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### Inclusive Education in Social Studies: Teacher Perspectives and Implementation Analysis<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities and support for all students by considering their individual differences. This study presents findings on the perspectives and practices of social studies teachers in Türkiye who contribute to the goal of inclusive education. It seeks to analyze the current state of this field by examining teachers' understanding of and practices related to inclusive education, ultimately informing future educational policies. The research involved content analysis of data gathered from semi-structured interviews with 14 social studies teachers in Kayseri province. The findings reveal that many teachers hold negative or ambivalent views toward inclusive education, and there are notable gaps in the planning and implementation of differentiated instructional designs that support inclusion. Based on these results, the study offers recommendations for educational policies and teacher training programs to enhance the understanding and effectiveness of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, inclusion, social studies education, teacher practices, differentiated instruction.



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## **Introduction**

Teachers play a crucial role among the stakeholders who influence the development and success of inclusive education (Chow, Bruin & Sharma, 2024; De Boer et al., 2010; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005). As the primary agents of social change, teachers are expected to meet complex and high expectations from society (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Van de Putte & Schauwer, 2013). The significant number of students excluded from education due to social, economic, and cultural barriers, along with the push for education as a right, has placed inclusive reforms on the global agenda (Opertti & Breddy, 2011). This transformation calls for a shift in teachers' perspectives, approaches, efforts, and practices, making inclusive knowledge and skills essential competencies for their profession (Vantieghem et al., 2020). Teachers are responsible for implementing and adapting curricula, educational practices, and assessments. A key aspect of their role is to promote students' active and meaningful participation in the teaching and learning process (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2012).

Inclusive education began to gain recognition in the 1970s, and its principles were significantly advanced by the Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action in 1994. Since then, inclusive education has become central to many international policy documents (European Agency, 2010; OECD, 2005; UNESCO, 2015; 2017), systematic reviews, and school practices. In 2015, the United Nations committed to ensuring "inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all" and to promoting "lifelong learning opportunities for all" as part of Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). Türkiye, having endorsed the Salamanca Declaration and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 1994, has also adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This demonstrates Türkiye's commitment to SDG 4, which emphasizes the importance of inclusive, equitable, and quality education, as led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

Since the 1990s, Türkiye has become one of the main destinations for citizens of Middle Eastern countries migrating either voluntarily or forcibly. It hosts the largest international migrant population in the world, particularly in the context of mass migration. During the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, Türkiye implemented an 'open door' policy for Syrian citizens affected by the conflict, allowing them to enter the country (Dora, 2020; Tanrıkulu, 2018; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2022). According to 2024 migration administration data, there are approximately four and a half million foreign nationals residing in Türkiye (Republic of Türkiye Presidential Communication Centre, 2024). Additionally, the number of individuals under temporary protection is rapidly increasing due to high birth rates (Erdoğan, 2022). This situation has led to significant challenges for the population under temporary protection as they navigate difficult adaptation processes economically, culturally, socially, and psychologically, impacting Türkiye's dynamics across various areas and levels. The prolonged civil war in Syria has made it evident that migrants under temporary protection are unlikely to return to their home countries as soon as initially anticipated. This situation has led to education being viewed as a primary means for integrating migrants into

Turkish society (UNICEF, 2022). In other words, Türkiye's most comprehensive political and educational initiative has been the inclusion of nearly one million Syrian students in the education system. This effort aims to prevent and address sociocultural, psychological, and economic chaos, disharmony, and crises (Karlı-Çalamak & Kılınc, 2021). The initiative is grounded in the belief that the integration process can be successful through the adoption and promotion of inclusive education practices at the national level.

The earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, severely affected the southeastern regions of Türkiye and had a profound impact on the education system. They decreased psychosocial well-being and caused significant damage to infrastructure. In addition to the loss of thousands of lives and extensive property damage, many children of school age became homeless, lost their parents, suffered physical and psychological trauma, faced economic hardship, or became disabled (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı [Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, Presidency of Strategy and Budget], 2023). In the long term, these events have created a new group of disadvantaged or vulnerable learners with diverse educational and support needs, including children with disabilities, traumatized children, and orphans. These challenges also have implications for education. Issues such as the destruction of educational facilities and schools, trauma experienced by students and teachers, difficulties in coping with losses, interruptions in education and student attendance, and security concerns (Arıcı, et al., 2023) have made the implementation of inclusive policies and practices both essential and challenging. As a result, the number of disadvantaged students in Türkiye has increased significantly due to both migration and the earthquake disaster. The country's diverse economic, cultural, and social landscape, combined with external migration and disasters, highlights the need to prioritize inclusive education.

Inclusive education aims to provide students with exceptional needs and disadvantages with learning options and strategies tailored to their social, linguistic, cultural, and educational circumstances (Galkienė & Monkevičienė, 2021; Parsons et al., 2018). To support this goal, education professionals recommend various teaching approaches in inclusive classrooms, such as individualized instruction, a student-centered approach, and Universal Learning Design (Finkelstein et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2018). Differentiated instruction is a particularly effective approach aligned with the philosophy and objectives of inclusive education (Gheysens et al., 2023; Tomlinson, 2001). In Türkiye, the renewed curriculum set to be implemented in 2024 identifies differentiated instruction as a crucial strategy for fostering an inclusive educational environment and an essential component of its programs. The curriculum describes differentiated instruction as "an individualized and flexible approach to meet students' learning needs" (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024, p. 66).

