

# Are social studies teachers ready for legal literacy education?

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess social studies teachers' legal literacy levels and their perspectives on legal literacy education. The study was conducted with 160 social studies teachers in the first stage and 10 selected teachers in the second. Instruments were the legal literacy scale and a semi-structured interview form. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. The results indicated that teachers generally possess a high level of legal literacy. However, a notable portion of them do not perceive themselves as legally literate, citing insufficient education, knowledge, experience, and interest in law as reasons. Furthermore, challenges related to the abstract nature of the subject and difficulties in effectively teaching it to students were identified. To address these issues, teachers suggested real-life applications, making the lessons more tangible, developing teaching materials, and enhancing professional development.

**Keywords:** legal literacy, legal literacy education, social studies, social studies teachers' views

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy, the state of being literate or the ability to read and write, can be used in different meanings and forms in everyday language. Literacy is defined as a concept that focuses on developing social skills and encompasses comprehensive reading and writing practices (Wray, 2001). According to UNESCO (2023), literacy is understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication through rich digital texts in a rapidly changing and globalizing world beyond the traditional understanding of grouping reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Looking at these definitions, literacy is understood as a comprehensive concept that includes advanced skills beyond reading and writing. Today, scientific, social, and technological changes have affected literacy, as they have affected all areas of life. As a result of this change and development, many new literacy areas have emerged, including the field of "legal literacy" that this work focuses on.

In this section, first, the concept of legal literacy will be explained, and the problem statement of the research will be presented. Then, studies related to legal literacy in the field of education will be discussed. Finally, based on the literature review, the necessity and importance of the study will be highlighted, and the purpose of the study will be presented.

### Legal Literacy

Legal literacy is the ability to read, comprehend, and write legal documents, decisions, and laws that contribute to the field of law. On the other hand, legal literacy is also a concept aimed at making individuals who are not directly related to the law literate in legal matters (Freudenberg, 2017; Zariski, 2011).

Legal literacy is not just about knowing the law as information, but also about being familiar with the content of rights within the scope of laws and being able to claim those rights. Therefore, it is a crucial quality that affects people's lives and needs to be learned (Yadav & Yadav, 2021). As the concept of legal literacy includes the use of legal rights by individuals, it facilitates the understanding of legal knowledge and other related concepts. In this context, legal literacy creates profiles of individuals who are active in society, have a critical perspective, research, think and question (Fultz, 2015).

### Components of Legal Literacy

There are three different dimensions (legal consciousness, legal mobilization, and legal socialization) that complement each other and constitute the conceptual framework of legal literacy (Zariski, 2011):

This study was derived from the first author's master's thesis, which was approved by Graduate Education Institute at Trabzon University.

1. **Legal consciousness:** It refers to people's perceptions, experiences, and behaviors related to legal issues. Legal consciousness does not only mean determining legal awareness or measuring knowledge, but it also documents the existence as well as the absence of law in societies (Chua & Engel, 2019).
2. **Legal mobilization:** It expresses how individuals and groups should actively seek recourse to law and legal institutions to protect their rights and to resolve the problems they encounter while exercising the powers granted to them by their rights (Morrill et al., 2010; Zariski, 2014).
3. **Legal socialization:** It examines individuals' relationships with laws and legal systems and expresses how individuals internalize or reject laws and legal institutions (Fagan & Tyler, 2005).

When the definitions of these three headings are carefully examined, it can be observed that legal literacy has mental, emotional, and behavioral foundations.

There is an emphasis on raising awareness about legal issues due to individuals' reluctance to engage with legal matters based on a lack of knowledge about their rights. Legal literacy is considered an important tool for creating legal awareness in the lives of people who are not involved in legal matters, as it is the foundation of constitutional democracy. Education is undoubtedly one of the most important tools in imparting this awareness to individuals. When we consider the relationship between education and law, one of the first detailed experiences for individuals in this regard is provided by social studies and related courses.

One of the most important outcomes of social studies and related courses, which claim to educate qualified citizens, is to train individuals who are literate in law. Indeed, the concept of citizenship itself requires legal literacy as a definition. Therefore, social studies teachers are one of the most influential actors in terms of individuals becoming literate in law. Pena Carranco (2016) stated that both teachers and teacher trainees have not received sufficient education in legal literacy, resulting in inadequate levels of legal literacy. Therefore, the fact that social studies teachers can directly identify their own legal literacy status and the shortcomings in legal literacy education can contribute to addressing the shortcomings and training more qualified legally literate individuals in the future.

