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Social Studies Teachers' Views on Coping Strategies for Historical Trauma

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Abstract

Historical trauma experienced during the teaching of social studies can create significant emotional and pedagogical challenges for both teachers and students. This study aims to investigate the strategies that social studies teachers use to cope with students' emotional reactions when teaching about historical traumatic events, as well as their preferred teaching methods and professional support needs. The research was conducted with 25 social studies teachers working at lower-secondary (middle) schools in the central district of Malatya, Türkiye, using a phenomenological qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via content analysis. The findings reveal that teachers employ strategies such as fostering open communication, building empathy, and creating a supportive classroom environment to help students cope with emotionally charged historical content. Storytelling, the use of real-life examples, visual materials, and drama activities are among the most prominent methods reported. Teachers also adapt their language to be age-appropriate and tend to avoid graphic or potentially traumatic details. The study further highlights teachers' expressed need for in-service training, psychological support, and access to expert guidance when teaching sensitive historical topics. These results underscore the importance of equipping social studies teachers with appropriate coping and teaching strategies to support students' historical awareness and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Historical Trauma, Social Studies Education, Teacher Views, Emotional Responses

1. Introduction

Historical trauma is a form of collective and intergenerational wounding, particularly shaped by the experiences of Indigenous peoples in North America through colonialism, forced assimilation policies, cultural prohibitions, and losses transmitted across generations (Gone, 2014; Maxwell, 2014; Prussing, 2014; Waldram, 2014). Brave Heart (1993) first defined the concept through the Lakota people, emphasizing that this community has endured grief, loss, and psychological distress not only at the individual level but also at family and community levels, persisting across generations. Thus, historical trauma is not merely an individual experience but a trauma with societal and historical roots that can be transmitted over generations (Duran & Duran, 1995).

The formulation of the concept of historical trauma is based on the integration of two fundamental structures: historical oppression and psychological trauma. According to Gone (2014), the rhetorical power of the concept also stems from this integration. Historical oppression encompasses the multidimensional negative experiences to which Indigenous peoples were systematically subjected by European colonizers, such as discrimination, cultural assimilation, forced displacement from their lands, and mandatory boarding schools; whereas psychological trauma refers to the emotional and mental consequences of these processes at both individual and community levels. Therefore, historical trauma points to the enduring wound of past collective catastrophes that continue to affect the present and even future generations of communities.

Gone (2013) has stated that one of the primary motivations behind the development of the concept of historical trauma was to relate the health problems observed among Indigenous peoples to the forms of postcolonial suffering, emphasizing that these issues stem from historical and social conditions rather than individual inadequacy. This approach also aimed to prevent Indigenous individuals from blaming or stigmatizing themselves for the problems they experience, thereby facilitating the healing process. Moreover, it paved the way for Indigenous cultural practices and traditions to be recognized as alternative or complementary therapeutic elements to modern psychological interventions. In this way, the aim was to legitimize and acknowledge Indigenous peoples' own cultural values and healing practices on a scientific and professional level (Gone, 2007).

However, despite these emancipatory aims, the widespread adoption of the concept of historical trauma has largely occurred through the discourses of mental health professionals and advocates operating within behavioral health systems and services. That is, while the concept has made visible the specific social and historical realities experienced by Indigenous peoples, it has also been adapted to existing medical and psychological frameworks. At this point, the resulting debate oscillates between two poles: on one side, there is the emancipatory idealism that situates the medical perspective within a social context, motivating and resocializing; on the other side, there is the pragmatic realism that medicalizes the social and aligns it with the dominant health system. Therefore, historical trauma is seen both as a tool that empowers the unique social demands and healing processes of Indigenous peoples and as a complex area of debate shaped by the boundaries and discourses of existing health systems (Gone, 2013; 2014).