Differentiated instruction involves making specific pedagogical adjustments in various aspects of the learning environment, including content, teaching processes, methods, and assessment (Lawrence-Brown et al., 2018; Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Mutlu & Öztürk, 2017). In this approach, teachers are expected to identify effective teaching strategies tailored to meet the diverse needs of their students (Doubet & Hockett,

2015). This requires creating a flexible learning environment and implementing educational interventions by adopting a responsive approach and utilizing their perceptual skills. Roy et al. (2012) highlight the importance of monitoring academic progress and employing data-driven procedures in differentiated instruction, emphasizing that student advancement should not be left to chance. As a result, differentiated instruction is a cyclical educational strategy in which teachers assess students' needs, track their progress and achievements, evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional methods, and provide constructive feedback.

Social studies is a fundamental course designed to support the goal of inclusive education, creating an integrated, egalitarian, and cooperative educational environment that promotes effective citizenship for all students in diverse classrooms. Inclusive education aims to actively engage all students in the learning environment, mirroring real-life situations within schools (Urban, 2013). This approach fosters a flexible, participatory, and democratic atmosphere in education, helping students with various abilities to become active citizens in the future. In essence, inclusive education promotes a classroom culture that reflects an egalitarian, democratic, just, and effective citizen profile, as well as a pluralistic social culture. The social studies course plays a crucial role in developing socio-emotional skills, such as social cohesion, communication, awareness, and cooperation, particularly for disadvantaged students and those with limited Turkish language proficiency (MoNE, 2024). Therefore, inclusive social studies education can significantly enhance the social mission of the social studies curriculum.

After the Salamanca Declaration, numerous books, articles, and academic studies on inclusive education have emerged in the international literature. While this indicates that inclusive education is an increasingly important educational trend, research specifically focusing on social studies teachers is limited within Turkish literature. Şimşek and Kılcan (2023) conducted a quantitative study investigating the attitudes and self-efficacy levels of social studies teachers regarding inclusive education. Their findings revealed that the teachers exhibited high levels of both positive attitudes and self-efficacy toward inclusive practices. Similarly, Bayram and Öztürk (2020) examined the perceptions and practices of pre-service social studies teachers through a quantitative questionnaire. They discovered that although these teachers held a positive view of inclusive education, their knowledge and practical skills in implementing inclusive practices were lacking. Öner (2022) conducted action research on social studies education in inclusive classrooms and highlighted that differentiated instruction methods can be effectively applied in this context. However, there remains a notable deficit of qualitative studies exploring the perspectives and practices of social studies teachers. Understanding the perspectives and practices of teachers toward inclusive education is crucial for identifying the challenges and barriers hindering successful implementation. This insight can serve as a guide for policymakers, enabling them to take necessary actions and develop effective policies for the implementation of inclusive education.

This study aims to explore social studies teachers' perspectives on inclusive education and their educational practices through the lens of differentiated instruction. Social studies is a crucial subject for promoting

inclusive education and effective citizenship, as it seeks to integrate individuals into society without discrimination and foster more socially harmonious, egalitarian, and just communities. In this context, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What are social studies teachers' perspectives on inclusive schools and inclusion?
- What are social studies teachers' inclusive education practices?

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection Tools**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, focusing on interviews for data collection. A semi-structured interview format was one of the methods employed. This format involves pre-prepared questions but allows the researcher to modify or adjust these inquiries when necessary (Adams, 2015). The semi-structured interview enables the exploration of new concepts and diverse viewpoints, offering flexibility beyond a rigid interview structure. This flexibility allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

The interviews lasted an average of 30 to 40 minutes and were typically conducted in a school setting. Participation was voluntary, with all interviews carried out after obtaining the participants' consent. Audio recordings were made with the consent of the participants, while data from those who declined consent were documented through notes. Participants were informed about their confidentiality and the interview procedures before the interview began, and they were told that the interview transcript would be provided to them for verification. During the interview, questions varied in nature and sequence, depending on the participants' responses and feedback regarding the communication.

### **Working Group**

The study group was selected using a convenience sampling method. The research involved 14 social studies teachers, each with varying levels of professional experience, who were working with at least one disadvantaged student in the central districts of Kayseri. When selecting the schools, preference was given to regions with a high concentration of asylum seekers under temporary protection and families with low socio-economic status. The data collected on the participants included their gender, professional experience, and whether they had received any in-service training on inclusive education prior to the study.

Table 1. Gender, professional experience, and training on inclusive education of the study group.