### Legal Literacy in Education Literature

In this study, the literature was reviewed on the topic of legal literacy, excluding studies that focused on students at different educational levels and social studies curricula. Through this review, it was observed that there is a significant amount of research on the knowledge, opinions, and perceptions of educators such as principals, teachers, and school administrators regarding legal issues, with some studies examining them collectively and others separately (Koc-Basaran, 2021; Naidoo, 2018; Oguz-Hacat, 2019; Pena Carranco, 2016; Perry-Hazan & Tal Weibel, 2020; Schimmel & Militello, 2007; Summers et al., 2020; Wagner, 2007). In addition to this, there are studies conducted with prospective teachers (Cengelci-Kose & Bursa, 2020; Kara, 2017; Kara & Tangulu, 2021; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Young et al., 2014). The studies conducted with both groups aimed to determine either the participants' general legal literacy or their legal literacy related to school law. Data in the studies were generally collected through surveys and scales, with a small portion collected through observation and interview techniques. The findings of the studies indicate that the levels of legal literacy were moderate to low.

No study has been found in the literature that aims to simultaneously obtain data on both teachers' legal literacy levels and their detailed perspectives on legal literacy education. Therefore, there is a need for a study that reveals the situation of social studies teachers, who are directly related to teaching the subject, more comprehensively. Although studies conducted with teacher trainees and school administrators, who are stakeholders in the subject, are valuable, they may not provide a complete understanding of the situation of practicing teachers in the field. Teacher trainees have not yet started their careers, and school administrators are more concerned with institutional law rather than individuals' legal literacy. However, it can be said that teachers who teach citizenship education courses such as social studies and equivalent courses, have a direct and faster effect on individuals' legal literacy. Because the courses in question are closely related to legal literacy due to their content. Therefore, teachers being good legal literacy role models can directly influence their students and thus the society to become more legally literate individuals. The results of this study can provide ideas and suggestions for improving the classroom environment and teacher education to address the current shortcomings and inadequacies in legal literacy. This study aims to determine social studies teachers' levels of legal literacy and their views on legal literacy education. In line with this aim, the following questions were asked:

1. What are the levels of legal literacy among social studies teachers?
2. Do the levels of legal literacy among social studies teachers show a significant difference based on various independent variables (seniority, interest in law, following legal issues, legal education, membership in non-governmental organizations [NGOs], and access to legal sources)?
3. What are the opinions of social studies teachers on legal literacy education?

## METHOD

In research, quantitative and qualitative data can be brought together in different ways (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the methods defined under quantitative and qualitative approaches were used together. In the research, a survey method was used to express the overall trend, opinions, and attitudes of the population based on a sample taken from the population (Creswell, 2014). In addition, an interview was preferred to reveal how teachers interpret, construct, and make sense of their experiences related to legal literacy education (Merriam, 2009).

**Table 1.** Information about participants in quantitative dimension of research

Information about participants	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Seniority (years)		
Six-10	29	18.1
11-15	26	16.3
16-20	55	34.4
21-25	39	24.4
26 & above	11	6.9
Interest in law		
Very interested	9	5.6
Interested	86	53.8
Slightly interested	60	37.5
Not interested at all	5	3.1
Following legal topics		
Always	33	20.6
Moderate	96	60.0
Very little	31	19.4
Sources		
Computer-the Internet	63	39.4
Newspaper-magazine-mook	20	12.5
Social media	29	18.1
Television	26	16.3
Experts	22	13.8
Receiving education related to law		
Yes	44	27.5
No	116	72.5
Membership in non-governmental organization		
Yes	53	33.1
No	107	66.9

### Study Group

The research was conducted with social studies teachers working in secondary schools in Trabzon City center and districts in the 2021-2022 academic year. 160 social studies teachers who participated in the study were selected by convenience sampling method.

