



A Bibliometric Analysis of Research on Social Studies Education in Primary Schools: Performance Analysis and Scientific Mapping

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Abstract: Social studies education offers an integrated discipline that addresses societal issues, especially in elementary school. This subject has attracted considerable attention from the academic world as a reformed educational paradigm that has frequently been neglected. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of literature that integrates findings from prior studies. This study aims to examine the present condition of social studies education research in elementary schools. The researcher utilizes bibliometric analysis to investigate literature from the Scopus database using targeted keyword phrases. This study examines 235 out of 563 eligible papers that were subjected to screening. Instruments like Biblioshiny and VOSviewer are employed to assess metrics like productivity, impact, cooperation, and knowledge. Notwithstanding variations in citation rates, the results demonstrate an increasing interest in research regarding social studies teaching. The United States serves as the principal regional center for global networking, with significant contributions from Turkey and Indonesia as well. The examination of contemporary subjects and clusters offers possible theoretical frameworks and underscores upcoming research tendencies. This study provides significant insights and recommendations for future research to enhance social studies curriculum in primary schools.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; primary school; research trends; social studies education

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INTRODUCTION

Social studies education (SSE) has become a significant interdisciplinary field that highlights many of society's challenges. SSE assists students in the primary years with understanding, interacting with, and making logical judgments about their surroundings (Bousalis, 2022; NCSS, 2017). It encompasses essential abilities like inquiry, evidence collection, and knowledge synthesis, rather than simple fact memorization. (Bekiroğlu & Güllühan, 2022; Schroeder et al., 2021). Primary school students gain knowledge of cultural and social systems through SSE, which also encourages inquiry, participation, practice, reflection, and creativity by examining controversial subjects (İşler, 2025). This education fosters an awareness of diversity, respect for human rights, and global sustainability by educating children about their rights, obligations, and responsibilities as citizens (Garwood et al., 2021; Shih, 2024). Moreover, students learn to be citizens in a democratic society (Levy et al., 2023), underscoring the cultivation of social consciousness and civic personality as the foundation for fostering socially responsible citizens. Therefore, SSE in primary schools provides a mechanism for educating good citizenship (Amelia, 2025; Taufika & Lubis, 2022).

SSE combines the majority of social science disciplines to improve elementary school students' comprehension of their social lives in a comprehensive, holistic manner (Dharma & Lestari, 2022; Hansen & Puustinen, 2021; Hughes & Marhatta, 2023). In addition to imparting social facts and concepts, SSE gives students the tools they need to solve problems and make decisions effectively, evaluate problems, and draw logical conclusions (Farris, 2024; Russell III & Waters, 2025). Topics in economics, socialization, migration, racism, and sustainability have complex connections to current social issues and may reflect learners' real-life experiences in the classroom (Aashamar & Klette, 2023). The elementary social studies curriculum tackles current concerns by emphasizing experiential learning, direct social problem-solving, grounding students in their surroundings, and practical, contextual training (Ollila & Macy, 2019; Whitlock & Brugar, 2019). Thus, social studies in elementary schools highlight cultivating knowledge, shaping social attitudes and civic values, and acquiring social skills relevant to the different contextual challenges students encounter in daily life; as a result, social studies education is strategically key for establishing a foundation of social consciousness and character in young learners.

SSE is widely recognized as a necessary educational program in primary schools; however, it faces significant obstacles to successful implementation (NCSS, 2017; Perrotta, 2023). The reduction of elementary social studies negatively impacts the issue in several significant ways. SSE is among the least preferred issues

among students, as educators frequently present social studies with a lack of understanding and negative attitudes, which, in turn, challenge the field (An, 2022; Sisay & Teferi, 2025). Another problem is that educators often cite the challenges of teaching this subject due to limited time (Doornbos et al., 2025). Due to a limitation in the amount of time allotted for social studies instruction, this subject is now integrated with other topics to maximize teaching time (Schroeder et al., 2021). Social studies are considered a less significant subject than mathematics and reading. (Bousalis, 2022), as educational policies and assessment frameworks typically prioritize literacy and numeracy skills as the primary measures of academic achievement (Kim et al., 2021; Shreiner & Dykes, 2021). Shreiner and Dykes (2021) argued that mathematics and reading have a direct influence on future academic success and professional skills. However, the role of social studies, encompassing value development, civic attitudes, and social comprehension, is less concrete. Bousalis (2022) found that teachers frequently hold negative views of social studies and often neglect to address citizenship, an element of social studies instruction in elementary schools. Teachers frequently overlook it because of its considerable demands.

The challenges led to several ideas for reforming social studies in primary schools after their implementation. Schools must reform the social studies curriculum by evaluating the practicality of this process using several indicators, including teacher readiness to make changes. (Popp et al., 2021). Teachers' engagement in curriculum development affects students' perceptions of social studies education. (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2020). This curriculum requires conceptual and pedagogical modification, particularly regarding constructive position, technological integration, and the division of its sections. (Barrot, 2023). Numerous studies highlight the importance of prioritizing complex topics and mitigating the obstacles posed by the inadequate time allotted to teaching social studies. (Perrotta, 2021; Turner et al., 2024). Additionally, it has been suggested to use contemporary teaching approaches, such as project-based learning (Duke et al., 2021a). The meta-analysis findings indicate that project-based learning significantly enhances learning outcomes, educational achievement, positive attitudes, and cognitive skills in learners when compared with conventional teaching methods. (Zhang & Ma, 2023). Recently, SSE in elementary schools has included technology as an innovative approach to learning. Wide-ranging technologies have been applied, including virtual museums. (Kayaalp et al., 2024), AI-driven chatbots (Yetişensoy & Karaduman, 2024) and immersive virtual reality (Alazmi & Alemtairy, 2024). Digital technology has transformed the educational system. It functions as a knowledge reference, an ideas creator, an instructor, and an assessor. Technology integration in education has improved student experiences (Haleem et al., 2022), offered ways to overcome educational barriers in settings with limited resources (Major et al., 2021), improved student performance, maximized the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and supported the stability and sustainability of educational systems (Abimbade et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Given the strategic role that social studies education plays in fostering citizenship values, social understanding, and 21st-century competencies in elementary schools, the growing interest of researchers in this field confirms that SSE is recognized as a significant field of study within the academic community. However, the major implications of the SSE research landscape are outpacing the field's sophisticated understanding at the elementary school level. There is still a scarcity of literature that scientifically analyzes the growth of publications, leading researchers and institutions, patterns of collaborative work, the emergence of themes, and potential future research directions. This leads to a lack of understanding, as it is difficult to quickly identify emerging topics, unexplored study areas, and the role and significance of SSE studies in primary schools globally without comprehensive identification. As a result, bibliometric analysis becomes an essential method for systematically reviewing and synthesizing SSE studies in elementary schools, providing an overview of the scientific status, research patterns, and trends, and creating opportunities for the future development of an intensive, evidence-based research agenda.

