeds the number of participants in the study.

How Do Social Studies Teachers Describe Their In-Class Practices Prior to Teaching New Concepts?

Teachers' responses to this question were collected and categorized under the theme of choosing key concepts for teaching ($f = 44$). The categories obtained from the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distributions of Teachers' Views on Choosing Key Concepts to Be Taught

Category	*f*
Concepts in the content and teaching materials	20
Concepts that students aim to learn	14
Preparing a list of keywords to be taught	10
Total	44

Practices related to this theme are merged under the categories of concepts in the content and teaching material, concepts that students aim to learn, and preparing a list of keywords. However, the most often mentioned practice in choosing the key concepts that teachers taught for each unit or course was found to be concepts in the content and teaching materials (e.g., textbooks). When the teachers talked about how they choose key concepts, the majority mentioned following the terms highlighted by the author of the social studies textbooks. The teachers also explained that key concepts are already included in the social studies curriculum; therefore, there is no need to overthink choosing new words to teach. One teacher shared her activities on choosing key concepts as, "First of all, I look up the textbooks and select the keywords. Textbooks often include so many keywords; hence, there is no need for other resources or the process of selection keywords" (T5).

Beyond this practice, 14 teachers mentioned processing inquiry-based word-learning for their students when choosing key concepts to be taught. Teachers shared that they began teaching important social studies concepts by considering the terms that particular students intend to learn or are not unfamiliar with for each unit. When teachers talked about students' vocabulary, they said students need to have a good understanding of the terminology related to the social studies content. These teachers explained that students' interest and curiosity were important factors in concept acquisition, and so they often used vocabulary self-collection strategy to teach their students many key concepts related to specific subjects (e.g., geographical terms, historical words). Teachers reported that vocabulary self-collection strategy allows students to investigate the concepts of dating, questioning, and discussing multiple meanings with their peers throughout the educational period; hence, it makes learning vocabulary fun. One teacher who uses the self-collection strategy shared the following:

> Before a new subject [e.g., reading text] in social studies, I generally guide my students to identify two difficult or interesting concepts; to research them they will study in relation to the subject. And I ask them to move these concepts to the class for practicing in the next lesson. (T6)

Some teachers in this study shared that they create their own list of words when choosing target words for each unit and lessons, as well as for the terms in the textbook. Teachers shared that they often prepare their own list for every new unit. When creating word lists, teachers mentioned that they consider their experiences, students' conceptual background, and life-requirement concepts. A teacher mentioned the following about choosing keywords in his lessons:

> Before a lesson or reading, I'll first identify important concepts to teach with material from my own experience and students' background knowledge. For the 6th grade in middle-school, I prepared a list of challenging and important words such as export, import, production, capital, and global economy under the theme of production/distribution/consumption. I asked my students whether or not they were familiar with these concepts. (T22)

How Do These Teachers Incorporate Their Practices Related to Concept Teaching Within the Context of Social Studies Instruction In-Class?

Teachers were asked which teaching methods they use in class to teach these concepts they've chosen. In addition, they were asked how they incorporate these practices within the context of social studies teaching instruction. Responses to these questions show clear differences among teachers' practices. The teachers shared that they regularly use two direct instruction models within their content area that affect vocabulary and reading skills in class. Teachers' responses were collected and

categorized under the theme of the direct concept-instruction model (f = 38) using content analysis techniques. The categories obtained from the interviews for this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Distributions of Teachers' Views Regarding the Direct Concept Instruction Model

Category	*f*
Definitional methods of instruction	28
Contextual vocabulary instruction	10
Total	38

Practices for Teaching Concepts Using Definitional Methods of Instruction to Support Vocabulary Development