**Table 1** provides information about the participants in the quantitative aspect of the study.

In the qualitative dimension of the study, interviews were conducted with 10 social studies teachers (five female and five male). The interviewees consisted of teachers who volunteered to participate from the sample of 160 teachers that make up the study's sample. Six of 10 teachers, whose seniority varies between 11 and 24 years, work in districts. The interview durations were around 36 minutes on average. In addition, to protect the interviewees' confidentiality, pseudonyms such as T1, T2, and so on were used.

### Data Collection Tools & Implementation Process

The data for the study was collected in two stages. In the first stage, a personal information form prepared by the researchers was used along with the legal literacy scale (Kara, 2017) of which validity and reliability studies were carried out. The scale consists of 29 items and a five-point Likert scale. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted to reveal interviewees' perspectives on how they organize their experiences and give meaning to their experiences and lives, in situations, where observation by the researcher was not possible (Patton, 2001).

To collect quantitative data, attempts were made to reach out to teachers directly, and for those who could not be reached directly, the forms were sent via email or social media applications (such as Telegram, WhatsApp, etc.). In the end, the quantitative data collection process was completed with 160 teachers.

During the first stage of collecting qualitative data, pilot implementation of semi-structured interviews was conducted with three teachers, and these teachers were not included in the actual study. In the subsequent main application stage, visits were made to the schools, where the teachers worked, and individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in quiet environments, where teachers could feel comfortable and where recording was possible. Before starting the interviews, the teachers were informed about the purpose and scope of the study. With the consent of the teachers, a recording device was used.

### Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using the SPSS IBM 21 program. The negative statements in the scale were subjected to reverse coding. Since the data set showed normal distribution, parametric tests such as independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA were used for independent groups (Buyukozturk, 2020). To determine which groups differed from each other according to ANOVA tests, Tukey test (Buyukozturk, 2020) was used, which provides multiple comparison opportunities. Moreover, the significance value in all analyses was calculated as 0.05.

The interview findings, on the other hand, were analyzed using content analysis, which allows hidden truths in the data to be uncovered, related data to be coded and organized into themes, and presented in a way that readers can understand (Yildirim &

**Table 2.** Scores from legal literacy scale

Participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
160	81	140	115.11	11.31

**Table 3.** ANOVA test results of scores of legal literacy scale by seniority variable

Seniority (years)	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Six-10	29	113.66	13.88
11-15	26	113.27	10.28
16-20	55	115.31	9.76
21-25	39	114.56	10.97
26 & above	11	124.18	12.27
Total	160	115.11	11.31

  

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Between groups	1,068.55	4	267.13	2.148	.077
Within groups	19,274.63	155	124.35		
Total	20,343.19	159			

Note.  $p < 0.05$

Simsek, 2016). Transcriptions of the recorded audio files from the interviews were made, and before proceeding to the analysis stage, the text files created were personally presented to the interviewees for their confirmation. After this stage, the coding and theme extraction step was initiated. Individual free coding was performed by two researchers, and the compatibility of the codes was checked. Using the reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), the percentage of agreement between coders was found to be approximately 86%. In the title of the results, the codes and themes resulting from the compatibility between the coders were presented in tables, and the findings were supported by direct quotes from the interviewees.

### Validity & Reliability

In studies, where quantitative and qualitative data are used together, the validity and reliability of the findings can be ensured more effectively (Bryman, 2006). In the preparation of the legal literacy scale, expert opinions were obtained for content validity, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for construct validity, and Cronbach's alpha analysis was used to test the reliability of the scale. As a result of the analyses, it was reported that the scale was reliable since the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale, which was determined to have seven factors, was 0.81 (Kara, 2017).

In the qualitative dimension of the study, to ensure the validity of the data collection tools, expert opinions were obtained, and a pilot study was conducted. Additionally, Merriam's (2009) principles of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity/generalizability), reliability, and confirmability (objectivity) in qualitative research have been followed. To ensure credibility, the interview durations were kept long, and the interviews were conducted in-depth. In addition, the data obtained from the interviews were written down and approved by the participants. To meet the transferability criterion, the data were described in detail, and direct quotes were included. To ensure reliability and confirmability, detailed explanations were provided for all stages of the qualitative research process. Furthermore, consistency was attempted to be ensured through the coding and theme-determination process carried out by each researcher.