Participant code	Gender	Professional experience (Years)	Training status
P1	Woman	8	Trained
P2	Man	9	Trained
P3	Man	8	Trained
P4	Man	7	Untrained
P5	Woman	7	Untrained
P6	Woman	21	Untrained
P7	Woman	11	Untrained
P8	Woman	12	Untrained
P9	Woman	7	Trained
P10	Man	4	Trained
P11	Man	12	Trained
P12	Man	15	Trained
P13	Woman	12	Untrained
P14	Man	18	Trained

As seen in Table 1, the participants are concentrated in the middle group in terms of professional experience, have equal rates in gender distribution (7 women, 7 men), and have a homogeneous distribution in terms of receiving training on inclusive education (8 receiving training, 6 not receiving training).

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using content analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique aimed at uncovering concepts and relationships that explain the gathered information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 242). Initially, the recorded data was transcribed into a Word document during the study process. These written documents were then emailed to the participants for confirmation of their accuracy. Four teachers responded, indicating that the data accurately reflected the interviews. The researcher carefully read the interview texts one by one to become familiar with the data before proceeding with the coding process. During coding, related codes with similar meanings were grouped under overarching themes. To enhance the reliability of the coding, a second researcher conducted independent coding, and the consistency between the two sets of codes was assessed. The coding agreement between the two researchers was approximately 80%, which exceeds the 70% threshold for reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The resulting codes were organized under the themes of 'perspective on inclusive education,' and 'in-class practices in inclusive education.'

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity is the ability to measure the feature that the research wants to measure; reliability is that this measurement reflects the feature in a stable, consistent, and accurate way (Başol, 2008). In qualitative studies, validity and reliability are possible with the researcher's presentation of the subject he/she is investigating in an unbiased and current manner (Öztürk, 2014). In addition, validity is more important than reliability in qualitative studies. In this study, to ensure validity, the interview questions were prepared by reviewing the literature and taking the opinions of two experts in the field of social studies, and how the research

data and results were obtained were explained in detail. In addition, interview data were presented as direct quotations to support the findings. For the reliability of qualitative studies, as stated by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016), the researcher made his/her position clear, two different researchers checked the consistency of the coding results, and the interview documents were shared with the participants.

## Results

The codes obtained in the content analysis were analyzed in two categories.

### **Social studies teachers' perspectives on inclusive education**

Table 2 shows the categories formed about the participants' perspectives based on the responses to reveal their perspectives on inclusive education and to evaluate the positive or negative aspects of inclusive education according to them.

Table 2. Participants' perspectives on inclusive education.

Feature	f
Those who remain undecided	7
Those with a positive perception	5
Those with a negative perception	2
Total	14

Seven participants expressed their perspectives concerning the components of inclusive education, such as its purpose, justification, and implementation. Although the participants in this group had a positive perception of the purpose of inclusive education, as exemplified below with the statements of P8, they made negative inferences about it, especially based on the deficiencies and problems in its implementation:

I should not directly categorize inclusive education as positive or negative. However, I mostly see it as an education that will benefit the students, but not under the conditions in our country. (P8)

Five participants explained their views on inclusive education positively, emphasizing its philosophical basis and purpose. For example;

I think this system is a fairer education system because every student wants to taste the feeling of success. They want to be motivated. With this education, children can see they can succeed without being segregated by their level and characteristics. Therefore, I can say that it is a more humane and socially just model of education. (P7)

Two participants expressed that they had a negative view of inclusive education. For example;

Frankly, I do not think inclusive education is the correct practice because there is a gap between disadvantaged and normal students. It does not make sense to educate two extreme students in the same environment. I do not think it will be a successful education (P13).

Three of the eight teachers who received in-service training on inclusive education and only two of the six teachers who did not have in-service training had a positive perspective. In comparison, two teachers who did not receive any training had a negative perspective.

Table 3 shows the findings regarding the reasons that negatively affect the approach to inclusive education of the participants who have a negative perspective on inclusive education or who do not directly express their perspective as positive or negative.

Table 3. Factors that negatively affect inclusive education according to participants

Feature	f
Language impairment and communication problems	7
Norm and discipline problems	4
Differences in cultural and moral understanding	2
Negative impact on non-disadvantaged students	2
Total	15

The first factor that negatively affects the participants' perspective on inclusive education is the language problem, which was mentioned by seven participants, especially with Syrian students whose Turkish is not at a sufficient level. P11 expressed his thoughts about this situation as follows:

... Because there are many refugee children in our country, most of them are brought to schools. However, the students admitted to schools were directly involved in education without learning the language. This situation caused problems for us, for them, and for other students because these children do not know how to read, write, and speak Turkish. I do not think it is right to expect socialization and success in school from these pupils... (P11)

The second factor that most negatively affected the participants' perspectives on inclusive education was the problems encountered with Syrian and mainstreaming students whose Turkish language skills were not adequate in terms of implementing classroom norms and maintaining discipline:

They cannot participate in the class [referring to Syrian children], so this education does not benefit these children at all. The same can be said for mainstream pupils. An extremely hyperactive mainstream pupil or a pupil with severe disabilities has serious problems (P8).

The other factor mentioned by two of the participants is cultural and moral differences:

For example, Syrian students have a serious moral problem. I don't know if we can explain it with culture, but I see them making hand jokes as if they were bullying each other. When I warn them, they don't take it seriously. We have a discipline problem. They constantly create a chaotic environment in the classroom and prevent other students from being educated by taking up their time (P6).