A comprehensive literature review can be created quantitatively with bibliometric analysis (Tang et al., 2022). Fajri et al. (2025) assert that bibliometric analysis enables scholars to discern emerging publishing patterns and academic contributions that have shaped this field in relevant and timely ways. In particular, the bibliometric analysis not only provides a thorough summary of SSE studies conducted in primary schools but also identifies areas that could benefit from innovation. This approach provides researchers with practical guidance on how to contribute to unexplored or emerging areas of the field (Al-Azizah & Haron, 2025). Bibliometric analysis can provide a macroscopic perspective on a large portion of the academic literature while also mitigating the shortcomings of conventional literature reviews (Lubis & Yus, 2024). According to Donthu et al. (2021), bibliometric research is a commonly used and rigorous technique for reviewing and assessing a large volume of scientific literature.

Previous academics have explored the diverse contributions of SSE research in primary schools. Numerous studies have examined this domain by area, including Turkey (Eryilmaz et al., 2021; Sökmen, 2021) and Japan (Watanabe et al., 2021). The majority of current research focuses on evaluating the contributions of scholars, particularly in highly specialized fields (Clark & Hunter, 2024; Jones & Edmondson, 2025; Saputra et al., 2023). However, it is difficult to find literature that has thoroughly outlined the empirical contributions of

SSE research in primary schools. Thus, using bibliometric analysis, the current study examines SSE research in elementary schools. By tackling the following three research issues, a thorough analysis of the existing literature on SSE in elementary schools is carried out: 1) How does the distribution of SSE literature in elementary schools vary by region and yearly growth? In terms of writers, journals, papers, and international cooperation on SSE in elementary schools, what or who are the principal contributors? 2) Which SSE topics are most commonly covered in elementary schools? 3) What are the most popular SSE subjects that are being covered in elementary schools?

METHODS

Bibliometric studies analyze scientific literature to assess the importance, quality, and evolution of research by systematically examining metadata (Erlande et al., 2025; Lubis & Yus, 2024). This method quantifies publications and citations while allowing researchers to identify significant research trends, pivotal works, prominent authors and institutions, patterns of scientific collaboration, and thematic interconnections that define the intellectual framework of a discipline. This methodology is very effective for identifying research trends, identifying study gaps, uncovering opportunities for collaboration, and delineating future research development trajectories (Fadillah et al., 2025). As a result, bibliometric analysis frequently serves as the basis for defining research goals, formulating research plans, and evaluating scientific performance through data-driven mapping. The most thorough and impartial understanding of the development of a field of study on a large scale is provided by bibliometric analysis (Agac et al., 2025; Dao et al., 2022).

The scientific search was first conducted on August 28, 2025, using the Scopus database. According to Abbas et al. (2024), Scopus was chosen because it provides sufficient metadata for bibliometric analysis and covers a wide range of scientific publications across diverse topics, particularly in the social sciences and education. Researchers may gain a comprehensive picture of the advancements and research trends in the field they are studying, thanks to this benefit. The researchers identified relevant search terms that aligned with the study's goals before beginning the article screening. A comprehensive keyword discovery process was conducted to ensure the chosen articles accurately reflected the planned study's scope. To improve the efficacy of search results, the search process uses the Boolean operators AND and OR. Only articles that are pertinent to the study topic are included in the search by using the Boolean AND operator.

On the other hand, by adding synonyms and variants of phrases that are often used in the literature, the Boolean OR operator broadens the search area. Furthermore, the search emphasizes the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles, as these three components are considered the most indicative of a scientific publication's content and primary focus. This method is intended to improve the thoroughness and relevance of search results while reducing the inclusion of articles outside the research's scope. According to this strategy, the search query is structured as follows: TITLE-ABS-KEY (((*"social studies"*) AND (*"educat*"*) OR (*"learn*"*) OR (*"teach*"*) AND (*"primary school"*) OR (*"elementary school"*)))

To ensure only pertinent and high-quality studies were selected, the researchers also established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria (Kovari, 2025). Articles published between 2005 and 2024, or within the last 20 years, were the only ones included in this analysis. The selection emphasized the significance of the social sciences as the fundamental tenet of social science education in primary schools, which studies human life, society, culture, and the environment. This professional emphasis ensures that the research mapping is more precise, consistent, and distinct from other fields. Furthermore, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included to ensure academic rigor, whereas non-peer-reviewed sources, such as books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and review articles, were omitted. Given that English serves as the lingua franca of international scientific communication and is predominantly used in highly regarded publications, only articles written in English were selected to enable broader representation and facilitate cross-national comparisons. The research was limited exclusively to teaching social studies at the primary school level, resulting in the omission of papers beyond this field.

The researcher conducted a document search. Initially, the author identified 563 papers in the Scopus database by analyzing their titles, abstracts, and keywords. The researcher excluded 98 documents from the 563 documents due to their non-compliance with the specified time frame, 68 papers that were not within the social sciences field, 83 documents that were not in the form of peer-reviewed articles, and 47 articles that were written in a language other than English. Consequently, 267 articles were selected for screening. The researcher subsequently conducted a manual examination of the titles and abstracts, identifying 32 articles that were not pertinent to this research. These articles included 25 with an extraneous focus, 5 review articles, and 2 with no abstract available. As a consequence, 235 articles were determined to be appropriate for additional examination. Figure 1 provides a concise summary of this information.