## RESULTS

In this section, first, the results related to quantitative data are presented, followed by the results related to qualitative data.

### First Sub-Problem

The arithmetic means and standard deviation values for the scores obtained by social studies teachers from the legal literacy scale scope of the first sub-problem of the research are presented in **Table 2**. The highest possible score that teachers can receive from the scale (Kara, 2017) is 145, while the lowest score is 29. The scale determines five levels: very low (29-52.2), low (52.3-75.4), medium (75.5-98), high (98.7-121.8), and very high (121.9-145).

The lowest score obtained by the teachers from the legal literacy scale was 81 and the highest score was 140. The arithmetic mean (M) of the scores as  $M=115.11$  and the standard deviation (SD) as  $SD=11.31$  were calculated. Considering the score classification, the participants have a high level of legal literacy.

### Second Sub-Problem

The scores obtained by teachers from the legal literacy scale were examined according to various independent variables for the second sub-problem of the research. In this context, it was determined that there was no significant difference based on seniority (see **Table 3**;  $F_{4,155}=2.148$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), sources used to access legal information (see **Table 4**;  $F_{5,154}=0.55$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), receiving education on law (see **Table 5**;  $t_{158}=1.81$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), and being a member of an NGO (see **Table 6**;  $t_{158}=1.96$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

The analysis conducted on the scores that teachers receive from the legal literacy scale according to the seniority variable revealed that there is no significant difference among the different years of service of the teachers ( $F_{4,155}=2.148$ ;  $p>0.05$ ).

**Table 4.** ANOVA test results of scores of legal literacy scale by variable of sources of accessing legal information

Sources	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Computer-the Internet	63	113.68	10.97
Newspaper-magazine-book	20	117.56	11.73
Social media	29	116.77	10.67
Television	26	115.73	12.21
Experts	22	115.11	12.61
Total	160	115.11	11.31

  

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Between groups	356.70	5	71.34	.550	.738
Within groups	19,986.49	154	129.78		
Total	20,343.19	159			

Note.  $p < 0.05$ **Table 5.** t-test results of scores of legal literacy scale by variable of receiving legal education

Receiving education related to law	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Yes	44	117.73	9.54	1.81	158	.071
No	116	114.11	11.79			

Note.  $p < 0.05$ **Table 6.** t-test results of scores of legal literacy scale by variable of being a member of an NGO

Membership in NGO	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Yes	53	117.58	12.63	1.96	158	.051
No	107	113.88	10.44			

Note.  $p < 0.05$ **Table 7.** ANOVA test results of scores of legal literacy scale by variable of interest in law

Interest in law	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Very interested	9	114.20	8.106
Interested	60	111.05	10.77
Slightly interested	86	117.30	11.35
Not interested at all	5	121.67	7.71
Total	160	115.11	11.31

  

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value	Significant difference
Between groups	1,793.40	3	597.80	5.02	.002	Very interested-not interested at all
Within groups	18,549.79	156	118.90			
Total	20,343.19	159				

Note.  $p < 0.05$ **Table 8.** ANOVA test results of scores of legal literacy scale by variable of following legal topics in news & information

Following legal topics	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Always	63	113.68	10.97
Moderate	20	117.56	11.73
Very little	29	116.77	10.67
Total	160	115.11	11.31

  

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value	Significant difference
Between groups	853.86	2	426.93	3.43	.035	Always-very little
Within groups	19,489.33	157	124.136			
Total	20,343.19	159				

Note.  $p < 0.05$ 

It was found that there is no significant difference in the scores that teachers receive from the legal literacy scale according to the variable of sources of accessing legal information ( $F_{5,154}=0.55$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

It was concluded that there is no significant difference in the scores that teachers receive from the legal literacy scale according to the variable of receiving legal education in the past ( $t_{158}=1.81$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

It has been found that there is no significant difference in the scores of the legal literacy scale obtained by teachers based on their membership status in an NGO ( $t_{158}=1.96$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

On the other hand, it was found that there was a significant difference in favor of teachers who were very interested in legal information and news (see **Table 7**;  $F_{3,156}=5.02$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and teachers who always follow legal issues based on the variable of following legal information and news (see **Table 8**;  $F_{2,157}=3.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