In addition, historical or social traumas such as war, migration, natural disasters, and genocide leave deep and multilayered effects not only on individuals who have directly experienced these events but also on subsequent generations. Such traumatic events lead to profound consequences for survivors, including intense feelings of loss, fear, loss of trust, and identity crises. However, recent scientific research demonstrates that children who have not been directly exposed to trauma, as well as the children of parents or grandparents who have lived through such experiences, can "internalize" these effects in different ways, rendering them psychologically vulnerable. In the literature, this phenomenon is referred to as "intergenerational transmission of trauma" or "secondary traumatization." The concept of intergenerational transmission reveals that trauma is not merely a temporary situation experienced by a single generation, but rather can be kept alive for generations within social memory and family structures. Parents may transmit the conscious or unconscious effects of their own trauma to their children; this transmission can occur through verbal means (stories told, warnings), emotional means (anxiety, overprotectiveness, emotional distance), or behavioral means (strict discipline, high anxiety levels, mourning practices) (Karatay, 2020).

While most foundational literature focuses on Indigenous trauma in North America, the phenomenon of historical trauma is not unique to this context. Many societies, including Türkiye, have experienced profound collective traumas through wars, forced migrations, population exchanges, political violence, and natural disasters. Events such as the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, compulsory resettlements, conflicts, military coups, and large-scale natural disasters have left lasting psychological and societal impacts on multiple generations in Türkiye. Therefore, studying historical trauma and its transmission is particularly relevant to the Turkish educational context, as social studies teachers frequently address these sensitive themes within their curricula.

However, research and educational policies in Türkiye have only recently begun to address how collective trauma shapes both individual development and educational practice. Social studies teachers, often tasked with teaching

sensitive historical events, are uniquely positioned to encounter and manage students' emotional reactions to these issues in the classroom. Despite their critical role, comprehensive studies examining how teachers cope with these challenges, the strategies they employ, and their professional development needs are limited in the Turkish context. Consequently, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- What strategies do social studies teachers use to cope with students' emotional responses when teaching historical traumatic events?
- Which teaching methods and classroom practices do they prefer to ensure effective and sensitive teaching of historical traumas?
- How do teachers prepare themselves professionally and personally for addressing historical trauma in the classroom?
- What types of professional development, in-service training, and support do teachers need to improve their competencies in coping with historical trauma?

Given Türkiye's complex historical and social structure, understanding how teachers address historical trauma is crucial, as their approaches significantly influence students' comprehension of history, identity formation, and psychological resilience.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study was conducted within the framework of a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research enabled the examination of phenomena in their natural context by using various data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Within this approach, the focus was on the concepts constructed by individuals and the meanings attached to these concepts (Merriam, 2013). Qualitative research also included the analysis of research problems through interpretative techniques and exploration of meanings attributed to social issues. Thematic analysis was applied to the data obtained through both deductive and inductive reasoning, with sensitivity to the human and environmental context. This approach made it possible to examine and interpret data in depth (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the phenomenological design one of the qualitative research designs was employed. Phenomenology aims to collect information about phenomena by examining individuals' experiences (Kocabıyık, 2016). Events, experiences, perceptions, concepts, and situations encountered in life may emerge as phenomena whose meanings are not fully understood. The phenomenological design was preferred to better understand such phenomena, as it draws on the diversity of individual experiences, analyzing, evaluating, and comparing these experiences. This design provided an opportunity to examine insufficiently understood phenomena in detail, thus allowing for a broader and deeper understanding (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

In this study, data were collected from teachers who had direct experience with the phenomenon being investigated. The main data collection method was semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives in detail. Additionally, non-participant observation was used as a supplementary data collection tool to gain further insight into classroom practices and teacher-student interactions during lessons on historical trauma. Since phenomenology is a part of qualitative research methodology, the aim was not to provide generalizable or definitive results; rather, the purpose was to obtain information that clarifies and deepens the understanding of the phenomenon in a detailed and explicit manner. Findings are supported by direct quotations from participant teachers and by descriptive accounts of classroom situations, enabling a better understanding of the subject matter (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The methodological choices in this research are theoretically justified by the need to capture the nuanced, context-dependent nature of teachers' lived experiences, which cannot be fully understood through quantitative or survey-based approaches alone. The phenomenological approach enables the research to engage deeply with subjective perspectives, which is especially important given the emotional and sensitive nature of historical trauma in education.

2.2. Participants

In this study, the convenient sampling technique, one of the purposive sampling methods, was employed. Convenient sampling enables the selection of participants who are readily accessible and available to the researcher, facilitating efficient data collection within the constraints of time and resources (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Although it does not ensure the representativeness of the entire population, this approach is frequently used in qualitative research when the aim is to gain in-depth insight into a specific group or phenomenon rather than generalizability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Using this method, the study was conducted with a total of 25 middle school teachers, comprising 13 female and 12 male teachers working in middle schools in the central district of Malatya. The principle of easy accessibility was observed in participant selection. The data collection process continued until sufficient and satisfactory information was obtained, and the study group was completed after interviewing the 25th participant.