The majority of participant teachers commented that definitional methods of instruction were effective for teaching important concepts related to a text or content. The teachers emphasized that the methods of pronouncing a concept, questioning its meanings, producing sentences containing its definitions, and using a dictionary increased understanding of social studies concepts. They described that students had been exposed to the definitions of new words and felt that definitions were an effective element in word acquisition. When speaking about their activities prior to reading a text on new concepts, teachers explained that they would write the words of the day on the chalkboard and ask their students about the words' meanings for 5-10 minutes. They would give their students the opportunity to question the meanings of concepts and guide students to generate a sentence by looking it up in a dictionary. The teachers consider dictionary use as an effective tool for acquiring the meanings of new words, as well as a logical way to independently learn words. In these findings, teachers seem to advocate the use of teacher-oriented and dictionary-based learning methods for promoting student learning of social studies concepts. One teacher's (T21) example being the "term *transportation*, which means to transport, is the movement of people/animals/things from one location to another," supports this finding. Another teacher shared his process for teaching new words as:

> Before starting a text containing new words, I read them aloud, define them, and then make up some sentences containing their structures, examples, or meanings in order to clarify these words. After the students memorize these words, we begin reading the text passage. (T9)

Practices for Context-Based Word-Instruction as a Way of Improving Social Studies Reading

Some teachers in this study use direct teaching to improve vocabulary, mentioning using contextual vocabulary learning in their classrooms. These teachers point out that reading comprehension should be enhanced, as well as supporting word knowledge to help students understand social studies texts. These teachers shared their attempts

at teaching students the skill of deriving and inferring word meanings from context by using various social studies texts contained meaningful contextual information. The teachers commended teaching students how to use context clues as an effective and beneficial strategy for acquiring keywords and improving social studies reading. Therefore, teachers emphasized that a considerable amount of activity on vocabulary instruction should be devoted to explicit instruction in word meanings from context in order to enhance the understanding of social studies content and concepts, as opposed to only using word definitions. These teachers think that the types of vocabulary lessons provided to students can use the required strategies while they read expository texts on the content-area. However, when teachers talk about this, they report how their students sometimes encounter several problems in deciphering the meaning of unknown words during reading social studies texts. Teachers thought that these could be attributed to there being a number of unknown social sciences terms in social studies texts. In order to solve these problems, they explained that they teach their students the ability of deriving word meanings from context. For instance, one teacher (T10) shared his activity on teaching the concept of locale by determining a geography text that included this concept and associate related terms in order to help students increase their vocabulary growth. When talking about their activity, this teacher reported observing students being guided to identify contextual clues from the text. After learning how to do this, students learned many terms effectively from the text, and their reading comprehension skills showed improvement. For this reason, the teachers advocate the need for social studies teachers to attempt teaching students how to derive a word's meaning from context clues to improve their social studies reading. One teacher's comments on this issue are as follows:

> I allow students to learn new words from contextual information while reading. When I identify rich contextual information about a target word within an instructional text, they make an educated guess about the meaning of the word to define it. (T24)

Another teacher shared their focus on the use of context clues as:

> I brought a story for the concept of patriotism. The story includes explicit contextual information for the target concept. I asked students to figure out the meaning of patriotism using context clues by reading the sentences of the text and then guiding them to compare their own meanings with dictionary definitions. (T28)

Practices for Graphic Organizers in Learning Various Aspects of Social Studies Concepts

Some teachers in this study shared that the complex relationships between phenomena and concepts related to social studies are made more fun and understandable through graphic organizers (f = 35). The practices teachers shared were found to show some commonalities. Teachers identified that using graphical

representations in vocabulary instruction supports long-term retention of concepts. The categories obtained from this part of the interviews are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Distributions of Teachers' Views Regarding Concept Teaching using Graphic Organizers

Category	*f*
Concept maps	8
Semantic maps	7
Concept cartoons	7
Word maps	7
Venn diagram	3
KWHL charts	3
Total	35

In this category, the majority of teachers reported benefitting from concept maps in teaching social studies vocabulary. Teachers who talked about concept maps, determined students' incorporation of key concepts and the relationships between those concepts or terms into concept learning activities necessary in order to support their vocabulary. A teacher explained her activity as follows:

> When teaching historical concepts, I often use concept maps because they are quite effective for learning historical terms. For instance, we prepared a concept map together with the students in order to examine the major developments of 1932-1938 in Turkey, the time of Atatürk. Students experienced more information by establishing various connections between the historical concepts. (T35)

Another teacher shared the following about teaching the concept of the Silk Road:

> I drew a concept map that included arrows and boxes on the chalkboard to explain to students the Silk Road concept to categorize this concept and uncover associated terms and concepts; then I asked the students to establish logical connections between the concepts taking these arrows and boxes into account. (T32)

When examining the other graphic organizers teachers reported, they explained that they taught their students many concepts using semantic maps, concept cartoons, word maps, Venn diagram, and KWHL (What I Know- What I Want to Know- How I'll find ınformation- What I Learned; Vacca & Vacca, 2002) cards in their classrooms. The teachers commented that using different graphic organizers in vocabulary instruction promotes vocabulary development and hence provides students with the ability to learn the various aspects of concepts. Teachers who talked about using graphic organizers also said it enhances understanding of social studies content. Meanwhile, these teachers also mentioned using organizers as a way of engaging all students with important concepts in social studies classrooms. For instance, when one teacher (T30) spoke of semantic maps, she described semantic maps to promote her students to learn multiple-meanings of a key concept, sharing that she asked her students to think about what evokes the concept of democracy to determine certain

semantic variables related to this concept and to complete the semantic map by discussing variables.

Another teacher, who used concept cartoons in his classrooms, shared as follows:

> …I often use cartoons in capturing big ideas and understanding difficult concepts. For example, the concepts of justice, rights, law, and independence are abstract and difficult to understand. Cartons are effective for this purpose, and sometimes I ask my students to draw their own cartoons on the concepts and give them feedback about their content. (T20)

Another teacher's response was as follows:

> I prepared a concept cartoon related to environmental problems including water, land, and air pollution, asking my students to interpret and tell me the words or concepts they associate it with in their mind. (T34)

Another teacher mentioned KWHL cards for enhancing social studies reading and vocabulary knowledge:

> I distribute KWHL cards to students when teaching social studies terms. Students write their prior-knowledge about the word of the day in Column K, what they want to learn about the word in Column W, how they'll learn the word in Column H, and what they've learned about the word in Column L. (T21)

Another teacher explained how to classify concepts through specific characteristics using word maps:

> I used word maps to explain the stream concept to students. In the diagram, I demonstrate to students the definition of stream, its relevant/irrelevant attributes, stream examples/non-examples, and a picture. (T6)

Finally, this teacher mentioned Venn diagrams:

> Venn diagrams are useful for retaining concepts because they help to determine the similarities and differences between two important words visually. For example, my students learned three geographical regions in Turkey using Venn diagrams with colored pencils and big cartoons on the walls in class. (T18)

Practices on Interactive Strategies to Model Learning Concepts

Another finding from the interviews is that some teachers shared using interactive vocabulary activities that allowed learning-by-doing in order to improve the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. These teachers reported the most effective way of increasing vocabulary development in social studies as creating useful word-learning activities in order to support students' in-class learning. The teachers commented that effective word-training activities that the students engaged in allows these words to be retained in their long-term memory; as a result, students can more easily recall these concepts while reading and speaking. These teachers reported teaching

their students abstract concepts about a social phenomenon by combining multiple strategies in class in order to increase their students' confidence and inclination to learn new words. Their responses are gathered under the theme of teaching concepts with interactive strategies ($f = 23$) and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Distributions of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Teaching Concepts with Interactive Strategies

Category	*f*
Vocabulary self-collection strategy	8
Interactive word wall [ABC graffiti]	5
Word games	4
Drama techniques	3
List-group-label strategy	2
Making an illustrated class dictionary	1
Total	23

The teachers talked about their teaching practices, and seven important activities in-class were found that modeled good word-learning: vocabulary self-collection strategy, interactive word walls (ABC graffiti), word games, drama techniques, list-group-label strategy, and making an illustrated class dictionary. The most mentioned practice in the interviews was vocabulary self-collection strategy. For this strategy, the teachers shared that students were asked to create a word list for an upcoming topic, to explain the reasons for choosing these words, and after conducting a short inquiry and investigation, to discuss them in-class and revise their own list by looking up the meanings in a dictionary. For the teachers, this activity was typically a physical movement or placement that actively involved students in selecting their own concepts, and questioning and discovering their meanings. A teacher described this practice in-class as follows:

> By using the vocabulary self-collection strategy, I encourage my students to learn new concepts. Students select high-frequency concepts within the context of the social studies content based on their investigation process and share these by discussing their meanings with their peers where, how, and what they learned, as well as what they felt in the process. For example, last month students found some concepts, such as production, commerce, distribution and capital, and then discussed their meanings with each other in-class. (T26)

Some teachers talked about interactive word walls as an activity for encouraging active learning in their classes. The teachers shared having an interactive word wall that they'd designed over their grade level with keywords in social studies themes during the school year. These teachers defined this practice as constructing alphabetized words, explaining that keywords are taught on social studies themes from left to right on the class walls. They indicated that important daily concepts and associated words, sayings, examples, historical events, and pictures are added under the alphabetized list, defining this activity as evidence of social studies vocabulary learning. One teacher's opinion on this subject is:

> ABC graffiti is popular for reinforcing word meanings. I distribute to each of my students a copy of the ABC graffiti handouts. For example, The ABCs of Atatürk Principles; my students wrote the concept of republic under the letter R, statehood under the letter S, nationalism under the letter N, and populism under the letter P, thus reflecting their ideas, contexts, pictures, and definitions on these. (T29)

When examining other practices, the teachers shared that they allow students to engage the concepts using student-centered techniques such as drama, word games, list-group-label strategies, and an activity called making an illustrated class dictionary. According to the teachers, such practices promote student learning of new concepts and key words by actually doing. These teachers also stated giving more time and opportunities for concept teaching in class because they think that social studies contains a variety of oft-used vocabulary words. A teacher using the list-group-tag strategy reported the following:

> I write a new concept on the chalkboard. Through brainstorming, students list many concepts and associated words by exchanging ideas with their peers. Then they try to group the words around the logical categories in small collective groups. When the listing begins, the groups discover word patterns while refining their knowledge of the central concept. Groups create their own word categories and then label each of these categories. (T31)

Another teacher said the following about word games:

> In the beginning of the unit "Let's Learn about Our Region" I prepared a jar containing useful words. This jar included small colored pieces of paper. One side of the pieces had geographical words, and the other side had examples of these words and their definitions. The students picked three random pieces of paper from the jar, looked at the words written on the visible side, and made a guess as to what meanings were written on the other side. Afterwards, they wrote short stories about the words and read these out in class. Thus, they learned geography concepts while having fun in this game. (T17)

Practices for Assessing Students' Context Concepts Development in Social Studies

All teachers who participated in this study were asked to respond to the question "Which assessment tools or practices do you use to assess how well your students have learned the concepts in your classrooms?" Teachers' responses have been categorized under the theme of assessing the context of concept development ($f = 40$). The categories in this theme are presented in Table 5

Table 5
Distribution of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Assessing Contextual Concepts Development

Category	*f*
Standardized vocabulary assessment tests	18
Graphic organizer tools	13
Alternative vocabulary assessment activities	9
Total	40

The teachers stated using different methods of assessment and measures to meet the vocabulary learning needs of all their students. Teachers shared examples of these assessments, including multiple-choice matching tests, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple-choice tests, and true-false tests. Many of the teachers mentioned assessing their students' vocabulary development most often using standardized assessment tests in class. As these teachers were talking about assessment, they identified standardized vocabulary assessments as sufficient for measuring students' overall vocabulary and information on their social studies concept development. They also mentioned multiple-choice measures as being popular for typical vocabulary-development assessments. One teacher stated his own methods for assessing students as follows:

> I individually try to mix up all different kinds of standardized assessments to determine whether students have learned the key concepts of a unit. Thanks to this, I can evaluate definitions, multiple meanings, and concepts related to unit concepts that students have learned before. (T4)

However, some of the participant teachers mentioned benefitting from graphic organizational tools for measuring students' word meaning and vocabulary development. Examples of these evaluation measures include concept maps, semantics analysis, word maps, mind-maps, and concept circles. Teachers who use concept maps, semantics analysis, and mind maps shared that these tools are included in the social studies textbooks and are sometimes already prepared for their students. However, other teachers pointed out that word maps and concept circles are useful and effective tools for assessing students' learning outcomes for specific topics; however, these are not included in the textbooks. One teacher who uses concept circles to assess her students' concept development reported the following:

> In vocabulary assessment, I use concept circles for what is newly learned; these are not included in the textbooks. In this practice, I write some important words and associate concepts in a circle divided into two or more sections. I ask students to uncover the connections between concepts and guide them to fill in the blank sections of the circle. Afterwards, I ask why/how they related these words to each other, for example, global warming, greenhouse effect, increased CO_2. (T33)

Some teachers in this study were found mentioning using alternative vocabulary assessment activities to assess their students' outcomes. These teachers pointed out that their practices not only assessed breadth of vocabulary, but also its depth regarding social studies content. These assessment practices are word and sentence analogies, creating a story with the target words, and vocabulary knowledge scales, respectively. These teachers reported that word and sentence analogies help students establish causal relationships to identify common similarities, as well as contrast relationships between concepts and key ideas and bridge the concepts of unknown words. These teachers think that creating a story from the target words students have

learned provides a way to measure four dimensions of vocabulary development (i.e., breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge), and their students' efficient use of ability and the relationships between key concepts. One teacher shared that he had asked his students to answer, "What is global warming?" in class at the end of the lesson. This teacher stated assessing the content of the global warming concept and its associated related terms and concepts through student narratives. In addition, other participant teachers mentioned using vocabulary knowledge scales (VKS) in class. Teachers who use this scale shared that it helps identify familiarity with concepts, the multi-meanings of concepts, and their productive use in sentences. One teachers' response to this educational tool is as follows:

> I provide students with a VKS containing the list of selected terms before starting a unit. The VKS has terms in four stages: never heard before, heard but meaning is unknown; meaning is known but uncertain, and the meaning is known and can be used in a sentence. I ask students to read each term and select only one stage on the VKS card; after this exercise, I collect their cards. At the end of the unit, I give the VKS cards to the students again. In this way, I assess students' vocabulary by comparing their prior-knowledge about the unit terms with this new information. (T34)

Another teacher uses word analogies:

> …yes, analogies are effective at assessing vocabulary. Analogies allow students to explain the relationship between two frequently used concepts and associate related words by considering their relationship. For example, I asked the students, "What is the relationship between geographical discoveries and the 15th-16th centuries?" I wrote this on the board as *Geographical Discoveries: 15th-16th centuries: Space Research:?* Students developed an analogy and gave the answer as *20th century*. (T4)

Another teacher talked about an activity for creating a story from unit words:

> …I pronounce the target words and ask students to write stories [at least 20-30 sentences] reflecting their own knowledge using target concepts. I assess the stories in terms of depth and breadth of knowledge, contextual usage, self-definitions, representations, and creative ideas related to the concepts in their stories. I hang the successful ones on the walls. (T29)

Discussion

This study evaluates the results obtained from interviews conducted with 35 social studies teachers under the themes of choosing the key concepts to be taught, concept-teaching strategies, and assessing the development of learned concepts. One practice that teachers mentioned most is choosing the new concepts to be taught at the beginning of planned implementations before teaching social studies content. The teachers shared that they follow the key concepts in the content and instructional materials while selecting new concepts to be taught within social studies content. Teachers reported the textbooks as normally sufficient for choosing new concepts and

keywords. Some teachers in this study mentioned their activities when choosing key concepts as a way students can learn daily words by reading, inquiring and discussing their meanings. Teachers reported using one strategy, vocabulary self-collection, when choosing which key concepts to teach in a unit or course. According to the teachers, vocabulary self-collection strategies help students learn the words they want through their own determination, investigative knowledge, and discussions with peers or the teacher on the various meanings (Greenwood, 2002; Haggard, 1986). Teachers shared that vocabulary self-collection requires them to consider students' interests and choices when they starting to teach new words. This finding is consistent with the results of previous research in relation to teachers pedagogical practices (Yağcı, Katrancı, Erdoğan, & Uygun, 2012). Hedrick et al.'s (2004) study found that 57.5% of middle-school social studies teachers follow the terms in the textbooks, 21.9% create their own list of words, 1.4% used vocabulary self-collection strategies, and 13.7% use other methods to instruct vocabulary in social studies. However, mostly focusing solely on teaching content or teacher-oriented activities rather than students' interests and expectations in vocabulary activities is characterized as a situation that must consider students' development of vocabulary knowledge more (Simpson, Stalh, & Francis, 2004). This result also contrasts the study conducted by Rudell (1994), which revealed that students certainly learn a variety of specific vocabulary better when teachers teach these words with students aiming to learn for their reading success. However, previous research has shown that when the words chosen are important key concepts that are often used and students discuss their meanings and reasons for choosing in class, they develop better word comprehension and awareness (Hedrick, Harmon, & Wood, 2008; Nation, 2008; Rudell & Shearer, 2002; Scott & Nagy, 2004).