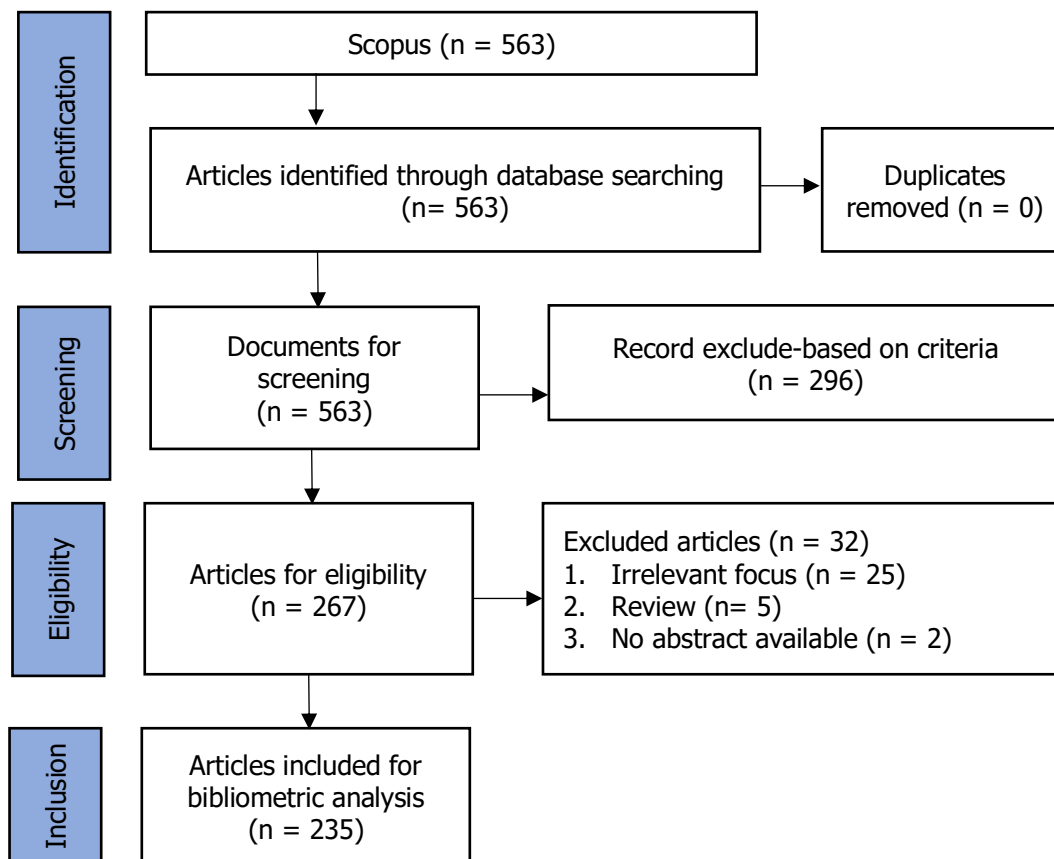


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

Additionally, the researcher applies the recommendations of [Donthu et al. \(2021\)](#) for analyzing performance and establishing a scientific network map. In reviews, performance analysis is a common practice that presents the performance of various research constituents in the field, similar to the backdrop profile in empirical research (e.g., authors, institutions, and region). Within this performance analysis, researchers employ Biblioshiny as an analytical tool. [Aria and Cuccurullo \(2017\)](#) have developed Biblioshiny, an online variant of the Bibliometrix utility that allows academicians to conduct practical bibliometric analysis using R application programming calls. Researchers comprehensively understand the field through the application of scientific mapping techniques to analyze intellectual interactions and structural connections among constituents. While conducting this scientific cartography analysis, researchers employ VOSviewer. Several academicians who analyze bibliometric networks have verified that VOSviewer functions effectively in their investigations ([Erlande et al., 2025](#)). According to [Xu et al. \(2021\)](#), VOSviewer is proficient in developing and visualizing text maps that incorporate bibliometric data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of publications and citations of SSE (SSE) research in primary schools. The average document age is 8.2%, and the annual publication growth rate is 8.24%. The average number of citations per document is 12.9%. The initial decade (2005-2014) saw a notable increase in publications, particularly in the final year, with 17 articles. The peak number of articles occurred in 2009, with 13 publications. The years 2006-2007 recorded the fewest publications, each totaling 1. However, citations in subsequent years significantly diminished, suggesting that the increase in citations has not yet influenced the advancement of knowledge. The second decade (2015-2024) saw the number of SSE publications reach its golden age, with 22 publications in 2019 and 21 in 2021. The highest number of citations was obtained in 2019, reaching 2.97. However, the number of publications in 2022 was the lowest, and the annual number of citations has remained stable since 2020, although citations declined in 2023. [Figure 2](#) summarizes this information.

Although citation counts have fluctuated, the study's findings indicate that the trend of SSE research in elementary schools continues to evolve, with a growing global interest. This pattern is logical, as it is influenced by factors such as the extent of international collaboration, the dynamics of research trends, journal reputation and accessibility, and the age of publication ([Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014](#); [Glänzel & Moed, 2002](#)). Citation surges are frequently observed in presently popular topics, while older articles are cited more frequently. Furthermore, citation fluctuations are indicative of academic dynamics and responses to broader social changes,

as well as the significant influence of the global context and social issues (Donthu et al., 2021). Furthermore, the basic education paradigm, which had previously marginalized social studies in elementary schools, underwent a transformation that led to heightened interest in teaching social studies in primary schools.

As a consequence of this paradigm shift, elementary social studies has emerged as a strategic subject. Social studies are considered a critical foundation for the identity and character development of young citizens, as they cultivate critical thinking, social awareness, citizenship ideals, and the ability to understand social realities from a young age. The climax occurred in 2019. According to the Trends Shaping Education 2019 report (OECD, 2019), this period is significant for educational research because international education policies and research have begun to prioritize several 21st-century educational trends, including critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and global citizenship education. This circumstance has led to a significant increase in publications that integrate social studies education with the capabilities of modern global citizens and pedagogical demands, particularly in primary social studies education.