The other negative factor mentioned by two participants is that disadvantaged students negatively affect the academic success and development of non-disadvantaged students. P13's remarks on the subject are shared below.



Yes, this system also creates obstacles for other children under these conditions because we must be more tolerant of these students. After all, they have problems adapting. This time, the other children expect the same tolerance, making it difficult for them to concentrate on the lesson. (P13).

### **In-Course Practices in Inclusive Education**

The findings regarding the participants' differentiated practices and activities in the content, process, and evaluation dimensions of teaching that would support disadvantaged students socially and academically during the course process were analyzed under four categories: "course content and process practices," "teaching materials," "learning environment", and "assessment and evaluation."

#### **Teaching content and process practices**

The participants were asked whether they performed differentiated content, methods, techniques, and activities for disadvantaged students, which methods and techniques they mostly preferred in this context, and whether there were problems and obstacles in front of differentiation and, if so, what they were. Only three of the participants differentiated according to the characteristics of the students, such as interest, prior knowledge, and learning styles. In contrast, eleven participants stated that they did not make any differentiation.

Since the participants did not differentiate at a high rate, questions were asked to determine the reasons for this situation. The problems and obstacles in front of differentiation and the categories formed as a result of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' reasons for not making differentiation in in-class applications

Feature	(f)
Insufficient course hours	7
Intensity of the curriculum	6
Occurrence of disciplinary problems	4
Language problem (students with insufficient Turkish language skills)	4
Failure to achieve academic success	2
Classes are too crowded	2
Not knowing how to do the application	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

As shown in Table 4, half of the participants stated that they could not implement differentiated instruction due to insufficient class hours. For example;

I mean, now we don't have time to say to this student, "Let's do this activity with you," and frankly, when you are trying to catch up with the subject with non-disadvantaged students, you realize that the lesson is over and the bell has rung (P14).

I don't differentiate between these students because our lessons are very short, and I don't have the opportunity to use different activities and methods for them while trying to help other students achieve the results. (P8).

Six of the participants associated the reason for not differentiating in-class methods, techniques, and activities with the intensity of the curriculum content, which reflects the purpose of the education system.

Our curriculum is intensive, our teaching hours are few, and I also have administrative duties. We have neither the time nor the conditions to make special requests for these students (P2).

Four of the participants stated that they do not apply differentiated instruction because it causes discipline and adaptation disorders between non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged students during the lesson process, and it is not possible to transfer academic knowledge and skills in the lessons due to language and cultural problems in students whose Turkish is not sufficient.

When I use a different activity and method, it causes disorganization in the classroom. Syrian students already live in their own world without any interest in the lesson. Inclusion pupils may also have discipline problems, and when different activities and methods are used, they see it as an opportunity and make the lesson more intense (P9).

Two participants mentioned the fact that differentiated teaching practice negatively affects the academic achievement of non-disadvantaged students and that class sizes are more crowded than desired as problems and obstacles to differentiation in classroom methods and techniques.

I think it is a more successful system academically. The curriculum we are offered is very intense in terms of subject matter, and we have very few teaching hours. I do not have the opportunity to use drama, station, etc., in the limited teaching time (P10).

... There is no student-centered teaching in this school. Everyone teaches like this. There are so many Syrian students, and one of them can be taught a special lesson. There can be seven or eight Syrians in one class, and some of them do not even speak the language. If we try to differentiate them, it would take a lot of time and effort (P8).

One of the participants self-critically associated the problems and obstacles to differentiation with his competence and stated that he did not differentiate in the lesson process because he did not know how to apply differentiated instruction.

I do not have enough knowledge for my pupils; I have not had enough training in this area. Yes, I have had training on inclusive education, but not everything is as written in the book; it is very difficult to apply it. (P2)

According to the participant, in-service training is insufficient to translate theory into practice. Since it is not activity-based, it cannot provide participants with the knowledge and skills to make differentiated lesson plans.

### **Teaching materials**

Differentiated instruction requires that not only the methods, techniques, and activities but also the teaching resources and materials to be used in the teaching process should be designed, changed, and developed by the teacher according to the characteristics of the students, such as interest,

needs, ability, and prior knowledge. For this reason, the results obtained from the analysis carried out to reveal whether the participants designed and differentiated the tools, materials, and materials to be used in the course for disadvantaged students are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Participants' design and preparation of materials, resources, tools, and equipment for disadvantaged students.

Feature	(f)
Designers of teaching material	2
Those who do not design teaching materials	12
Total	14

According to Table 5, only two participants designed materials, tools, and equipment for disadvantaged students before the lesson and differentiated resources.

I aim to ensure they learn at their level without being excluded from the activity. I prepare materials for special learners using more examples and visual elements related to the subject. I repeat more often (P5).