In this study, data collection was continued until data saturation was reached, that is, until no new themes or codes were emerging from the interviews and the information obtained began to repeat (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). At this point, it was determined that sufficient data had been collected to comprehensively address the research questions, and the data collection process was concluded. Participants were assigned codes such as P1, P2, P3, ..., P25 to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, the data obtained from the interviews were included in the findings section to support and provide evidence for the results.

It is important to note that convenience sampling, while practical for qualitative research, significantly limits the generalizability of findings. The sample of 25 teachers from a single district in Malatya may not represent the broader demographic and cultural diversity of Turkish teachers. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as context-specific and not directly transferable to all educational settings in Türkiye. Future research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to strengthen the generalizability of findings.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Teachers Forming the Working Group

Characteristic	Description
Gender	13 female, 12 male
Age Range	25-30 years
Professional Experience	5-10 years
Education Level	All teachers have at least a bachelor's degree, 7 teachers have a master's degree

2.3. Instrument and Procedures

In this study, a semi-structured interview protocol containing open-ended guiding questions developed by the researcher was used as the primary data collection tool. During the development of the interview protocol, the researcher first reviewed the relevant literature and created a framework covering the key thematic areas to be explored. Next, the validity and appropriateness of the protocol were established through expert review. Specifically, feedback was obtained from three faculty members from the Department of Turkish and Social Sciences Education at İnönü University. In addition, two social studies teachers and one Turkish teacher reviewed the interview guide and provided further suggestions, which were incorporated through subsequent revisions. After these processes, the final version of the interview protocol was established.

The semi-structured interview protocol included the following open-ended questions to guide the interviews:

1. What strategies do you use when you encounter students' emotional responses while addressing historical traumatic events in social studies classes?
2. Which teaching methods or approaches do you prefer to ensure that students can understand the topic in a healthy way while teaching about historical traumas (e.g., wars, migrations, natural disasters, genocides, etc.)?
3. What kind of personal or professional preparations do you make to be ready for students' questions or emotional reactions related to historical traumas?
4. What do you pay attention to in order to prevent your students from being negatively affected or

- traumatized by historical traumatic events?
5. What positive or negative effects have you observed on students when historical traumas are discussed in the classroom environment?
 6. What types of support or training do you think are needed to improve teachers' skills in coping with historical trauma?

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

During the research process, pre-scheduled interviews were held with the participants. The locations and times of the interviews were determined according to the participants' availability. Audio recordings were taken during the interviews in order to allow for detailed analysis. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method. In the analysis process, thematic categories were first created based on the research questions and theoretical framework. Then, the collected data were organized according to these categories. Finally, the data were presented with frequency values.

To ensure the reliability of the research and to eliminate potential individual biases during the coding of the data, the interview data were evaluated and coded independently by both the expert and the researcher (coders) conducting the study. Afterwards, these codings were compared, and the numbers of agreements and disagreements were identified to determine the level of inter-coder consistency. The reliability of the research was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994/2016) reliability formula: "reliability = number of agreements / (total number of agreements + disagreements)." According to the formula, the reliability value calculated for the study was determined as 91%. Since the level of agreement between coders was 91% in this study, it was concluded that the desired level of reliability had been achieved. According to Saban (2009), in qualitative research, when the agreement between expert and researcher evaluations is 90% or above, the desired level of reliability is considered to be achieved.

3. Results

In this section, the findings obtained from the research are presented and interpreted through tables.

