

## A Comparison of Values in the Social Studies Curricula of Turkey and Estonia

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the social studies curricula currently implemented in different countries (Turkey, Estonia) during the 2025–2026 academic year, focusing on values, and to identify similarities and differences. A qualitative research method was adopted in this study. The data sources for the study consist of the social studies curricula of Turkey and Estonia. The data were obtained through “document analysis.” The data obtained within the scope of the research were analyzed using a descriptive analysis method. While 20 values were identified as prominent in the Turkish social studies curriculum; in Estonia, 17 values were identified, with 6 of these classified as general human values and 11 as social values. Values such as justice, honesty, compassion, freedom, respect, responsibility, and patriotism are present in the curricula of both countries and have been identified as shared values. Unlike in Turkey, it was determined that human dignity, environmental sustainability and gender equality stand out in Estonia. Based on this, it is considered necessary to include values such as human dignity, environmental sustainability and gender equality in our country’s social studies curricula as well. Curriculum development efforts could be undertaken in these areas.

**Keywords:** Value, Estonia, Turkey, curriculum, social studies.

### 1. Introduction

Throughout history, societies around the world have had distinct lifestyles in many areas, including cultural, religious, political, economic, and social aspects. While these different lifestyles have sometimes stemmed from the geographical conditions of the country, religious beliefs, political ideologies, or economic activities, they have also influenced one another. Because societies have different ways of life, the educational activities of countries also contain distinct aspects.

The rapid development of transportation and communication technologies has made the world feel like a small village, enabling different nations to examine each other’s education systems, identify their strengths, or develop new techniques aligned with those systems. Additionally, as the world rapidly globalizes, common concerns and challenges have emerged on the international stage, and collective solutions to these issues are being sought. For these and related reasons—whether to address issues within the education system, to create curricula suitable for constantly and rapidly changing the world or for numerous other reasons—countries are undertaking reform efforts in their educational activities. The need for educational reform has also popularized comparative education studies. Comparative education examines all issues related to education (Türkoğlu, 2012). Comparative education studies not only provide the opportunity to anticipate the outcomes of innovations inspired by the experiences of many different countries around the world but also play a supportive role in the development of educational reforms by enabling to observe diverse practices (Tatlı and Adıgüzel, 2012).

Comparative education is a rapidly developing field in the 20th century and a new area of study of significant importance in shaping education systems. One of the underlying reasons for the emergence of this field is the concern of “How can we achieve something better?” In this context, utilizing the experiences of different countries to implement innovations in the Turkish education system will undoubtedly contribute to making these changes more controlled and well-founded (Sel, 2004).

The type of person sought to be educated today differs from that of the past. The aim is to cultivate individuals who can adapt to change and development, understand diverse societies, think critically and creatively, use technology effectively, and generate new values for themselves (Yüceer, 2011). Educational systems are being developed and revised in line with these objectives. Through the curricula they develop, educational institutions systematically instill in students the values necessary for them to adapt to the existing social order. Since this research focuses on the

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dimension of values, to better understand the concept, we can define a value as a unifying principle that is believed by the majority to be necessary and correct for the well-being of individuals, enabling people living in any society to sustain their lives in unity and harmony. While different societies may have values specific to their own cultures, the importance of universal values intended to be instilled in every individual living on Earth is also significant; the fundamental understanding that should be emphasized regarding values is that they must be those accepted on a universal scale. For example, love, respect, friendship, honesty, equality, justice, sharing, cleanliness, solidarity, and similar values are highly valued in many societies. In addition to the values that have come down from the past and continue to persist today, it is also essential in this context to produce future-oriented alternative values that align with the demands of the modern era and to connect these new values with the traditional ones (Aktepe, 2016).