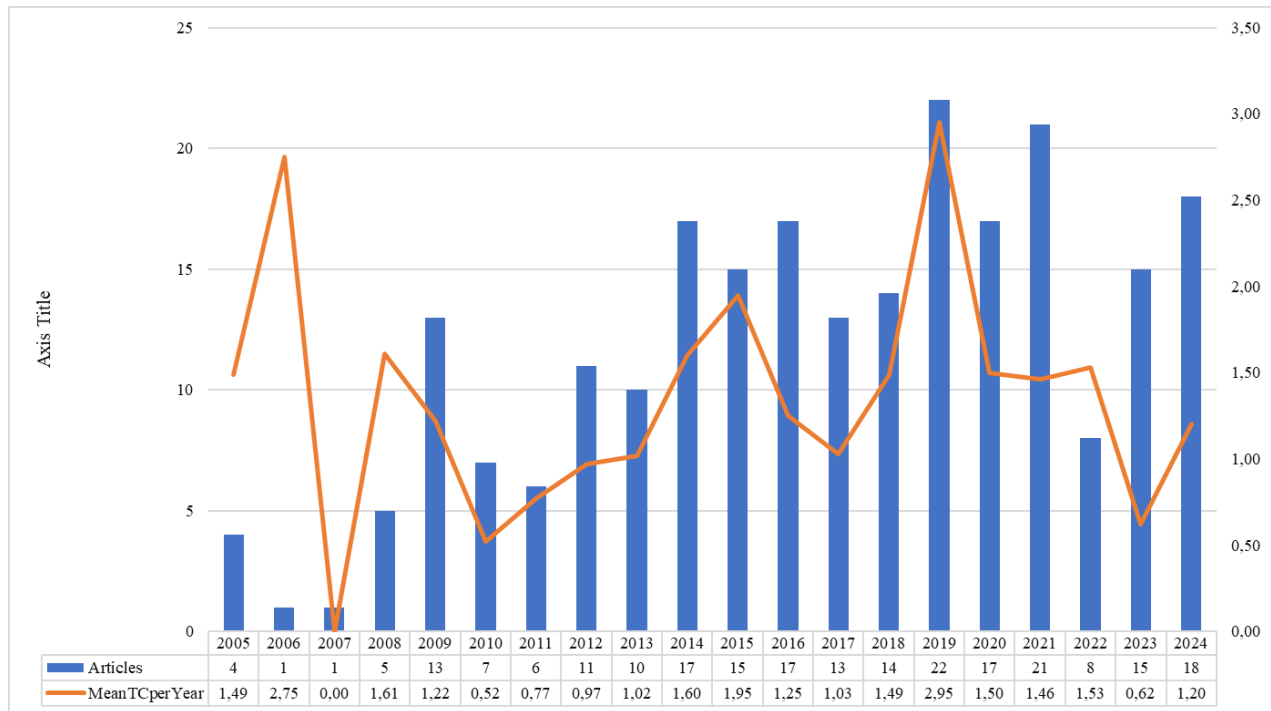


Figure 2. Publication growth.

The emergence of 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, social literacy, cultural literacy, and citizenship awareness, that are contextual to students' lives, is becoming more prominent in discussions of reforming social studies education in elementary schools, as the learning paradigm shifts from the mere transmission of social facts. According to research, basic social studies is essential for fostering civic and cultural literacy through instruction that is relevant to children's social, cultural, and environmental realities. (Farris, 2024). The integration of character values, local and global issues, and innovative pedagogical strategies, including contextual, thematic, and project-based learning, is also emphasized in social studies reform to enhance student engagement and comprehension (Ollila & Macy, 2019; Whitlock & Brugar, 2019). Traditional rote instruction in elementary schools has been decisively replaced by a more constructivist, contextual, and student-centered approach to social studies education. Elementary social studies are now recognized as a means of promoting critical thinking, social awareness, and active student participation by incorporating learning that is relevant to real-world experiences and the social environment, according to recent research (Haryanti et al., 2022; Sasmita et al., 2022). Additionally, the integration of thematic, project-based, and inquiry-based learning is becoming more robust in accordance with the demands of a contemporary curriculum that prioritizes relevance, meaningfulness, and the cultivation of 21st-century competencies in social studies education (Duke et al., 2021b; Hughes & Marhatta, 2023; Tschida & Buchanan, 2015). The curriculum for social studies in elementary schools will no longer be content-based; rather, it will concentrate on the development of children's civic and social abilities.

Table 1. Region production

Continent	Rank	Country	Documents	Citations
Nothern America	1	USA	67	1315
	7	Canada	5	26
Europe	2	Turkey	67	343
	8	Croatia	5	25
	9	Slovenia	5	18
	10	Sweden	4	47
	12	Serbia	3	6
	15	Cyprus	2	127
	16	United Kingdom	2	34
	17	Norway	2	23
Asia	19	Germany	2	8
	3	Indonesia	22	161
	4	Taiwan	10	607
	11	South Korea	4	34
	18	Saudi Arabia	2	22
Oceania	20	Iraq	2	1
	5	Australia	7	166
	14	New Zealand	3	2
Africa	6	South Africa	5	33
	13	Botswana	3	2

Table 1 presents the primary contributors to elementary Social Studies Education (SSE) research, with the United States as the dominant contributor, accounting for 67 documents and 1,315 citations. Both Turkey and Indonesia follow closely behind, with 67 publications and substantially fewer citations of 343 and 161, respectively. Taiwan is notable for its high citation counts, despite publishing fewer articles, while Cyprus and Australia are also included in the rankings. Countries such as Slovenia, Croatia, and Canada, which published numerous papers, received minimal citations, indicating a discrepancy between the volume of publications and the impact of citations. This study underscores the importance of geographical factors in evaluating SSE research productivity, with particular emphasis on the United States' dominance in this field. Specialized professional organizations, including the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), which was established in 1921, are closely associated with this dominance. NCSS has been instrumental in advancing SSE by establishing educational standards, formulating curriculum frameworks, and strengthening its status as an autonomous academic discipline since the early 20th Century. Not only does this institutional influence improve the quality and consistency of SSE education at the national level, but it also establishes a theoretical and pedagogical foundation that researchers from various countries frequently consult. As a result, the United States has established itself as a critical benchmark for global SSE development and research through the NCSS's existence and contributions.