Table 2: Strategies for Coping with Students' Emotional Reactions

Theme	Frequency (f)
Emotional Sharing and an Open Communication Environment	12
Developing Empathy	9
Creating a Safe and Supportive Classroom Atmosphere	8
Using Realistic but Softened Language	7
Group Activities	6
Receiving Guidance and Psychological Support	4
Distraction or Positive Redirection Techniques	3

- P3: "I make an effort to create a safe space where students can share their feelings about topics involving historical trauma. Most of the time, I give them the opportunity to express what they feel."
- P8: "When some students become anxious or upset, I first listen to them and explain that what they are experiencing is normal. Then, I ask questions that encourage them to develop empathy."
- P12: "While explaining the events, I avoid details and soften my language. I also try to emphasize the positive aspects to prevent unnecessary fear or anxiety in the classroom."
- P15: "By organizing small group discussions, I enable students to share their emotions. Through these exchanges, students understand that they are not alone."
- P20: "For students who have great difficulty coping emotionally, I cooperate with the school counseling service. If necessary, we seek support from the psychological counselor."

The most commonly used method is creating an environment for emotional sharing and open communication ($f=12$). Teachers strive to establish a safe classroom atmosphere where students can openly express emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and anger. This approach enables students to feel valued and understood. Developing empathy ($f=9$) contributes to students evaluating historical events from the perspectives of different actors and better understanding the pain experienced by others. Especially through practices such as drama, enactment, and role-playing, efforts are made to strengthen students' sense of empathy. Within the theme of providing a safe and supportive classroom environment ($f=8$), many teachers adopt a respectful approach to students' emotional responses, listen to them without judgment, and guide classroom discussions when necessary. In this way, they aim to reduce students' emotional burden. The use of realistic but softened language ($f=7$) involves carefully selecting details when describing traumatic events and presenting emotionally disturbing content in a gentler and safer way. By doing so, teachers try to prevent students from developing excessive anxiety or fear. Group activities ($f=6$) allow students to share their emotions in small groups and realize that others have similar feelings. This has both a calming effect and helps foster a sense of community. In some cases, teachers seek guidance and psychological support ($f=4$) and cooperate with the school counselor for students who have difficulty coping emotionally. A less frequently mentioned theme is the use of distraction or positive redirection techniques ($f=3$), where teachers try to maintain balance by directing students' attention to positive or everyday topics after addressing intense traumatic content.

Table 3: Preferred Teaching Methods and Approaches for Historical Traumas

Theme	Frequency (f)
Storytelling and Real-Life Examples	13
Use of Visual Materials and Documentaries	11
Discussion and Question-Answer Activities	10
Drama, Role-Playing, and Enactment	8
Group Work	7
Project and Presentation Assignments	5
Field Trips or Virtual Tour Activities	3

- P2: "When teaching about historical traumas, I tell real-life stories. Students understand the events better and develop empathy."
- P5: "I use documentaries and visual materials in class. Especially short films on themes like war or migration make the subject more concrete for students."
- P9: "By creating a discussion environment, I allow students to ask questions and express different viewpoints."
- P12: "We do drama and enactment activities with students. This way, they feel as if they are part of the events."
- P18: "I have students do research and presentations in groups. This not only improves collaboration but also helps them learn the topic from different perspectives."
- P23: "If possible, I organize field trips and take students to battlefields or museums. This makes the learning process more permanent."

The majority of participants indicated that storytelling and the use of real-life examples ($f=13$) is the most effective strategy. Teachers emphasized that when historical traumas are conveyed not as abstract concepts but through real human stories, students' levels of empathy increase and their understanding of the subject deepens. The second most commonly preferred method is the use of visual materials and documentaries ($f=11$). Teachers stated that materials such as photographs, videos, documentaries, and maps help convey the impact and reality of events to students more effectively. Visual content, especially in topics that are complex or emotionally intense, attracts students' attention and makes learning more permanent. Discussion and question-answer activities ($f=10$) are frequently used as practices that promote active student participation, develop critical thinking skills, and reveal different perspectives. Allowing students to share their own views supports a deeper understanding of the subject. Drama, role-playing, and enactment ($f=8$) emerged as important methods that enable students to experience

historical events, understand their emotional dimension, and develop empathy. Group work ($f=7$) involves methods that allow students to conduct research together, share their thoughts, and create joint products. This method was found to be beneficial for fostering solidarity among students and for developing different perspectives. Project and presentation assignments ($f=5$) provide opportunities for students to conduct research individually or in groups and present their findings to the class. In this way, both their sense of responsibility and their research skills are developed. A small number of teachers stated that they prefer field trips or virtual tour activities ($f=3$), taking students to museums, monuments, or historical sites. These activities enable students to achieve more meaningful learning by seeing the events on site.