When asking teachers their views about the types of methods they employ to teach key concepts so as to meet their students' needs in-class, some of them were found to use explicit instruction methods such as definitional approaches and contextual analysis, while others to prefer employing interactive strategies and different types of graphic organizers. Most participant teachers reported that just giving a word's definition is sufficient for learning it; hence, they explained that they often use definitional methods of instruction when teaching a specific term. The teachers commented that memorizing the dictionary definition is a logical way to enhance students' vocabulary; therefore, they mentioned often guiding their students to use a dictionary in order to acquire a social studies concept. This finding is consistent with the results of Bailey et al.'s (2006) study, which found that concepts in social studies are basically based on definitions and that social studies teachers don't have enough time to teach the variety of specific vocabulary words. However, researchers in the field of vocabulary instruction have pointed out that the definitional method of instruction is a lower-level word-learning skill (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2013) and therefore does not reliably allow for either reading comprehension

or conceptual development; this can cause relatively superficial learning (Nagy, 1988). Graves and Penn (1986) noted that definitional methods can be an activity that initially helps teach new concepts, but it does not sufficiently help students consider all the dimensions of a concept or allow them to develop a generalization from these dimensions. Regarding this finding, Marzano (2004) made the suggestion that teachers should often use traditional tasks in vocabulary instruction. Marzano explained that a student who only memorizes definitions might encounter some problems, and these problems negatively affect reading comprehension. In light of these findings, the potential impact of this practice that teachers reported should be considered in terms of students' understanding of what they've read in social studies and other content-area classes. If higher-level vocabulary learning skills are not taught to students, understanding social studies texts (in particular expository texts) and materials might be compromised (Burke, 2012). Social studies classes are a content area that requires more use of higher-level reading skills because it contains a variety of technical words and text types related to social sciences (Hennings, 1993). Given students' metacognitive weaknesses, effective reading strategies and vocabulary learning skills being taught together within the context of social studies content seems crucial for best meeting the needs of these students (Nation, Clarke, Wright, & Williams, 2006). Such practices can encourage students to be aware of the strategies they'll use for understanding texts by focusing on the reading (Shaw, Barry, & Mahlios, 2008).

A number of teachers in this study explained their use of contextual analysis for developing understanding of social studies texts; they shared that they first teach their students the strategy of contextually inferring word meanings (Kuhn & Stahl, 1998) as a way of improving comprehension in order to improve social studies reading. This finding supports that, prior to teaching students social studies concepts, allowing them to develop an understanding of expository social studies texts that include a wide variety of specific words helps them increase their future reading success (Carney, Anderson, & Blackburn, 1984). The teachers thought that using context clues as a method allows them to combine vocabulary and reading comprehension skills, as well as improve social studies reading (Fukkink & de Glopper, 1998). Hedrick et al. (2004), supporting this idea, noted that 47.6% of social studies teachers in their study use instructional texts containing numerous contextual clues to reinforce words' meanings. Fukkink and de Glopper (1998) asserted that due to the large number of words one come across while reading, even a small improvement in the ability to infer the meaning of unknown words from contextual clues can bring about a significant increase in the number of words learned**.** Given that teachers are expected to improve their students' comprehension in reading, previous research has confirmed the effectiveness of contextual approaches on vocabulary development (Dole, Sloan, & Trathen, 1995; Nelson & Stage, 2007; Rinaldi, Sells, & McLaughlin, 1997). This result supports the view that the more time it takes to teach and model efficient

vocabulary strategies, the less time they have to spend teaching the required content material (Barry, 2002). Accordingly, the teachers in this study who use contextual analysis in vocabulary instruction are clearly aware of the positive correlation between the variables of word acquisition and reading comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 1991).