The most effective thing we do is to set easier lesson targets for these students. For example, while we ask students to write information about 7 regions from geography, we ask them to write only the region where we live. It is the same in terms of activity and technique, but as I said, I draw the desired behavior and knowledge to a lower level. (P14)

Participants were asked questions to determine which resources and materials they use for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in inclusive classrooms and which resources they find useful for their students. The categories created are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The most preferred and utilized tools, equipment, and materials of the participants

Feature	(f)
Smartboard	10
Worksheets (question and activity sheets)	6
Visual (map, atlas, picture, etc.) materials	3
Writing board	2
Textbooks and other books	1
Total	22

According to Table 6, ten participants find the smart board useful and use it for all their students in inclusive classrooms because it appeals to multiple sensory organs, provides quick access to more information sources with web support, and provides the opportunity to concretize the information by presenting it to the student.

I use the Smart Board most of the time. It is a very useful tool, especially for disadvantaged students. It makes understanding easier. Whether it is mainstream, Syrian, or other groups of students, it attracts their attention and is useful for concretization and reinforcement (P12).

The other teaching materials and resources that the participants preferred to use frequently were the activities and worksheets they prepared

themselves or obtained from other sources. Six participants stated that they used worksheets effectively but prepared them according to the class average, not according to the interests, needs, and abilities of disadvantaged students.

I mostly use concrete materials, smart boards, and activity sheets (P7).

Yes, I use photocopied information sheets and question papers (P9).

Three of the participants stated that they used visual teaching materials (such as maps, atlases, and photographs), two stated that they used the blackboard effectively, and one stated that they used auxiliary textbooks other than the main textbook.

I already give examples from everyday life while explaining the subjects; I give simple examples to these students; I do this a lot with inclusion students; I try to make them perceive values by concretizing them. In terms of skills, I try to use simpler graphs and tables. For map skills, I use maps a lot or I give examples from our immediate environment for spatial thinking skills. (P5).

### **Learning environment**

Since the classroom layout and learning environment should be arranged in a way to ensure that students receive education in a collaborative learning environment by forming small groups to achieve common goals in an inclusive classroom environment, questions were asked to the participants to determine whether they made any arrangements and changes in the learning environment. It was determined that none of the participants made any changes or modifications in the classroom order and only changed the location of the students to solve the discipline problem. For this reason, the categories obtained to determine the reasons for not making arrangements and the situations that prevented the participants from making arrangements are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Participants' reasons for not making changes in classroom organization.

Feature	(f)
Causing disciplinary problems	6
Creating a waste of time	3
Unsuitable physical conditions	1
Large class size	1
Not suitable for the methods used	1
Total	12

Six of the participants stated that they did not make changes and arrangements in the classroom environment because of student control and discipline problems that occurred during the lesson process.

I changed the students' places, but the class order did not change. However, there is already a discipline problem, and it would be more difficult to control the students if the order changes. If the students sit differently, they may sit next to their new friends, making it more difficult to manage the class. (P2)

I don't want to change the order of the desks; I want to make a group order like a U-order. However, it would be difficult to ensure class

control if the students go out of the order they are used to. We would have difficulty ensuring class control. (P5)

Another obstacle mentioned by the participants is that the time allocated for changing the classroom organization harms the lesson process. Three participants stated they did not change the classroom organization because they did not want to waste time. For example;

I don't change the classroom organization; it's always the same. I mean, we don't have time for it. To be honest, the lesson time is not enough anyway. We can hardly even complete our activities, but I wish we had the chance to do it (P1).

One participant mentioned the physical equipment and conditions of the school and classrooms as obstacles and problems, as well as the fact that the classroom organization and collaborative learning approach are not suitable for change, the class sizes are too crowded for group work, and the teaching approaches, methods, and techniques they use do not justify changes in the classroom organization.

Our classes are too big; the average number of 5th graders is 30. If I try to get these students to change the classroom organization, I can neither get them back nor place them. But if there were fourteen or fifteen pupils in my class, I could make an arrangement, but that is very rare. (P7).

### **Measurement and evaluation**

In the measurement and evaluation, which represents the product dimension of differentiated instruction, an effective teaching approach in inclusive education, questions were asked to determine whether the participants made differentiation according to the characteristics of their students. The findings obtained are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Participants' differentiation in the assessment process

Feature	(f)
Those who claim to differentiate	9
Those who claim not to differentiate	5
Total	14

As seen in Table 8, nine participants stated that they made differentiation in assessment and evaluation practices and products, while five of them stated that they did not make differentiation. The answers given by the participants during the interview to the additional questions about how they differentiate their assessment and evaluation activities show that this differentiation is not a differentiation in methods, techniques, and desired learning products according to the individual differences of disadvantaged students but only changes in the content of traditional written assessment tools. The participants stated that they generally tried to make differentiation by using opinion grades for the student and that they did not use evaluation methods such as self-evaluation, portfolio, and product file, which would allow them to evaluate students by taking into account their different characteristics such as interest, needs, and intelligence type.

We do the process evaluation in class with the opinion grade. However, the written exams are not prepared at the same level and

characteristics as the other students; we subject them to an easier and simpler exam (P1).