The United States occupies a central position in the long-established and internationally influential tradition of social studies scholarship. This contributes to the higher number of citations received by American researchers in elementary school-level social studies education research, especially when compared to researchers from other countries, such as Turkey and Indonesia. Many major concepts, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical approaches in social studies education have been developed by American academics. They are widely used as international references, which makes their work highly citable (Sönmez, 2020). For example, prior contributions from early academics such as Edgar Bruce Wesley and Barth provided a foundational outline of the subject, reinforcing the importance of historical context in the development of social studies (Sapriya, 2017; Winataputra, 2019). In addition, American researchers have strong access to reputable international English-language journals and a deep understanding of global publication standards, which enhances the visibility and readability of their articles. Their research orientation, which is both theoretical and applied, is relevant across contexts and is supported by international collaborative networks and adequate research funding, allowing American researchers to produce large-scale, methodologically robust studies that are often cited. This situation is reinforced by the cumulative citation effect, in which established researchers and publications continue to be cited. In contrast, researchers from Turkey and Indonesia, despite significant growth in publications, still face limitations in global visibility, funding, and international networks.

Table 2. Most influential authors

Rank	Author	Affiliation	Region	Documents	Citations
1	Hwang, Gwojen	National Taiwan University of Science and Technology	Taiwan	4	396
2	Chen, Chih-Hung	National Taiwan University of Science and Technology	Taiwan	1	199
3	Chiu, Liyu	National Taiwan University of Science and Technology	Taiwan	1	199
4	Cheng, Kunhung	National Chiao Tung University	Taiwan	1	198
5	Tsai, Chin Chung	National Taiwan Normal University	Taiwan	1	198
6	Heafner, Tina Lane	University of North Carolina	USA	6	157
7	Zembylas, Michalinos	Open University of Cyprus	Cyprus	2	127
8	Chen, Nian Shing	National Sun Yat-sen University	Taiwan	1	122
9	Ho, Hsueh Ju	National University of Tainan	Taiwan	1	122
10	Kuo, Fan Ray Revon	National Sun Yat-Sen University	Taiwan	1	122
11	Sandholtz, Judith Haymore	University of California	USA	1	118
12	Wills, John S.	University of California	USA	1	118
13	Van Fossen, Phillip J.	Purdue University	USA	1	100
14	Kambani, Froso	Ministry of Education and Culture	Cyprus	1	92
15	Dee, Thomas S.	Stanford University	USA	1	87
16	Jacob, Brian A.	University of Michigan	USA	1	87
17	Schwartz, Nathaniel L.	Tennessee Department of Education	USA	1	87
18	Beecher, Margaret	West Hartford Public Schools	USA	1	76
19	Sweeny, Sheelah M.	University of Connecticut	USA	1	76
20	Neolaka, Amos	Universitas Negeri Jakarta	Indonesia	1	74

Furthermore, the researcher then examines the top authors in this area. The researchers identified 51 authors from a total of 508 who have at least one document that received 50 or more citations in this field. In [Table 2](#), the researchers list 20 of these 51 authors as highly recognized. The analysis indicates that Hwang, Gwojen, is the preeminent author in the domain of SSE at the elementary school level, with 4 publications and 396 citations. He is succeeded by Chen, Chih-Hung, and Chiu, Liyu, each with 1 publication and 199 citations, as well as Cheng, Kunhung, and Tsai, Chin Chung, who also each have 1 publication and 198 citations. This research also revealed that writers with numerous publications may have a limited citation count, as exemplified by Tina Lane, who has 6 publications and 157 citations. According to the study's findings, Tina Lane Heafner has published more than any other researcher. Although this researcher is among the most productive in the field, they are not regarded as the most influential. Citations, not publications, are what identify influential researchers. As a result, the study's findings demonstrate that a researcher's publications and citations are not directly correlated. Upon closer examination, among the 20 prominent writers, the bulk of scholars are affiliated with institutions in the USA (45%), followed by Taiwan (40%), Cyprus (10%), and Indonesia (5%), which has the fewest authors.

[Table 3](#) lists the most prominent papers in the field of primary school-level SSE (SSE) based on citations. [Hwang et al. \(2015\)](#) received the most citations (199), followed by [Cheng and Tsai \(2019\)](#) with 198 citations and [Hwang et al. \(2014\)](#) with 122 citations. These three articles are often cited as seminal works in SSE research at the elementary level. However, the top 10 papers have relatively few citations compared to other fields of study. Only 70 citations were given to the article, the fewest of the top 10, indicating limited influence and reach. The literature on SSE in elementary schools has not gained much traction in the international academic community, despite the existence of significant texts as primary references. To make SSE studies in elementary schools more visible and influential, cross-country and cross-disciplinary cooperation is crucial.

Table 3. Top 10 leading articles

Rank	Author	Title	TC	Total Citation per Year
1	Hwang et al. (2015)	A contextual game-based learning approach to improving students' inquiry-based learning performance in social studies courses	199	18,09
2	Cheng and Tsai (2019)	A case study of immersive virtual field trips in an elementary classroom: Students' learning experience and teacher-student interaction behaviors	198	28,29
3	Hwang et al. (2014)	Effects of an integrated concept mapping and web-based problem-solving approach on students' learning achievements, perceptions, and cognitive loads	122	10,17
4	Wills and Sandholtz (2009)	Constrained Professionalism: Dilemmas of Teaching in the Face of Test-Based Accountability	118	6,94
5	Van Fossen (2005)	"Reading and math take so much of the time...": An Overview of Social Studies Instruction in Elementary Classrooms in Indiana ¹	100	4,76
6	Zembylas and Kambani (2012)	The Teaching of Controversial Issues During Elementary-Level History Instruction: Greek-Cypriot Teachers' Perceptions and Emotions	92	6,57
7	Dee et al. (2013)	The Effects of NCLB on School Resources and Practices	87	6,69
8	Beecher and Sweeny (2008)	Closing the Achievement Gap with Curriculum Enrichment and Differentiation: One School's Story	76	4,22
9	Uge et al. (2019)	Development of Social Studies Learning Model Based on Local Wisdom in Improving Students' Knowledge and Social Attitude	74	10,57
10	Hwang & Chang (2016)	Effects of a peer competition-based mobile learning approach on students' affective domain exhibition in social studies courses	70	7,00