Children need help to understand which behaviors are accepted within society and to internalize the values that exist in their own culture or are universally recognized. Values education plays a key role at this stage. To achieve these goals, values education can be provided in various social settings, such as the family, the community, or school. The family is the first environment where a child interacts with society, and the family's influence on the child is significant. The family, which contributes to the child's development in every aspect, also plays an active role in the process of transmitting social values. At this point, families should focus on helping children freely form their own values without imposing their own value judgments, without coercion, and without exerting pressure. Beyond the family, the environment is another setting that influences the individual through learning. By observing model behaviors, a child can develop good or bad habits. Negative behaviors such as lying, stealing, irresponsibility, and profanity are social issues that develop alongside the environment. By the time a child reaches school age, it is necessary to modify the negative values they have acquired within the school environment and ensure that approved values and behaviors are instilled (Tezcan, 2018). There are many values that should be taught in school, at home, and in the community, such as responsibility, honesty, respect, tolerance, good citizenship, love, cooperation, honor, compassion, justice, generosity, faith, courage, goal-setting, freedom of choice, self-discipline, usefulness, common sense, democracy, perseverance, and trust, and the answer to the question "Which values should be taught to students?" is not entirely clear. Therefore, the values that should be taught may vary depending on the country and the education system. Among this diversity, values that are more important than others must be identified and instilled in children, and the most effective way to do this is through education and instruction (Akbaş, 2015).

Education aims not only to achieve cognitive objectives but also to function as a system capable of imparting all values to students. Both curricula and textbooks play a crucial role in values education and are frequently discussed topics. To effectively implement values education in Turkey, it is necessary to conduct comparative research on the educational programs of different countries. In this regard, the social studies course holds a unique position because social studies is also a values education course. Due to its interdisciplinary nature and content structure, the social studies course holds a distinct place and importance in the transmission of values. Furthermore, the primary objective of the social studies course is to cultivate good, responsible citizens. In this context, it can be said that it is a course where values can be conveyed and values education approaches can be applied.

When considering studies that examine the social studies curricula of various countries from the perspective of values, Merey, Kuş, and Karatekin (2012) aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of the social studies curricula of Turkey and the United States in terms of values education. Bursa and Çengelci Köse (2017) compared the social studies curricula of Turkey and Canada in terms of values education. Kafadar, Öztürk, and Katılmış (2018) examined the social studies curricula currently implemented in three countries (Turkey, the United States, and France) in terms of elements related to values education. Yağan (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of the 5th-grade social studies curricula in Turkey and Australia within the context of values education. Aygel (2023), on the other hand, examined the social studies curricula of Spain (Andalusia Autonomous Region) and Turkey in terms of values. A literature review revealed that the social studies curricula of the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and Spain have been examined in terms of values. Since no study was found that included Turkey and Estonia, this country was selected for the comparison. Another reason for choosing this country is that it is one of Europe's emerging nations in education and outperforms major European countries in global education tests such as PISA.

The primary objective and focus of this research are to compare the values targeted for students to acquire within the social studies curricula of Turkey and Estonia during the 2025–2026 academic year, to identify similarities and differences, and, in this context, to determine the shortcomings of our own curriculum. In line with this general objective, the following sub-objectives have been established:

1. Which values are included in Turkey’s 2024 Social Studies Curriculum?
2. Which values are included in the Estonian Social Studies Curriculum?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the values included in the social studies curricula of Turkey and Estonia?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study is a case study that adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research primarily focuses on the interpretation of verbal data. It is a type of exploratory research. It is used in studies involving deep and detailed topics. While quantitative research aims to draw generalizations from results, qualitative research reflects the researcher’s perspectives (Bülbül, 2016). A key consideration here is the researcher’s impartiality and ability to interpret the data objectively. Case studies are defined as a method involving the in-depth examination of one or more events, environments, programs, social groups, or other interconnected systems (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2018). In this study, the social studies programs of the relevant countries were examined in depth.