I used written and opinion grades in the evaluation according to the regulations. In the opinion grade, I evaluate according to the student's development in the class. In other words, it is not the written grades but the student's participation in the learning process, interest, behavior, and adaptation that directly influence this grade. Apart from that, I ask mainstream and Syrian students easier and fewer questions in written exams, and I try to include visual elements (P8).

The study's findings, based on the attitudes and experiences of social studies teachers, shed light on the challenges that negatively impact the success of inclusive education and the issues within their practices.

### **Discussion**

The attitudes and practices of teachers, who play a crucial role in the inclusion process, significantly influence the transformation of schools, the dissemination and improvement of inclusive education, and the overall educational outcomes. As noted by Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka (2014), teachers' perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and practices towards disadvantaged students—shaped by their cultural, historical, and social contexts—directly affect the reality and future of inclusive education. This study aims to provide a clear and realistic depiction of the current situation regarding teachers' roles in inclusive education. It seeks to reveal teachers' tendencies and practices towards inclusivity while offering theoretical and practical insights to develop, guide, and support reflective practices in this area. The research examines teachers' perspectives on inclusive pedagogy, focusing on their in-class and out-of-class practices within the framework of differentiated instruction. By analyzing teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms, the study highlights their profiles and positions concerning inclusive education.

Despite the global commitment and efforts toward inclusive education, several challenges persist in practice. One significant challenge involves teachers whose perceptions and attitudes are at odds with the goals set by policymakers (Savolainen et al., 2020; Lindner et al., 2023). Therefore, an analysis of social studies teachers' perspectives on inclusive education revealed that, although a majority had received in-service training, many held negative or undecided views. These perspectives were largely shaped by the challenges they encountered in their teaching experiences, particularly with students who had insufficient Turkish language skills or with students requiring special inclusion, regardless of the philosophical, pedagogical, social, and economic justifications for inclusive education. This issue may stem from the fact that inclusive education is a relatively new concept for educators in Türkiye and has been implemented rapidly and without full preparation. Language and communication problems, as well as cultural differences among student groups with limited Turkish language skills, contribute to this perspective. Additionally, there may be underlying prejudices against students from foreign countries (Carrington, 1999; Ersoy, 2019; Karataştan, 2023). Teachers faced the challenge of educating a large number of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds who were under temporary protection due to difficult political and social conditions, such as the Syrian civil war and terrorism. Many of these

students had insufficient proficiency in the Turkish language, which may have reinforced the teachers' existing discriminatory perceptions based on their social and cultural backgrounds. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the training provided to teachers in inclusive education. It is concerning to consider how much this training actually enhances teachers' understanding of inclusive education and their ability to apply it in school settings. The difficulties and experiences teachers encountered in practice may indicate that this training could impede their ability to embrace the intended goals and content and may devolve into mere procedural exercises. Some studies indicate that while increasing knowledge and confidence in inclusive education is important, it does not necessarily alleviate teachers' stress and anxiety regarding disadvantaged students or change their practices (Forlin et al., 2011; Maria, 2013). Therefore, conducting qualitative studies to explore the underlying reasons for teachers' stress and anxiety related to inclusion will be valuable in raising awareness and addressing these concerns.

Differentiation in mixed-ability classrooms is recognized as an effective teaching approach (Aftab, 2015; D'Intino & Wang, 2021; Tomlinson, 2001, 2005). However, findings indicate that only a few teachers effectively employed various methods and techniques during lessons, with their practices falling short depending on factors such as barriers, available resources, opportunities, goals, individual differences, and time constraints. Specifically, while some teachers claimed to implement differentiation, their adaptations primarily focused on the content and materials of their lessons. There was little to no differentiation in the methods and activities used. The basis for these differentiations was limited, targeting a uniform outcome aligned with the curriculum but employing the same methods and techniques for all students. Consequently, the differentiation intended by the teachers translated into content that was either enriched or simplified according to the class's academic average. Unfortunately, this was often conveyed inadequately and unconsciously through traditional teaching methods. Research, including national and international studies (Mutlu & Öztürk, 2017; Supragoyi et al., 2017; Benjamin, 2020; Çam & Acat, 2023; Altun & Naiman, 2024), has shown that teachers often exhibit low to medium levels of differentiation in their teaching practices. They tend to favor teacher-centered, reactive, and lecture-based methods and typically assess learning outcomes based on the average academic achievement of the class rather than on a more individualized basis. This approach can lead to various problems, such as lack of student participation, decreased motivation, unrecognized success, and behavioral issues. These challenges may be perceived by teachers as barriers to implementing differentiated instruction, resulting in a cycle where traditional methods remain prevalent. To address this issue, practical training aimed at increasing teachers' awareness and motivation could be beneficial. Furthermore, studies that explore and compare the personal, psychosocial, professional, and economic factors influencing teachers' attitudes and practices across different countries -regardless of cultural and local contexts- could provide valuable insights into this phenomenon on a global scale.