The articles by Hwang et al. (2015), Cheng and Tsai (2019), and Hwang et al. (2014) hold a prominent position due to their high citation counts; therefore, they can be considered seminal works advancing SSE research in elementary schools. The high number of citations for these articles indicates that the focus on technology integration, innovative instructional design, and the use of digital learning environments is the most frequently referenced issue by subsequent researchers. However, overall, the citation counts of the top 10 articles are still relatively low compared to those in more established fields of education, suggesting that SSE in elementary schools has not yet fully achieved strong visibility and appeal on a global scale. The low number of citations, including in articles ranked at the bottom of the top 10 list that received only around 70 citations, reflects the limited academic reach and the not-yet-widespread research network in this field. This condition indicates that although there are significant works that serve as theoretical and methodological foundations, SSE research in elementary schools is still at an early stage and requires further strengthening within the international research landscape. Therefore, as suggested by these findings, increasing cross-country and interdisciplinary collaboration becomes an important strategy to expand the impact of research, enrich theoretical perspectives, and enhance the visibility and citations of SSE research in elementary schools in the future.

Prominent researchers and significant documents have been recognized. Hwang et al. (2015) developed an educational contextual computer game to improve student learning outcomes through inquiry-based learning methodologies. This research involved collaboration with prominent writers Chen, Chih-Hung, and Chiu, Liyu, who are significant figures in this domain. Cheng and Tsai (2019) employed immersive virtual reality (VR) to examine students' learning experiences in SSE. The publication of both pieces in *Computers & Education* has had a major impact on the discussion around SSE in primary education. This publication has constantly functioned as a venue for interdisciplinary discourse, frequently disseminating research that connects educational philosophy, technological advancement, and digital pedagogy.

Additionally, both the USA and Turkey have been key centers for research on SSE at the elementary school level, with the USA serving as a global standard since the early 1900s. The USA has emerged as the main engine of SSE research, driven by its leading universities, first-rate academic infrastructure, and extensive

networks of collaboration. As the vital bridge connecting Europe and Asia, Turkey has raised its profile in the global SSE research network by expanding its scientific publications and working with universities in Sweden and the Netherlands.

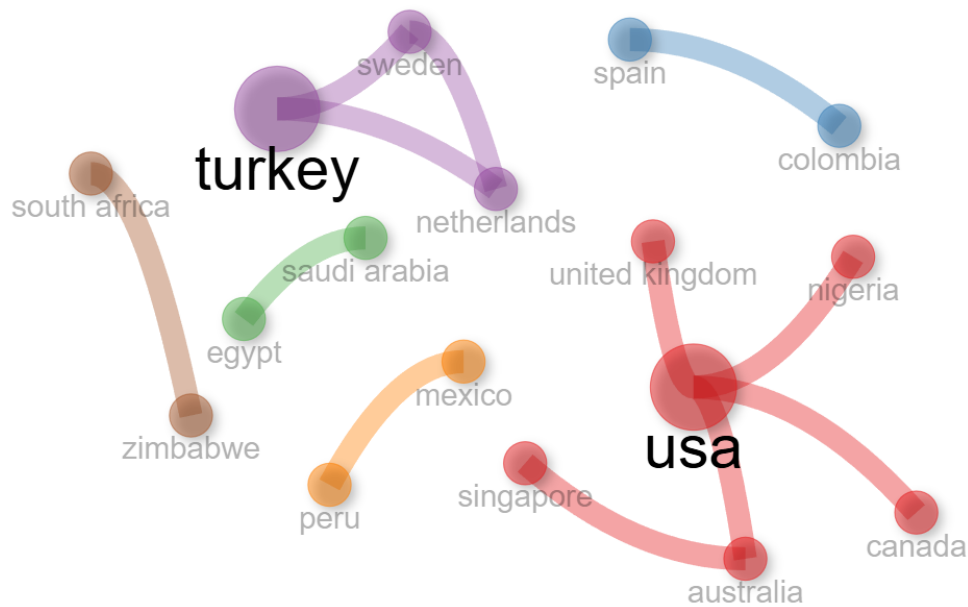


Figure 3. Network collaboration

Figure 3 shows a trend of international collaboration in elementary school-level SSE (SSE) studies across regions. The USA is the most prominent center, collaborating with countries like Australia, Canada, Nigeria, and the UK. Singapore has also shown participation, but only with Australia. Turkey, in the purple cluster, forms a small network in Europe. Countries in the blue, green, yellow, and brown clusters struggle with cross-border collaborations, suggesting limited research capacity or a focus on domestic activities. However, an intercontinental collaboration between Spain and Colombia reveals potential for expanding SSE research beyond the Americas and Europe. This finding suggests the need for more inclusive collaboration, particularly involving countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to create a more diverse, contextual, and representative understanding of SSE on a global scale. Meanwhile, regarding scientific mapping, researchers examine the themes and research topics that are trending in this large field. Keyword co-occurrence analysis, or co-word analysis, is what we are using to investigate the theme research clusters of SSE in primary schools. This research examines the co-occurrence of terms across the titles, keywords, and abstracts of several publications to uncover conceptual trends in the chosen literature. (Hallinger et al., 2020). There are 831 keywords across the 235 articles examined. Although 831 keywords with a minimum occurrence of 1 were selected, VOSviewer can display only 672 of them. This study identified six research clusters, with a minimum cluster size of 60. Figure 4 shows the produced co-occurrence map.