Some teachers in this study reported the importance of using graphic organizers (GO) in order to promote reinforcing the content of social studies and understanding abstract concepts in class. These teachers think that using GOs helps make abstract concepts concrete and helps students uncover the relationships among concepts in social studies texts. They noted that one advantage to using different types of GOs is that these tools allow students to spend less time writing and rereading while trying to deal with expository social studies texts (Chang & Ku, 2014). These teachers highlight the strategic instruction model by talking about modeling the use of GOs to develop reading variables such as comprehension, word identification, and fluency in social studies. According to the results, these teachers are understood to place graphic organizational tools at the center of their education when teaching social studies content. Robinson (1997) asserted that using GOs promotes words' ability to be encoded into long-term memory, retained, and recalled, as well as provide a framework for new concepts using pre-existing schema. However, a review of the literature suggests supporting GOs with effective strategy models and word-learning behaviors. For instance, Bromley (2007) points out that combining multiple-strategies in vocabulary instruction fosters students' word awareness by developing a rich and deep understanding of its meanings and by making meaningful leaps in developing vocabulary knowledge.

Some teachers shared using interactive vocabulary teaching procedures in class for their students within the context of social studies curriculum (Harmon et al., 2005). When these teachers mention vocabulary activities, they explained incorporating students into hands-on learning activities in order to support vocabulary development in social studies. According to the teachers, these activities typically involve the students physically moving themselves within the context of social studies content or important concepts being taught in classroom. These teachers shared teaching important social sciences terms by having their students actively engage with content using student-centered techniques such as making an illustrated class dictionary, and drama and word games. For example, a number of teachers shared that they design interactive word walls for their grade with keywords on the themes of social studies curriculum during the school year. These teachers think that such interactive, productive, word-processing activities increase students' word awareness and provide them with a comprehensive understanding of social studies concepts (Scot & Nagy, 2004). These teachers explained spending

more time and giving opportunities for vocabulary words within their content area. Accordingly, student success in learning vocabulary may have motivated the teachers in this study to continue to value and use these strategies in content area. Kohler, Henning, and Usma-Wilches (2008) concluded that a teacher makes decisions during and after teaching based on students' achieved learning. This means that using interactive strategies as reported by teachers here supports the literature in that students' positive learning experiences with these strategies can influence teachers' decisions frequently teach with these strategies (Burke, 2012).

All teachers participating in this study reported preferring different evaluation methods and measures in order to assess how well students' had learned concepts or words within social studies content. Some examples of these measures include standardized tests, word analogies, concept circles, and vocabulary knowledge scales, respectively. Findings show that the teachers use a variety of evaluation forms to determine if students have met the required outcomes for activities; however, most teachers stated using standardized vocabulary tests to assess student outcomes in order to determine how well they learned the social studies concepts. Relevant literature points out the inadequacy of scores obtained from standardized tests in monitoring students' vocabulary growth and conceptual development (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1995). Allen (1999) observed that the majority of teachers espouse standardized tests for assessing vocabulary learning, and as evidence of these espoused beliefs, the teachers attempt to determine students' vocabulary level by giving their students some words' definitions on a matching tests. Standardized tests as mentioned by the teachers in the study were, therefore, as superficial assessment tools on reflecting changes in a growing vocabulary (Allen, 2007). Promising tools for assessing one's depth of vocabulary development (assessing what a student understands about the subject instead of what they know or do not) include alternative assessment practices and graphic organizers (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Kabapınar, 2016, p. 340; Vaughn et al., 2008). Recent studies have incorporated alternative practices in assessing both academic vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills (Segler, Pain, & Sorace, 2002; Stahl & Bravo, 2010). Teachers who use alternative vocabulary assessments to measure student outcomes in vocabulary knowledge have reported that these practices help assess students' breadth of vocabulary, as well as their reading comprehension in social studies texts. Supporting this finding Stahl and Bravo (2010) suggest five dimensions for vocabulary development should be considered (i.e., generalization, application, breadth, precision, and availability) while preparing a vocabulary assessment tool. In this study, the teachers who use these alternative vocabulary assessments may have been impacted by the current requirements in the literature and, as a result, used these methods and tools to assess vocabulary development by considering the broad nature of in-class concept learning. As such, these teachers seem aware that

alternative practices are the best measures in assessing all the dimensions of concept learning and vocabulary development.