Teachers cited several reasons for their inability to differentiate instruction, attributing these challenges to factors beyond their professional role, competence, and responsibilities. The key issues

identified included insufficient class hours, the intensive content and learning outcomes of the curriculum, discipline, adaptation problems within classrooms, and language barriers for students who struggle with Turkish. However, aside from the language and communication issues, the other challenges mentioned can often be addressed through differentiated teaching practices in inclusive classrooms, which can also improve classroom composition (D'Intino & Wang, 2021; Lawrence-Brown, 2018; Porta & Todd, 2022). These observations indicate that teachers often do not alter their teaching methods or develop sensitivity toward implementing differentiated instruction for students with diverse needs. Furthermore, the findings suggest a lack of motivation among teachers to apply differentiated instruction, as they do not perceive its positive impact on the issues they face, nor do they recognize the positive organizational and academic outcomes it can have for their students. As a result, they have not discovered the advantages of differentiated instruction.

In differentiated instruction, it is essential to adapt the course content, process, and assessments, as well as to apply collaborative learning strategies and group work. This requires diversifying teaching resources, technologies, tools, and materials (Tomlinson, 2017). To achieve this, teachers must design instructional materials that cater to students' prior knowledge, interests, learning speeds, and cognitive abilities. The findings of the study indicate that teachers struggle with effectively designing materials tailored to student characteristics or differentiating existing resources in mixed-ability classes. Most teachers primarily use basic audiovisual materials, such as smart boards, worksheets, and maps, during lessons. In particular, many teachers prefer smart boards because they engage multiple senses and allow for the presentation of information in a more concrete and in-depth manner with web support. While this suggests that teachers are making an effort to use differentiated materials that accommodate varying levels and interests among their students—without strictly relying on textbooks—the information indicates that they often use same materials based on the average academic achievement of the entire class. Teachers use various materials in the same lesson to help disadvantaged students reach the same level as their peers, facilitate the learning process, reinforce the lesson content, and ensure the information is concrete and understandable. When designing and adapting teaching materials, teachers often simplify worksheets or question papers and provide concrete examples to make learning more accessible. However, teachers typically develop different materials based solely on the information being conveyed rather than considering the diverse sensory needs, interests, abilities, and cognitive characteristics of their students. In inclusive classrooms, it is important to note that not all students are expected to achieve the same learning outcomes. Therefore, course materials should be tailored and presented according to each student's individual characteristics and level. These observations suggest that teachers often lack pedagogical adaptations meaning they do not differentiate their methods and practices during the lesson and do not develop sensitivity or skills for differentiation.

An inclusive classroom environment should be organized to ensure that no student experiences psycho-social exclusion or discrimination. It is essential to provide equal and consistent conditions where each student's characteristics and circumstances are acknowledged and accepted. Consequently, it is important to examine how teachers adapt their



strategies, group students, and facilitate communication in a way that makes learning accessible and efficient for everyone. This approach should also encourage collaborative learning and group work. However, findings indicate that many teachers do not implement adaptations in the inclusive learning environment that would enhance student-to-student or teacher-to-student interaction, as well as the social dynamics of the classroom and academic achievement. When teachers make changes, these often relate to the positioning of students rather than improvements in technology, physical space, resources, or social dimensions of the classroom. The primary goal of these changes tends to focus on maintaining control over students and preventing disciplinary issues, rather than creating optimal physical, psychosocial, and educational conditions that different teaching methods and techniques require. With appropriate environmental and physical adaptations, along with differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms, students' academic motivation can significantly increase. By addressing students' psycho-social needs through the reinforcement of their discovery and communication skills, as well as values of belonging and justice, teachers can greatly alleviate the difficulties associated with inclusive classroom management (Johnsen, 2003; Pasira, 2022). This finding reinforces the idea that teachers often do not differentiate their activities in mixed classes. Despite being the country with the highest number of disadvantaged students in formal education, learning environments in Türkiye are not supportive of inclusive education. This is primarily due to inadequate facilities, a lack of effective designs and teaching plans (Durak & Erkiş, 2023), and the persistent use of traditional teaching methods. In this context, while teachers should receive support through systems, resources, and training opportunities, they can still make a substantial impact on inclusive education by fulfilling their responsibilities, even in the face of limited resources.

Differentiating aspects such as process, purpose, method, and scope of assessment in inclusive classrooms requires a fair, effective, and proactive design that prioritizes the needs of each student. This approach is not intended to simply compare and summarize the outcomes of teaching procedures; rather, it aims to guide and shape educational practices through proper diagnosis (Moon, Brighton & Tomlinson, 2020; Heacox, 2012). However, the findings indicate that teachers often use the same criteria and goals to assess all students, regardless of any disadvantages they may face. Consequently, the predominant method for student assessment, according to teachers, is written exams. Although nine teachers reported attempting to differentiate their exams, their approach primarily involved reducing the number of questions or simplifying the content of a traditional evaluation method. While this effort aims to adapt assessments to student levels, it falls short of the true essence of differentiated instruction. Effective differentiation considers not only academic performance but also a variety of factors that contribute to student differences, including interests, abilities, prior knowledge, socioeconomic status, and types of intelligence. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to employ diverse measurement tools for more effective monitoring and formative assessments throughout the educational process. This reliance on traditional written exams contradicts the equitable approach to education that seeks to individually monitor and evaluate the achievements of disadvantaged students in inclusive classrooms. In addition to written exams, teachers often rely on their

subjective opinions for assessments. This opinion-based evaluation derives from informal observations and interactions during lessons, rather than using alternative, consistent, and evidence-based methods such as performance tasks, portfolio assessments, and self-assessment. The findings indicate that the assessments conducted in heterogeneous classrooms do not align with the principles of formative assessment. Formative assessment focuses on monitoring individual student development by diagnosing their strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, and interests. It provides concrete data to teachers, which can be used for future differentiated course design and to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials, methods, and techniques employed.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

