

## Virtual Museum Experiences of Social Studies Prospective Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to determine the views of social studies prospective teachers about virtual museums. The research was designed according to the phenomenology pattern, which is one of the qualitative research designs. The study group was determined using the criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. The study participants consisted of 30 prospective teachers who took media literacy course in the fourth year of the social studies teaching undergraduate program. The research data were collected by employing the interview method. An open-ended interview form was used to collect the data. In preparing the interview form, questions were formed in parallel with the research subject by the researcher, and the questions were finalized by receiving expert opinions. The participants visited a virtual museum for the research and were asked to answer interview questions about the visit. The data obtained from the research were analyzed with the descriptive analysis technique. It was concluded that the participants mostly answered yes to the question of whether virtual museums could be used in social studies education. The reasons they stated for their positive answers were that it attracted the attention of students, increased permanent learning, improved spatial perception skills and the perception of historical space. For the question of which historical values the virtual museums caused students to gain, the participants mostly replied as the development of national consciousness, love of homeland, nation, flag, respect, freedom, and solidarity values. For the question of what experiences the participants acquired during their virtual museum visits, they mostly stated that it contributed to the development of historical empathy skills, improved permanent learning, raised awareness, and increased sensitivity.

**Keywords:** Social studies, Prospective teachers, Virtual museum

### Introduction

Museums are elements that reflect the identity of societies from the past to the present and are considered important for the individuals of the society. They are places where traces of the past can be seen genuinely. Along with the latest technological developments, the rapid change in everything has also affected museums and museums have opened their doors to society virtually. Virtual museums, where individuals have the opportunity to visit and explore the museum on the web, have been opened to use. According to Barlas Bozkuş (2014), virtual museums are digital treasures that share visual, audio, and text files that can be accessed electronically with people, in the fields of art, culture, and history. In these museums, whose examples are seen more and more every day in the world, artworks are produced by attributing meaning to the work in terms of post-modern exhibition practices. According to Sungur & Bülbül (2019), virtual museums, which do not need a defined period of time and real space, offer visitors the opportunity to access them via the internet and computers without limitations in time and space.

Museums are out-of-school learning areas that are frequently used in the teaching of many disciplines. For example, a historical issue can be conveyed more effectively through museums. Especially in social studies education, museums have been frequently used teaching environments. Educators use museums in teaching to provide effective and more realistic teaching on historical subjects. With the rapid developments in technology, especially virtual museums can be used as more useful and more economical teaching tools for education. When a teacher wants to bring students to a subject in the classroom, they can use virtual museums in the classroom environment and can increase students' attention. In this regard, especially the awareness and views of teachers in the teacher training process are very important. Because a teacher candidate who goes through an effective teacher training process can be more efficient in teaching. Therefore, the opinions of social studies prospective

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teachers on the use of museums and especially virtual museums are very important. Hence, the problem sentence of this study is the question of how are social studies prospective teachers views on virtual museums.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the present study is to determine the opinions of prospective social studies teachers in virtual museums.

### **Method**

#### **Research Model**

The present study was designed in line with phenomenology, a qualitative research design. Phenomenology “focuses on phenomena that we are aware of; however, we do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding about. Phenomena may appear in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts, and situations. Phenomenology provides a suitable research ground for studies that aim to investigate phenomena that are not completely alien to us, but that we do not fully understand” (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011, p.72).

#### **Study Group**

The study group is selected using the criterion sampling method, which is a purposive sampling method. According to Patton (1987), the purposive sampling method “enables in-depth study of situations that are thought to possess rich information” (cited in Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011, p. 107). The study group was composed of 30 prospective teachers who were fourth-year students in the social studies teaching undergraduate program taking media literacy course.

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The research data were collected using the interview method. A standardized open-ended interview form was used in data collection. While preparing the interview form, questions were formed by the research in line with the research topic, and questions were finalized through expert opinions. In the study, the participants visited a virtual museum and they were asked to answer some interview questions on this visit. The data obtained from the research were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique.

### **Findings**

According to Table 1, 27 of prospective social studies teachers stated that virtual museums could be utilized in social studies education (Yes). However, 3 participants stated that virtual museums could not be utilized in social studies education (No).

Table 1 Social studies teachers' views on benefiting from virtual museums

Grade level	Yes	No
4th grade	27	3

According to Table 2, prospective social studies teacher stated the following reasons behind utilizing virtual museums in social studies education: drawing the attention of the students (f12), increasing students' permanent learning (f8), improving spatial perception skills (f7), and improving the perception of historical places (f5).

Table 2. The reasons for utilizing virtual museums in social studies education

Grade level	Reasons	f
4th grade	Drawing the attention of the students	12
	Increasing students' permanent learning	8
	Improving spatial perception skills	7
	Improving the perception of historical places	5

According to Table 3, the following findings were obtained regarding the question "What historical values does virtual museum experience provide according to prospective social studies teachers": Developing a national consciousness (f11), homeland (f9), nation (f5), love of flag (f4), respect (f4), freedom (f3), and solidarity (f3).

Table 3. Historical values acquired through virtual museum

Grade level	Historical values	f
2nd grade	Developing a national consciousness	11
	Homeland	9
	Nation	5
	Love of the flag	4
	Respect	4
	Freedom	3
	Solidarity	3

According to Table 4, the following findings were obtained regarding the question "What experiences did museum visits provide for prospective social studies teachers: that it contributes to developing historical empathy skills (f7), that it contributes to permanent learning (f5), that it raises awareness (f4), and that it increases their sensitivity (f3).

Table 4. The experience that prospective social studies teachers gained during virtual museum visits

Grade level	Experiences	f
4th grade	That it contributes to developing historical empathy skills	7
	That it contributes to permanent learning	5
	That it raises awareness	4
	That it increases their sensitivity	3

## Results and Discussion

The results obtained in the study investigating the opinions of prospective social studies teachers on virtual museums are as follows: Participants mostly answered yes to the question stating whether virtual museums could be utilized in social studies education. Underlying reasons behind that were as follows: that it drew attention from students, that it increased their permanent learning, that it improved spatial perception skills, and that it improved the perception of historical places. On the question stating which historical values virtual museums provided, participants mostly stated that it provided values such as developing national consciousness, homeland, nation, love of flag, respect, freedom, and solidarity. On the question stating which experiences virtual museum visits provided for prospective social studies teachers, they stated that it contributed to developing historical empathy skills and to permanent learning, that it raised awareness, and that it increased their sensitivity.

Sungur & Bülbül (2019) also think that virtual museum practices in primary school education are beneficial for students. According to Aladağ, Akkaya & Şensöz (2014), making museum visits is very difficult in terms of financial means, security, time, distance, travel, family refusal, accident risks, etc. In order to find a solution to this problem all over the world and to reach museums on the other side of the world in the globalizing world, the concept of virtual museology has emerged. As with museum visits, there are some preparations and precautions to be taken before, during, and after the visit. Making these preparations will increase the efficiency to be obtained from the visit and ensure that the benefits are achieved in the most accurate and effective way. In this context, it is important to make good planning before using virtual museums.

Contemporary museums are much more than places dedicated to the placement and display of collections and artworks. In fact, they are now seen as a privileged tool for communication and play a central role in making culture accessible to the mass audience (Carrozzino & Bergamasco, 2010). When evaluated generally, virtual museums can be used as useful teaching materials in education.

## Recommendations

The present study attempted to identify the opinions of prospective social studies teachers on virtual museums through experiencing these museums. In line with research findings, the more widespread use of virtual

museums could make a significant contribution to education. In future studies, the opinions of students at different grade levels on virtual museums can be investigated.

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