Limitations and Implications

This study aims to investigate middle-school social studies teachers' practices related to concept teaching within their social studies instruction based on their own views and experiences in order to support and assess the development of students' vocabulary. The interviews with these teachers in this study are representative of a self-reporting scale. For this reason, the practices teachers mentioned could not be completely validated as the investigator did not observe the teachers in class to determine whether their interviews align with their classroom practices. All findings in this study are limited to the scope of the perceptions and experiences espoused by the participating teachers. Future research should include teacher observations along with interviews to validate actual classrooms practices. Observations can provide researchers with comprehensive data regarding the concept-teaching practices they've already developed and implemented for their students. In addition, observations might highlight what is lacking in teachers' in-class practices in order to better understand and plan opportunities for developing the teaching-profession. If this study is replicated, it would be important to a review of the content and format of teachers' involvement and participation in professional vocabulary instruction will be important if this study is replicated. This would allow researchers an opportunity to understand whether teachers have transferred knowledge of current and effective research-based practices into their classroom practices.

Conclusion

The results showed that the majority of teachers here use lower-level strategies and practices when teaching social studies concepts in their classrooms. These teachers were not found to employ strategies that support the current accepted understanding and ideas regarding concept teaching within the context of their social studies instruction for students to improve their vocabulary learning skills. In order to meet students' needs, these teachers reported using traditional tasks focused more on words' definitional knowledge, as well as assessment methods that measure only the breadth of vocabulary knowledge. Findings indicate that although the teachers attempted to develop their students' vocabulary they did not spend sufficient time focusing on a specific set for teaching socials studies concepts, thus they used lower-level vocabulary learning skills. Accordingly, the constant use of lower-level skills indicates a need to provide teachers with certain professional training opportunities that address improving students' vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. According to researchers, the most beneficial professional development training

for teachers is to create opportunities that focus on enhancing academic vocabulary growth and metacognitive reading strategies, particularly for students within the context of social studies curriculum or related activities (Alkış, 2012; Whalon, Al Otaiba, & Delano, 2009). Creating many opportunities are needed that focus on improving content-area vocabulary and comprehension development within social studies content. In this respect, the process of improving students' vocabulary-learning skills and other specific strategies can help them gain a deeper understanding of social studies concepts and the inferred information presented in texts. In choosing these strategies, teachers should focus on teaching efficient skills that students can use themselves independently during reading or lectures. Some teachers in the current study explained that they highlight classroom activities that focus on using higher-level strategies to foster students' social studies reading and vocabulary growth, as opposed to only lower-level reading skills strategies in-class such as basic vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. These teachers reported giving their students many opportunities by planning which keywords to teach with their students, using various teaching methods on a set of specific strategies within the content of the social studies curriculum. Thus, they talked about how they had increased their own students' word awareness. This finding is important as it shows the greater effectiveness of using productive strategies to model students' vocabulary learning skills, as opposed to the traditional vocabulary methods that focus on developing students' breadth of vocabulary. The practices teachers mentioned are expected to be useful suggestions for guiding other teachers' practices related to vocabulary instruction in content-classes. Regarding effective concept teaching, teachers are recommended to focus on teaching students about vocabulary-learning skills, as well as supporting vocabulary growth to foster students' reading comprehension development. In this respect, one can emphasize the extreme importance of increasing awareness on the use of effective and current vocabulary instructional strategies, which should be incorporated into content-areas not only to build vocabulary knowledge but also to help improve reading comprehension skills. However, the practices teachers reported here indicate that more importance should be attached to concept teaching as well reading skills teaching in social studies. The findings show the need to continue planned teaching of reading skills and concepts in social studies classrooms through teacher-supported and teacher-student cooperation using explicit instruction. In order to support students' vocabulary growth and conceptual development, teachers are suggested to incorporate higher-level strategies into their classroom practices when they teach content.

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