### 2.2. Research Sample

One of the sources and materials for the research is the current social studies curriculum published in Turkey under the Turkey Century Education Model (TYMM) and gradually implemented. The other is the document titled “National Curriculum for Basic Schools” published in Estonia, which also covers the social studies course. The sources and materials of the study are listed in Table 1 below.

| Table 1. Sources and materials   |                                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Turkey                           | Estonia                               |
| Turkey Social Studies Curriculum | National curriculum for basic schools |
| 2024                             | 2011                                  |

### 2.3. Research Instruments and Processes

Document analysis, observation, and interviews are frequently used as data collection tools in case studies. The data collection tools used in this study consist of written and visual sources obtained through document analysis. In the data collection process, a literature review was first conducted, and the social studies curricula of the countries under examination were obtained from the official websites of the respective countries’ ministries of education. The aim here is to present precise, in-depth, and detailed descriptions of the situation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). For the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum implemented in grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Turkey, the Turkey Century Education Model website was used, and the curriculum was accessed via the link <https://tymm.meb.gov.tr>. For the 2011 National Curriculum for Basic Schools implemented in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 in Estonia, the website of the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, <https://www.hm.ee/en>, was utilized. Since the curriculum implemented in Estonia is an English-language document, it was translated into Turkish both by the researcher and, for reliability purposes, by a language expert.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

In the analysis of the programs obtained through document review, descriptive analysis—a qualitative analysis technique—was employed. Descriptive analysis involves organizing and defining the collected data according to themes previously determined by the researcher. Following this definition, the findings are explained, related, and interpreted. To strengthen the interpretation, comparisons are made between the facts as necessary (Özdemir, 2010). In the analysis

of the findings obtained in this study, the sections related to the values dimension in the countries' curricula were also examined in detail, compared, and conclusions were drawn.

### 3. Findings

The research's findings will be presented in the sequence specified by the sub-problems in this section.

#### 3.1. Values Education in the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum in Turkey

The first sub-problem concerns which values are included in the current social studies curriculum in Türkiye. Information regarding the first sub-problem is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Values in the Turkish Social Studies Curriculum

| Values          |               |                    |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Justice      | 7. Aesthetics | 13. Healthy living |
| 2. Family unity | 8. Privacy    | 14. Respect        |
| 3. Diligence    | 9. Compassion | 15. Love           |
| 4. Friendship   | 10. Humility  | 16. Responsibility |
| 5. Sensitivity  | 11. Freedom   | 17. Thrift         |
| 6. Honesty      | 12. Patience  | 18. Cleanliness    |
|                 |               | 19. Kindness       |
|                 |               | 20. Patriotic      |

The items listed in Table 2 represent the 20 values that the Turkish social studies curriculum aims to instill in students. It is observed that these 20 values are similar in nature to the values included in the social studies curricula implemented in the country in 2005 and 2018.

#### 3.2. Values Education in the Estonian Social Studies Curriculum

The second sub-problem concerns which values are included in the current social studies curriculum in Estonia. Information regarding the second sub-problem is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Values in the Estonian Social Studies Curriculum

| Values                            |                                                  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| General Human Values              | Social values                                    |
| 1. Honesty                        | 1. Freedom                                       |
| 2. Compassion                     | 2. Democracy                                     |
| 3. Respect for life               | 3. Respect for one's native language and culture |
| 4. Justice                        | 4. Patriotism                                    |
| 5. Human dignity                  | 5. Cultural diversity                            |
| 6. Respect for oneself and others | 6. Tolerance                                     |
|                                   | 7. Environmental sustainability                  |
|                                   | 8. Rule of law                                   |
|                                   | 9. Solidarity                                    |
|                                   | 10. Accountability                               |
|                                   | 11. Gender equality                              |

Estonia's national curriculum for elementary schools includes a social studies course. The values listed in the table above are included under the heading "Core Values of Basic Education." While six values are listed under the heading "General Human Values," it is noted that 11 values are included under the heading "Social Values."