According to the variable of interest in law, a significant result was obtained in favor of highly interested teachers in legal topics in terms of the scores that teachers receive from the legal literacy scale ( $F_{3,156}=5.02$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 9.** Characteristics that social studies teachers should have regarding legal literacy

Theme	Code	Participant code	n	T
Characteristics of a legal literacy teacher	Knowledgeable in legal issues	T1, T2, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, & T10	8	25
	Impartial/objective	T1, T3, T4, & T9	4	
	Role model/guide	T5, T7, T9, & T10	4	
	Fair	T1, T3, & T4	3	
	Keeping up to date with current developments	T2, T5, & T10	3	
	Knowledgeable about fundamental rights & freedoms	T6, T7, & T8	3	

**Table 10.** Sufficiency of social studies teachers in terms of legal literacy

Theme	Code	Participant code	n	T
Sufficiency status	Insufficient	T2, T4, T7, & T8	4	10
	Moderately sufficient	T3, T6, T9, & T10	4	
	Sufficient	T1 & T5	2	
Reasons for not being sufficient	Lack of legal education	T2, T3, T4, T6, T7, T9, & T10	7	13
	Lack of personal knowledge & experience	T6, T7, T8, & T9	4	
	Lack of interest	T6 & T7	2	

According to the variable of following legal topics in news and information, a significant result was obtained in favor of teachers who always follow legal topics in terms of the scores that teachers receive from the legal literacy scale ( $F_{2,157}=3.43$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

### Third Sub-Problem

In this section, qualitative data obtained from social studies teachers' views on legal literacy education were analyzed and presented in codes and themes. The views of teachers on the characteristics that they should have regarding legal literacy are presented in **Table 9**.

According to **Table 9**, for social studies teachers to be legally literate, they must foremost be knowledgeable in legal issues, impartial/objective, a role model/guide, fair, keeping up to date with current developments, and knowledgeable about basic rights and freedoms. Interviewee T10, who stated that a legally literate teacher must be knowledgeable, keep up-to-date, and serve as a role model, explained their opinion, as follows:

"... First, the teacher must be knowledgeable, research, read, and learn ... Teachers should renew and update their understanding because knowledge is constantly changing, and technology is developing. Teachers are also a part of this society, and they are in role model positions in society, so I think they have more duties and responsibilities. They should exhibit correct (exemplary) behavior and attitude in society and school. A teacher is a person who teaches, a conveyer of knowledge, responsible for imparting knowledge and skills."

The view of T3, emphasizing the importance of teachers being fair and impartial is, as follows:

"... I cannot generalize, but I can say that teachers should strive to be fair, avoid injustice, and explain to children that there are limits to their freedoms. In other words, they should be impartial."

T7 has explained that teachers should be role models and be knowledgeable about fundamental rights and freedoms:

"In my opinion, social studies teachers should be knowledgeable about their fundamental rights and freedoms, know how to seek remedies in case of problems, fight to protect their rights, believe in the rule of law, and develop themselves in different areas, including physical, cognitive, and emotional domains. Although they may not be a legal expert like a lawyer, they should be an observant, sensitive, and conscious individual regarding legal events, situations, and experiences concerning themselves, their family, students, and their surroundings. As a teacher, they should act as a guide and a role model, setting a positive example."

The answers given by social studies teachers to the question about how they evaluate their sufficiency in legal literacy are given in **Table 10**.

In **Table 10**, where teachers evaluated their legal literacy sufficiency, they mostly expressed that they are insufficient or moderately sufficient. The number of those who think they are sufficient is quite low. They attributed their general inadequacy to the lack of legal education, personal knowledge and experience, and lack of interest in the law. T5, who expressed that he is sufficient in terms of legal literacy, stated the following opinion:

"I am not fully knowledgeable about the matter, but I can say that I know how to enter any kind of legal process and the steps to take. I convey this information to children by using examples, simplifying the situation, and presenting it at a level that they can understand. I consider myself competent in this regard. I see myself as a legal literate person. I believe that I have enough knowledge and practice to achieve a result."