The research question aimed to explore the perspectives and practices of social studies teachers in Türkiye regarding inclusive education based on their experiences in inclusive schools and classrooms. The concepts, outcomes, and contexts that emerged from this study were designed to provide both theoretical and practical insights into predicting inclusive education outcomes, examining teachers' perspectives and practices, and encouraging reflective practice in the development, guidance, and support of inclusive education. The categories that were identified reflect the focus of the direct interviews conducted with teachers, and efforts were made to represent the general profile of educators in inclusive schools. This study analyzed teachers' viewpoints supporting inclusive pedagogy, as well as their classroom practices, in the context of differentiated instruction. It was found that teachers' perspectives were negatively influenced by the challenges they faced in their teaching experiences, particularly with students who had insufficient Turkish language skills or with mainstreamed students. This occurred despite the philosophical, pedagogical, social, and economic justifications for inclusive education.

In inclusive classrooms, which prioritize justice and sensitivity alongside educational equality, teachers often struggle to implement effective differentiated instructional strategies. Observations indicate that while some teachers claim to use differentiated instruction—which is a cyclical process involving design, implementation, and evaluation—their adaptations primarily focus on modifying content and materials. There is little differentiation in methods and activities. These differentiation practices tend to rely on meeting curriculum outcomes using the same teaching methods and techniques rather than being tailored to students' interests and needs. As a result, the differentiation presented is often unconscious and insufficient, rooted in traditional teaching approaches. Teachers cite several reasons for their lack of differentiation, including limited class time, disciplinary issues, and the dense content and objectives outlined in the curriculum.

Teachers' ability to design materials tailored to the diverse characteristics of students in heterogeneous classes, as well as their capacity to differentiate existing materials, is quite low. The adaptations made by teachers who designed and modified materials were primarily related to the subject content. These changes included simplifying worksheets and exam questions and providing concrete examples. It was observed that teachers did not create different materials based on students' sensory preferences, interests, abilities, or cognitive characteristics. It was found that most teachers relied heavily on smart boards, citing reasons such as

their ability to engage multiple sensory modalities and present information in a concrete and enriching manner with web support. However, it was noted that the effective use of smart boards by teachers was primarily aimed at enhancing overall academic achievement and streamlining course content rather than specifically supporting the development of disadvantaged students or fostering differentiation. In addition to smart boards, worksheets containing activities and questions were among the most frequently used materials by teachers in heterogeneous classrooms. Conversely, the use of official and nationally adopted textbooks, which serve as the primary sources for curricula, was relatively low.

Teachers often fail to adapt to an inclusive learning environment that fosters interaction among students and between teachers and students, as well as social dynamics and academic achievement. Instead of implementing necessary changes to the classroom setup, they tend to simply rearrange students' positions. This adjustment is primarily aimed at maintaining control over students and preventing disciplinary issues rather than creating the optimal physical, psychosocial, and educational conditions needed for various teaching methods and techniques.

While assessment tools and methods in inclusive classrooms need to be varied according to students' different abilities, needs, and interests, many teachers still rely on traditional assessment techniques such as written exams and personal grading opinions. This form of assessment is not based on alternative, consistent, process-oriented, or evidence-based methods like performance assignments, portfolio studies, or self-assessment. Instead, it often relies on the teacher's informal observations and interactions during lessons. The findings indicate that assessments conducted in heterogeneous classrooms often fall short of being formative. Additionally, teachers often focus only on cognitive comprehension and understanding during the evaluation process, neglecting affective and kinesthetic skills.

Based on the findings and results of the study, the following suggestions were made:

1. While teachers generally hold a positive view of the purpose and philosophy of inclusive education, they face challenges due to a lack of skills in implementing differentiated instruction. Providing qualified training for teachers will significantly enhance the success of inclusion efforts.
2. Organizing the physical and social facilities of schools in a systematic and planned manner, along with equipping them with the necessary materials and technology that cater to the social, academic, and physical needs of students, will help address the physical and equipment-related challenges that negatively impact education.
3. Implementing measures to reduce class sizes and ensure the equitable distribution of disadvantaged students across schools and classes will help prevent social issues such as grouping, communication barriers, and prejudice among students. This approach will also support the use of cooperative learning methods in differentiated instruction, leading to positive outcomes.

4. Future studies on inclusion should focus on examining the current challenges and practices in the context of students, families, and school administrations. This broader perspective will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the practices and issues surrounding inclusive education.

5. Research that investigates teachers' practices using various methods, such as direct observation, will contribute valuable insights to the field and may support, deepen, or refine the existing findings.

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