#### 3.3. Similarities and Differences Between the Values Included in the Social Studies Curricula of Turkey and Estonia

The third sub-problem concerns the similarities and differences between the values included in the social studies curricula of Türkiye and Estonia. Information regarding the third sub-problem is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Differences in Values in the Social Studies Curricula of Turkey and Estonia*

| COMMON VALUES  | Turkey                                                           | Estonia                                                       |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
|                | Different Values<br>Included in the Social Studies<br>Curriculum | Different Values Included in<br>the Social Studies Curriculum |
| Justice        | Family unity                                                     | Human dignity                                                 |
| Honesty        | Diligence                                                        | Democracy                                                     |
| Compassion     | Friendship                                                       | Cultural diversity                                            |
| Freedom        | Sensitivity                                                      | Tolerance                                                     |
| Respect        | Aesthetics                                                       | Environmental sustainability                                  |
| Responsibility | Privacy                                                          | Rule of law                                                   |
| Patriotism     | Humility                                                         | Solidarity                                                    |
|                | Patience                                                         | Gender equality                                               |
|                | Healthy living                                                   |                                                               |
|                | Love                                                             |                                                               |
|                | Frugality                                                        |                                                               |
|                | Cleanliness                                                      |                                                               |
|                | Kindness                                                         |                                                               |

When comparing the social studies curricula of Turkey and Estonia in terms of values education, as shown in Table 4, the values of justice, honesty, compassion, freedom, respect, responsibility, and patriotism are shared. It is observed that the values of family unity, diligence, friendship, sensitivity, aesthetics, privacy, modesty, patience, healthy living, love, thrift, cleanliness, and generosity, which are included in the Turkish social studies curriculum, are not present in the curriculum of the other country under examination. The distinct values identified in the Estonian curriculum include human dignity, democracy, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, solidarity, and gender equality.

#### 4. Results

In this study, the values intended to be instilled in students during the 2025–2026 academic year in the social studies curricula of Turkey and Estonia were compared, and similarities and differences were identified.

In the social studies curriculum published in 2024 under the Turkey Century Education Model (TYMM) and currently being implemented in phases, a total of 20 values—including “justice, family unity, diligence, friendship, sensitivity, honesty, aesthetics, privacy, compassion, humility, freedom, patience, healthy living, respect, love, responsibility, thrift, cleanliness, kindness, patriotism.”

In the national curriculum prepared for elementary schools in Estonia, which includes social studies, it has been identified that 17 values stand out under the heading of “core values of basic education.” While values such as “honesty, compassion, respect for life, justice, human dignity, and respect for oneself and others” are categorized under “general human values”; “freedom, democracy, respect for one’s native language and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, solidarity, responsibility, and gender equality” are presented as social values.

The shared values included in the curricula of Turkey and Estonia have been identified as “justice, honesty, compassion, freedom, respect, responsibility, and patriotism.” By comparing the curricula of the two countries, different values have also been identified. It was observed that values such as “family, unity, diligence, friendship, sensitivity, aesthetics, privacy, modesty, patience, healthy living, love, thrift, cleanliness, and generosity” are included in Turkey’s social studies curriculum. In Estonia, however, the values identified were different: “human dignity, democracy, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, solidarity, and gender equality.”

## 5. Discussion

In the social studies curriculum published in 2024 under the Turkey Century Education Model (TYMM) and currently being implemented in phases, a total of 20 values—including “justice, family unity, diligence, friendship, sensitivity, honesty, aesthetics, privacy, compassion, humility, freedom, patience, healthy living, respect, love, responsibility, thrift, cleanliness, kindness, patriotism.” We observe that the values of friendship, privacy, compassion, humility, and patience were not included in the previous 2005 and 2018 social studies curricula and have been newly added to the 2024 curriculum. It is possible to say that these newly added values are those that have been on the verge of disappearing due to the influence of technology. In particular, values such as privacy, humility, and patience are being negatively affected by the influence of social media.