Table 4: Personal and Professional Preparation Methods for Addressing Student Questions and Emotional Responses

Theme	Frequency (f)
Following Current Scientific and Pedagogical Resources	9
Experience Sharing and Peer Support	7
Receiving Support from Experts or Guidance Counselors	6
In-Class Role-Play	5
Personal Awareness	4
Emotion Regulation through Art, Literature, or Hobbies	3

- P3: "I keep up with new resources, articles, and especially current publications on adolescent psychology. This way, I feel more prepared for possible reactions."
- P5: "I exchange experiences with colleagues who deal with similar topics. Especially regarding answers to difficult questions, we learn from each other."
- P8: "Sometimes a student's reaction can be intense; in such cases, I consult with the school counseling service and develop a joint roadmap with the student."
- P12: "For my own preparation, I practice scenarios and role-play; planning in advance how to respond to possible difficult questions makes me feel more confident."
- P16: "To manage my own stress and emotions, I do meditation or take short walks. To manage a student's anxiety, I need to be in a good emotional state myself first."
- P19: "On emotionally tiring days, I try to relax with short stories or music. This way, I am calmer and more prepared in the classroom."

According to the research findings, the most frequently used method by social studies teachers to prepare for possible student questions and emotional responses when addressing historical traumas is following current scientific and pedagogical resources ($f=9$). Participants enhance their knowledge and skills by utilizing up-to-date articles, books, and seminars related to both history and child and adolescent psychology. Experience sharing and peer support ($f=7$) involve teachers regularly exchanging real-life examples and effective coping strategies with their colleagues through meetings, conversations, or online sharing groups. Receiving support from experts or guidance counselors ($f=6$) is considered important for developing a multidimensional approach to student well-being, especially in situations with a heavy emotional burden, by obtaining professional guidance. In-class role-play ($f=5$) refers to teachers mentally rehearsing or taking notes on potential difficult questions and emotional responses before class, which helps them feel more prepared. Through personal awareness ($f=4$), teachers practice breathing, meditation, or small rituals to control their own emotional responses and stress levels. Emotion regulation through art, literature, or hobbies ($f=3$) stands out as a method used to relax personally and maintain balance, especially on challenging teaching days.

Table 5: Precautionary Strategies to Prevent Negative Student Impact When Teaching Historical Traumatic Events

Theme	Frequency (f)
Age-Appropriate Language and Content Selection	13
Emphasizing Positive Aspects	10

Avoiding Traumatic Details	9
Observing Student Reactions	7
Creating a Safe Classroom Environment	6
Sensitivity to Differences	4

- P1: “When explaining historical traumas, I choose words appropriate to the students’ age level and avoid details that might cause fear or panic.”
- P4: “After each difficult event, I highlight stories of hope and new beginnings that emerged at the end of that period. This way, students do not develop a sense of helplessness.”
- P8: “Some students are highly affected by the events described; I observe them and, if necessary, have one-on-one conversations.”
- P13: “I pay attention to cultural and familial sensitivities during lessons. Since each student’s trauma threshold may differ, I avoid generalizations.”
- P17: “I make an effort to create a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and expressing their emotions.”
- P20: “I ensure that the visuals or videos used do not contain violence and are not emotionally triggering.”

The majority of participants emphasized the importance of age-appropriate language and content selection ($f=13$). Teachers simplify topics according to students’ age and developmental levels, avoiding complex or heavily traumatic details. In this way, they aim to prevent students from developing excessive anxiety or fear. Emphasizing positive aspects ($f=10$) aims to boost students’ morale and resilience by highlighting hopeful examples such as solidarity, recovery, and reconstruction that emerged during those difficult periods, alongside traumatic events. Avoiding traumatic details ($f=9$) means steering clear of content involving violence, death, or pain, and using a gentle and protective tone when discussing sensitive topics. Participants particularly noted that they avoid triggering content, especially for sensitive students. Observing student reactions ($f=7$) includes monitoring students’ facial expressions and behaviors during and after class, and providing individual support or conversations when needed. This approach increases sensitivity to students’ immediate emotional needs. Creating a safe classroom environment ($f=6$) aims to establish an atmosphere where students can freely share their feelings and be listened to without judgment, thereby reducing the negative impact of traumatic content. Lastly, the theme of sensitivity to differences ($f=4$) involves personalizing lessons and avoiding prejudice, recognizing that each student’s experiences and family background may be different.