T9 has stated that they are moderately proficient in legal literacy, and this is due to their lack of legal education and experience:

**Table 11.** Gaining legal literacy with social studies course

Theme	Code	Participant code	n	T
Insufficient	Teacher's ability to convey information	T2, T6, T8, & T9	4	11
	Limitations of materials/subject	T7, T8, & T9	3	
	Need for supplementary lessons	T2 & T6	2	
	Student's lack of interest	T8 & T9	2	

**Table 12.** Difficulties encountered in conveying legal topics to students & proposed solutions to these difficulties

Theme	Code	Participant code	n	T
Issues	Abstract nature of subjects	T4, T5, T6, T8, T9, & T10	6	15
	Caused by teacher	T3, T7, T8, & T10	4	
	Caused by student	T1, T8, & T9	3	
	Limitations of class time	T7 & T8	2	
Solutions	Concrete examples	T2, T6, T8, & T9	4	17
	Applied activities	T4, T6, T9, & T10	4	
	Adjusting lesson materials	T4, T5, T6, & T7	4	
	Relating to daily life	T2, T9, & T10	3	
	Professional development opportunities for teachers	T7 & T8	2	

"I can say that I am sufficient in terms of the legal issues that I need to convey based on my existing knowledge and the social studies curriculum. But of course, I have shortcomings in general. I would say that I am at an intermediate level. Sometimes I must seek expert or professional support because our knowledge is not enough. Sometimes in legal processes, we may remain passive as we are unsure how to proceed or which steps to follow. I think this may be due to our lack of education or failure to keep up with the latest developments in the field, as well as lack of research and reading."

On the other hand, teacher T4 said that I do not consider myself sufficient in legal literacy:

"I do not consider myself sufficient in terms of the law because I did not receive enough education on this subject ... I can evaluate myself as far as I try to educate myself. In this sense, it is necessary to acknowledge the deficiency. But I do my best to convey what I know correctly and impartially. I try to learn the necessary information expertly and convey it."

T4 attributed the adjective of inadequacy in legal literacy to not having received sufficient education related to law before.

Teachers' views on the acquisition of legal literacy through social studies education are presented in **Table 11**.

According to **Table 11**, all interviewees believe that students are not adequately equipped with legal literacy through social studies courses. In most opinions, inadequacy is attributed to the teacher's ability to convey information, limitations in the material/topic within the social studies curriculum, and then the need for supplementary lessons, the students' lack of interest. Teacher T9, providing multiple reasons for the inadequacy, explained that this situation is related to a lack of materials and the teacher's ability to convey information:

"In my opinion, legal literacy is being taught to a limited extent with the current curriculum. This is because we cannot see it much in the existing materials. At this point, it is up to the practitioners, conveyors, and teachers like us. By applying the right methods and techniques and selecting appropriate activities, I believe we can always keep this interest alive and continue it."

T8 emphasizing both the limitations in materials and the inadequacies of the teacher and student stated the following opinion:

"In the social studies course, subjects such as basic rights and freedoms and legal information are given under the name of citizenship issues. But how much is gained (meaning that it is not gained sufficiently)? At this point, the student's lack of interest, level of proficiency, or the teacher's ability to effectively convey the topic may be contributing factors, or the lesson or textbook may be abstract and incomplete in covering this subject matter."

According to teacher T6, the reason for inadequacy is due to the teacher's ability to convey information and the lack of an auxiliary course:

"Just having social studies class is not enough. It would be much better if a Law and Justice course (for everyone) were given ... I think that if the teachers contribute to the class in terms of their perspective, activities, and applications, it will positively influence the students' attitudes toward this subject."

The law and justice course (elective) that T6 referred to can be taken between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The teachers' opinions regarding the difficulties encountered in conveying legal topics to students and proposed solutions to these difficulties are presented in **Table 12**.

According to **Table 12**, it has been determined that teachers face difficulties in conveying legal topics due to the abstract nature of the subjects and problems arising from either the teacher or the student. Proposed solutions to these problems include

providing concrete examples and applied activities related to daily life, adjusting lesson materials, and ensuring the development of teachers.

T6 emphasized the problem of legal topics being abstract and proposed solutions such as providing concrete examples, conducting applied activities, and adjusting lesson materials:

“We are experiencing difficulties not only with the topics being somewhat abstract in the book, lack of examples, and insufficient explanatory examples for each topic, but also in terms of using different materials. It can be challenging to obtain some of these materials. If the Ministry of National Education produces videos and content to assist us, we can benefit from technology and videos rather than doing something in the classroom ourselves. It would be great if we could provide examples and activities for every topic and item in the book. I think we should focus on concrete examples, especially. Of course, if we could conduct activities such as going to court or simulating a court in the classroom, it would be both effective and practical.”