Cluster 1 (Red) focuses on keywords such as “primary education,” “curriculum,” “teaching,” “learning,” and “education,” which indicates an emphasis on curriculum development and learning practices in primary education. The keyword “primary education” directly refers to the elementary school level as the primary focus of study. In contrast, the keyword “curriculum” highlights the importance of the design, content, and structure of the curriculum used at this level. On the other hand, the keywords “teaching” and “learning” highlight the classroom learning process, encompassing the teacher’s instructional strategies and students’ learning experiences. Meanwhile, the keyword “education” serves as a broad umbrella that unites all these aspects into a coherent framework of formal education. In this first cluster, curriculum development and learning practices have become popular themes in primary education research because the curriculum is considered a key instrument for educational reform that adapts to social, technological, and global needs. Additionally, bibliometric studies show that the curriculum serves as a tool for incorporating 21st-century skills such as reading, creativity, and critical thinking, while also providing learning materials. Furthermore, global events like the pandemic have spurred research into innovative curricula and learning methods applicable to students today.

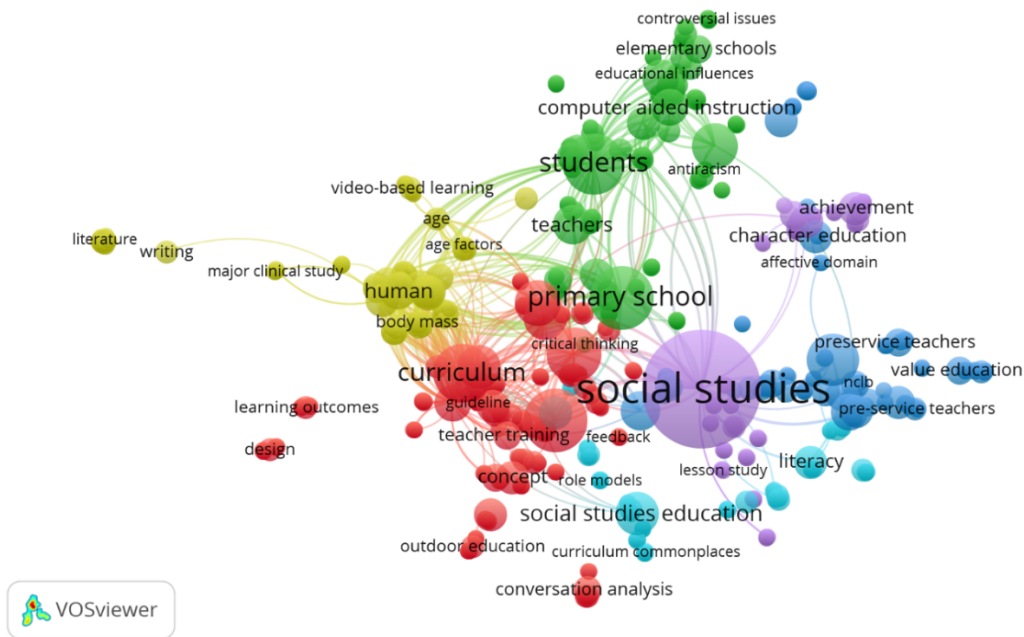


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network based on network visualization

Cluster 2 (Green) highlights the promotion of technology and interactive learning environments in elementary school. Terms like “primary school,” “student,” and “elementary school” emphasize elementary school children as the principal focus. Simultaneously, terms such as “computer-aided education,” “learning system,” and “e-learning” underscore the significance of digital technology in facilitating education, encompassing the utilization of computers, e-learning platforms, and learning management systems. The term “interactive learning environment” emphasizes that technology functions not just as a tool but as a catalyst for fostering an interactive, participatory educational setting, enabling students to participate more actively, collaboratively, and immersively in the pursuit of knowledge. The amalgamation of technology and interactive learning environments has been a prevalent theme in elementary education, as it has demonstrated the capacity to enhance student engagement and motivation while facilitating comprehension of teachings. The use of interactive media, including films, animations, and educational software, fosters an engaging learning environment that meets children's needs. Studies indicate that interactive technology can markedly improve students' motivation, abilities, and academic results.

Cluster 3 (Blue) highlights keywords such as “elementary school,” “testing,” “accountability,” and “elementary social studies,” which lead to the theme of assessment and accountability in social studies learning in elementary schools. Testing in elementary education measures academic achievement and serves as a means of accountability for teachers and schools. In social studies, tests shape students' understanding of society and democratic values. However, results-oriented testing can reduce critical thinking, emphasize memorization, and neglect social and contextual values. Therefore, testing practices should be balanced. Assessment and accountability in social studies learning in elementary schools has emerged as a widespread issue due to the increasing pressure of the education system on student learning outcomes. Assessment serves as an evaluation tool and becomes an essential instrument for improving the quality of learning through meaningful feedback. Furthermore, the demands for public accountability encourage schools to be more transparent in demonstrating student achievements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). However, there is still a gap between rote-based assessments and the 21st-century competencies required, so this topic is widely researched to identify more authentic and relevant assessment models (Daniel & Reynolds, 2011).

Cluster 4 (Yellow) focuses on children's educational sociology, emphasizing social experiences, gender, and learning innovations in elementary schools. Keywords such as “human,” “child,” and “childhood” highlight the importance of childhood development as a period for shaping identity, cognitive skills, and social attitudes. The gender dimension is reflected in keywords such as “female” and “male,” which indicate how boys' and girls' learning experiences can differ and affect their learning outcomes. Meanwhile, keywords such as “schools,” “writing,” and “video-based learning” point to the role of schools in developing basic literacy while utilizing suitable interactive learning technologies for the digital generation. Human experience and sociology affirm that education is not only a matter of technical learning but also a social space where children build identities, interact with others, and internalize societal values. The sociology of children's education, highlighting social experiences, gender, and learning innovations in primary schools, has become popular due to its essential role in child development. Primary schools are not only spaces for the transmission of knowledge but also significant arenas of socialization that shape children's behavior and social identity (Menyfield, 1998). In addition, early awareness

of gender construction encourages research to understand how stereotypes are formed and can be challenged through educational practices (Gilchrist & Zhang, 2024). The push for pedagogical innovation also makes this topic increasingly prominent, as creative and inclusive learning approaches are seen as capable of preparing children to face future social challenges (Mynbayeva et al., 2018).