Table 6: Effects of Discussing Historical Traumas in the Classroom on Students

Theme	Frequency (f)
Development of Historical Awareness and Social Responsibility	10
Psychological Impact	9
Social Solidarity	7
Increase in Academic Curiosity and Inquiry	6
Negative Emotions Such as Anxiety, Sadness, or Fear	5
In-Class Discussion	3

- P2: “When traumatic historical events are addressed, most students become more sensitive and empathetic toward what others have experienced.”
- P6: “These topics help us recognize our responsibilities as a society and become more conscious individuals.”
- P9: “Some students may feel sad or anxious at the end of the lesson; sometimes these feelings can last for several days.”
- P13: “As sharing increases within the class, students support each other more and group cohesion is strengthened.”
- P17: “Some students want to do further research on these events and turn to books and documentaries

related to the topic.”

- *P21: “Sometimes very sensitive students may experience anxiety, so I am careful when addressing these topics.”*
- *P25: “Thanks to discussions, students learn to evaluate events from different perspectives.”*

According to the research findings, the development of historical awareness and social responsibility ($f=10$) enables students to learn lessons from the past of their own society and humanity, understand their social responsibilities, and become more conscious citizens. Psychological impact ($f=9$) indicates that, due to the weight of the topics, some students may experience temporary sadness, anxiety, or discomfort. Such emotional responses may be more intense, especially among sensitive students. Social solidarity ($f=7$) shows that through classroom sharing and common feelings, students support each other and develop group cohesion and a sense of social belonging. The theme of increased academic curiosity and inquiry ($f=6$) reveals that some students are influenced by these topics and are motivated to conduct research, read books, and seek information from various sources. Nevertheless, negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, or fear ($f=5$) were observed in some students. Teachers stated that such emotional fluctuations may occur temporarily, especially in lessons where traumatic details are intensely addressed. In-class discussion ($f=3$) demonstrates that students develop their ability to think from different perspectives and improve their communication skills when discussing these topics.

Table 7: Support and Training Needs for Developing Skills in Coping with Historical Trauma

Theme	Frequency (f)
In-Service Training and Workshops	13
Psychological Counseling and Expert Support	10
Provision of Resources	8
Professional Sharing Groups	7
Training in Drama, Art, and Creative Methods	5
Online Training	3

- *P2: “We need special in-service training for teaching emotionally sensitive topics. Drama or creative drama workshops could be very useful.”*
- *P6: “Receiving regular guidance from psychological counselors would make it easier for us to understand students’ emotional reactions.”*
- *P11: “It is very important to be provided with reliable materials and visuals that we can use when explaining traumatic events.”*
- *P15: “Sharing methods and feelings with teachers who have similar experiences during regular professional sharing meetings at school is very beneficial.”*
- *P19: “Learning about new approaches through online seminars, podcasts, and short courses is very useful for my own development.”*
- *P23: “Practical training on creative techniques such as art and storytelling makes it easier for me to empathize with students in the classroom.”*

The type of support most frequently identified as needed by participants was in-service training ($f=13$). Teachers particularly expressed the desire for up-to-date and practical training on how to address emotionally sensitive historical topics using pedagogical methods. Drama, creative drama, and empathy development workshops were highlighted as preferred practices. The need for psychological counseling and expert support ($f=10$) was also notable. Participants emphasized that receiving regular guidance and supervision from school counselors or field experts would support the emotional well-being of both themselves and their students. Teachers also stressed the necessity of resource provision ($f=8$). The development of reliable, pedagogically appropriate, and age-appropriate visual, video, story, and activity materials would facilitate the process. Professional sharing groups ($f=7$) enable teachers with similar experiences to come together, share ideas and feelings, and establish solidarity when dealing with challenging topics. Training in drama, art, and creative methods ($f=5$) draws attention to the importance of learning creative expression techniques and forms of emotional expression, which can be comforting

for both teachers and students when dealing with historical trauma. Finally, online training ($f=3$) points to the need for flexible and up-to-date learning environments where teachers can access new knowledge and techniques regardless of time and place constraints.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the strategies and challenges faced by social studies teachers in addressing historical trauma within Turkish middle schools. Consistent with international literature on trauma-informed pedagogy (Carello & Butler, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), this study demonstrates that open communication, empathy-building, and the creation of safe classroom environments are perceived as essential by teachers when discussing traumatic historical events. The frequent use of storytelling and real-life examples mirrors the suggestions of Barton and Levstik (2004), who argue that personalizing history not only deepens student engagement but also fosters empathy and social responsibility.