The shared values included in the curricula of Turkey and Estonia have been identified as “justice, honesty, compassion, freedom, respect, responsibility, and patriotism.” Manson, Marker, Ochoa, and Tucker (1971) have highlighted the importance of schools and social studies courses in fostering values. According to them, the school itself is a social institution, and the values embedded in its daily operations can have a powerful impact. In particular, young children should learn fundamental values through their daily lives. In many schools, implementing these values will entail significant changes. Justice, freedom, and respect—all of these should be expected of students and teachers in every classroom. It must be clearly acknowledged that the school and the social studies curriculum cannot be independent of values.

In Estonia, however, the values identified were different: “human dignity, democracy, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, solidarity, and gender equality.” Among these values, environmental sustainability stands out in particular. This is because environmental sustainability is included under the category of social values and is considered important. In Turkey, values have held particular importance in curricula prepared based on a constructivist approach, especially since the 2004–2005 academic year; however, when examining the past 20-year period, environmental sustainability has not been included as a value. Given that Estonia is a country that incorporates the value of environmental sustainability, it is possible to state that a philosophy has been adopted there that seeks to benefit from nature without harming it and aims to live in harmony with it. In this context, the protection of the environment and its preservation for future generations without degradation take center stage.

Environmental sustainability refers to ensuring the continuity of natural resources (Küçük and Güneş, 2013). With the growing population and the impact of technological advancements, people have begun to rely on natural resources more and more each day. Due to the increasing population and technological development, the natural environment—once considered limitless and inexhaustible—has been subjected to degradation. This situation has put the sustainable use of natural resources at risk. The protection of natural resources for future generations is of critical importance from a sustainability perspective. To leave a world for future generations that can meet their needs without endangering them, the natural environment must be used in a sustainable manner (Menteşe, 2017). In this context, we observe that the Estonian curriculum highlights environmental sustainability as a social value. According to Gedik (2020), the world is not an inheritance from our parents but a trust from our children. It is our responsibility to care for it and hand it over to future generations in a better condition. To fulfill this responsibility, it is essential to understand the importance of sustainability. Based on this, it is considered necessary for environmental sustainability to be included as a value in social studies curricula.

Another distinct value featured in the Estonian curriculum is gender equality. Although significant progress has been made in Turkey since the 2000s regarding the elimination of gender inequality, recent data indicates that the status of gender equality in society has not yet reached the desired level (Bardakçı and Oğlak, 2022). The way the concept of gender is addressed in social studies courses is crucial for ensuring equality in social roles. In a study conducted by Karakuş, Mutlu, and Diker Coşkun (2018), it was found that the concepts of gender and women are addressed in social studies courses; however, it was noted that no systematic content design was observed. In this context, it is considered necessary to incorporate the value of gender equality into social studies curricula in our country.

The concept of human dignity, which has attained the status of the highest value in terms of human rights and the rule of law today (Bulut, 2008), is one of the distinct values in Estonia. This concept, which encompasses the value of human personality and independence, is included among general human values in Estonia. Human dignity signifies that a person is valuable and deserving of respect simply by virtue of being human. The concept of human dignity is now incorporated into numerous international treaties and national legislation (Seymen Çakar, 2013). For this reason, it is important for the concept of human dignity to be included in social studies curricula and highlighted as a core value.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Researchers:

This study covers Turkey and Estonia. The social studies curricula of these countries have been examined in terms of values. To view curricula from a universal perspective, the social studies curricula of other countries can be examined in terms of values and other dimensions.

### Recommendations for Practitioners:

Turkey's 2024 social studies curriculum is student-centered and activity-based. While it incorporates many values, teachers must engage students actively to ensure these values are internalized. Accordingly, activities should be organized to instill these values in students, and teachers should serve as role models.

### Recommendations for Curriculum Developers

It is considered necessary to include values such as environmental sustainability and gender equality— which are present in Estonia's curriculum—in our country's social studies curriculum as well. Curriculum development efforts could be directed toward these topics.

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