Cluster 5 (Purple) highlights keywords such as "social studies," "achievement," "attitude," "values education," "authentic learning," "elementary teachers," and "assessment interviews" that describe the research focus on social studies learning in elementary schools. The central theme in this cluster is the integration of knowledge, values, and attitudes through authentic learning and teacher-based assessment evaluation. Social studies at the elementary level instill moral values, ethics, and social responsibility, shaping students' attitudes. Assessments address cognitive domains and attitudes towards social values and citizenship. Teachers facilitate real-life connections, and assessment interviews provide personal evaluations. The authentic learning approach reinforces relevance to real-life experiences. Social studies learning in elementary schools that emphasizes integrating values, attitudes, and student achievement through authentic learning and teacher assessment has become a popular theme because it offers contextual, meaningful learning experiences. This approach has proven to enhance motivation, critical thinking skills, and positive attitudes among students compared to traditional methods (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Schneider, 1994). Additionally, authentic assessments that reflect real-world situations are more effective at comprehensively measuring students' competencies (Gulikers et al., 2004).

Cluster 6 (Aqua) emphasizes essential terms, including "SSE," "literacy," "creativity," "sustainability," "children," and "curriculum commonplaces," which culminate in the theme of advancing social studies in primary education through the lenses of literacy, creativity, and sustainability as informed by curriculum commonplaces. SSE promotes children's literacy, creativity, and comprehension of sustainability while also conveying social knowledge. The framework of the commonplace encompasses teachers, students, resources, and context, which can be used to develop a curriculum that is significant, equitable, and relevant. The implementation of SSE in primary education, based on literacy, creativity, and sustainability within the framework of curriculum commonplaces, has emerged as a prominent subject due to its alignment with the demands of 21st-century education. This education promotes critical thinking, creativity, and environmental consciousness through a comprehensive, thematic, and contextual methodology (Kallio et al., 2024). The emphasis on literacy and sustainability aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which highlight the importance of quality education and climate action (Sterling & Orr, 2001; UNESCO, 2021).

Finally, *Figure 5* shows a visualization of the overlap of keyword co-occurrences describing the evolution of the SSE research topic in elementary schools over time. This study has visualized trending issues from 2010 to 2020 because it is based on methodological considerations that during this period, the number of publications and the interconnections of keywords were sufficiently dense to form stable thematic clusters that could be reliably interpreted. In contrast, the more recent period (2021–2024) still shows limited connectivity and could potentially result in fragmented visualizations. Therefore, data after 2020 were analyzed descriptively to show the latest developments without being visualized in networks. Furthermore, although the analysis uses publications from the last five-year period, the citation data are up-to-date at the time of data collection, making them still valid, as citations evolve and reflect the most current scientific impact of those publications. This approach allows a balanced assessment of scientific influence, balancing data stability and contemporary relevance.

The color gradient represents the average publication year of publications associated with each term, with yellow denoting the most contemporary related topics (Salido et al., 2025). Researchers are currently discussing the research trends reflected in the most recent emerging keywords, including "elementary school," "reading," "children," "human experience," and "literacy." Emerging research topics include "professional development," "elementary school teachers," "gender stereotype," "women leaders," "political socialization," "computer-assisted teaching," "outdoor education," "outdoor learning environments," "classroom interaction," "differentiated learning," "learning styles," "rural primary schools," "social skills," "democratic attitude," "curricula," "experiential learning," "pedagogical content knowledge," "teacher professional competence," "pre-service teacher education," "life studies lesson," "role playing game," "digital game-based learning," "technology-enhanced learning," "cooperative learning," "flipped classroom," and "adaptive classroom environment," requiring time and deeper exploration from researchers in the future. Additionally, research trends in this field have been geographically identified, with studies originating from Turkey moving towards India and Norway.

experienced academics to establish a robust literature foundation, identify relevant publications, and comprehend the expanding scientific network in the domain of primary school social studies. Moreover, keyword analysis uncovers existing research gaps, hence fostering the development of more novel and contextually relevant study ideas.

Furthermore, the results of the bibliometric study might substantially enhance the quality of social studies education in primary schools. The analysis of research trends may provide an extensive understanding of key study areas, pedagogical methods, and prevailing topics, as well as those that remain underexplored in social studies research. This information can inform educators, researchers, education practitioners, and curriculum developers in creating learning strategies that are relevant, contextual, and evidence-based, while promoting innovative social studies education that meets students' needs and aligns with basic education development requirements. Thus, bibliometric research enhances academic inquiry in primary school social studies education and facilitates evidence-based decision-making to advance learning practices at the primary level.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully achieved the objectives established by the researchers. This study, based on 235 articles from the Scopus database, reveals that SSE in primary schools has become a prominent research domain, leading to a significant increase in total publications. At the same time, annual citation figures fluctuate, reflecting changes in academic interest and evolving topics. A bibliometric study reveals that the USA, Turkey, and Indonesia are the main contributors to SSE articles in primary education, highlighting each nation's academic preeminence and research capabilities, as well as their influence on global research trends. This study has examined prominent writers, primarily essential figures from Taiwan, the most significant articles with a minimum of 70 citations, and international partnerships, with the USA having the most substantial number of collaborations, followed by Turkey. This discovery underscores the need for further inclusive engagement, especially with nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to cultivate a more diversified, contextual, and representational understanding of SSE globally. These results also highlight essential research themes and topics. Despite achieving its aims, this research on SSE in primary schools has several limitations. It is mainly derived from Scopus, which may exclude significant articles from other databases. The study is quantitative and does not examine the content, instructional quality, or context of SSE implementation. This study only utilizes publications written in English. The research advocates enhancing literature representation by broadening database sources, including Web of Science, ERIC, EBSCO, and Google Scholar, and by including qualitative methodologies, such as content analysis, in the examination of complete publications. Moreover, future researchers may collaborate with other countries to mitigate language barriers, thereby facilitating the exploration of a broader range of data beyond English.

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