One noteworthy result is the teachers' intentional use of age-appropriate language and their avoidance of graphic or overly distressing details. This approach aligns with trauma-informed teaching recommendations (REL Appalachia, 2021; Osher et al., 2021), which emphasize that sensitive content should be presented with care to avoid re-traumatization, particularly for vulnerable students. The finding that teachers emphasize positive aspects such as recovery, solidarity, and hope echoes previous studies (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016) highlighting the need to balance the realities of traumatic history with messages that build psychological resilience and optimism in students.

Moreover, the study identifies professional development, in-service training, and access to expert psychological support as critical needs among teachers. This is consistent with the work of Berger and Samuel (2020) and Alisic (2012), who found that teachers often feel inadequately prepared to address students' emotional responses to trauma and therefore require institutional support, regular training, and access to mental health resources. However, unlike some Western contexts where more comprehensive support systems may exist (Berger & Samuel, 2020), Turkish teachers in this study reported limited availability of such resources, underscoring a significant gap in the current educational infrastructure.

Another significant contribution of this study is the documentation of multi-modal, student-centered approaches including group work, discussion, drama, and creative activities which have been found effective in previous research for supporting both cognitive and emotional learning outcomes (Harrison & Hurd, 2020). The reliance on peer support and professional sharing groups also reflects the findings of Jennings and Greenberg (2009), suggesting that collegial networks play a valuable role in teacher well-being and professional growth.

Importantly, while teachers recognized the potential positive effects of trauma-sensitive pedagogy on students' historical awareness, empathy, and social solidarity, they also reported short-term negative psychological effects such as anxiety, sadness, or fear in some students. This observation is in line with the literature (Carello & Butler, 2015; Osher et al., 2021), which acknowledges that even the most carefully crafted approaches can elicit strong emotional reactions, especially when dealing with sensitive or recent traumas.

This study expands the limited literature on historical trauma in Turkish education by providing context-specific findings and by demonstrating that, despite cultural and systemic differences, Turkish teachers share many concerns and strategies with their international peers. The results also suggest that further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of trauma-sensitive pedagogy, especially regarding students' psychological adjustment, academic performance, and civic engagement. Additionally, the study's use of convenient sampling and the focus on a single region (Malatya) limit the generalizability of the findings, pointing to the need for future studies with larger and more diverse samples across different Turkish regions.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the transformative potential of trauma-informed and sensitive teaching strategies in social studies education. The findings demonstrate that teachers make conscious efforts to safeguard students' emotional

well-being through open communication, empathy, and age-appropriate instructional methods when addressing traumatic historical events. The use of storytelling, visual materials, and participatory activities not only increases student engagement but also enables a deeper and more meaningful understanding of complex historical topics.

Nevertheless, the results also indicate notable gaps in the professional support systems available to teachers. Many teachers highlight the need for continuous, practice-oriented in-service training, access to psychological counseling, and reliable teaching resources. Meeting these needs will strengthen the integration of trauma-sensitive pedagogy within the Turkish educational system and ensure sustainability in practice. In this regard, policymakers and school administrators should prioritize the provision of regular professional development programs, peer support groups, and expert guidance, thus supporting teachers to be equipped both emotionally and pedagogically. Furthermore, this study points to the necessity of fostering professional collaboration, peer support, and self-care practices among teachers confronting the challenges of teaching traumatic content. Schools should create an environment that facilitates networking among teachers, emotional support, and the sharing of professional experiences.

In conclusion, developing trauma-sensitive approaches in social studies education will not only enhance students' historical awareness and sense of social responsibility, but also contribute to their psychological resilience. For lasting and long-term impact, it is recommended that future research focus on longitudinal outcomes, the effectiveness of intervention programs, and the adaptation of trauma-sensitive strategies to the needs of diverse student populations across Türkiye.

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