T7 mentioned self-caused problems and emphasized the need for adjustments to lesson materials and professional development for teachers as solutions to these problems:

“I cannot say with 100% certainty that I am a teacher with legal literacy skills. For example, when I teach legal topics (such as rights), there may be problems conveying legal issues, such as the use of rights in practice and the deficiencies in ensuring justice against unfairness. To contribute to the solution of these problems, efforts can be made to provide teachers with legal literacy skills. Lesson materials related to legal issues should be revised and made sufficient.”

T8 addressed many problems and suggested solutions such as giving concrete examples and conducting professional development programs for teachers:

“I have problems when teaching existing topics. The topics are few, superficial, and not adequately exemplified in the course materials. Also, the class hours are limited, so I need a lot of time to teach and reinforce these topics thoroughly because I try to provide plenty of concrete examples for comprehension. On the other hand, these topics do not attract their attention much. The theoretical parts also remain abstract. However, the teacher can step in and make the lesson effective and attention-grabbing by using their experiences, either from personal examples or other relevant events. Additionally, I believe that educational programs aimed at improving teachers' skills in this regard should be provided by relevant individuals and institutions.”

## CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

According to the quantitative results of the study, the level of legal literacy of teachers was found to be high (from very low, low, medium, high, and very high levels). This result can be explained by the fact that most participants either follow the law moderately or always, and a little over half of the participants are interested in the law. Additionally, the low membership of NGOs can be considered as a factor limiting the higher result of the scale because the low membership limits the participants' encounter with legal issues or situations. Regarding the qualitative findings, the number of teachers who expressed positive views (sufficient and moderately sufficient) was slightly higher than the number of teachers who did not consider themselves sufficient, which weakly supports the quantitative data. However, nearly half of the participants do not consider themselves proficient in legal literacy. This may be because the qualitative questions in the research provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their shortcomings, and therefore they gave more cautious answers.

Similar to our study, Koc-Basaran (2021) found that school administrators have basic competencies in legal literacy. The fact that school administrators are more involved in legal processes than teachers makes this result expected. However, there are also contrary results regarding school administrators (Naidoo, 2018). Schimmel and Militello (2007) stated that teachers' legal literacy is low due to the neglect of legal literacy gains. In the studies of Kara (2017) and Kara and Tangulu (2021), it was found that the level of legal literacy of social studies teacher trainees is at a moderate level, which is different from the findings of our study. This can be attributed to the fact that social studies teacher trainees have not yet started their profession, whereas teachers have more knowledge and experience, leading to higher results compared to teacher trainees.

The study also examined whether there was a significant difference in teachers' legal literacy levels based on various independent variables. In this context, no significant differences were found based on years of experience, sources related to law, education related to law, and NGO membership variables. It can be said that there is no significant difference in terms of years of experience, as the lack of education about law and experience in both pre-service and in-service training may be the reason. Similarly, the low NGO membership among teachers and the limited use of high-quality sources, such as experts, in sources about law variable may have led to the absence of significant differences in these variables. In the studies conducted with social studies teacher trainees by Kara (2017) and Kara and Tangulu (2021), it was found that the level of legal literacy knowledge showed a significant difference in favor of male teacher trainees. However, in our study, a significant difference was found in favor of those who are highly interested in law and those who always follow legal topics. Both variables indicate a close relationship with the law; therefore, it is an expected result that they affect legal literacy.

According to our study, the participants described a legally literate teacher as knowledgeable in the law and fundamental rights and freedoms, impartial, a role model, fair, and up to date with current issues. Given that teachers have not received formal education in law, it is understood that they provided these answers based on their limited knowledge. Similarly, in Oguz-Hacat's



(2019) study, teachers believed that legally literate individuals should be aware of their rights, knowledgeable in legal rules, capable of implementing their rights, aware of their rights and freedoms, and fair.

In our study, when those who did not consider themselves sufficient in terms of legal literacy (almost half) were added to those who considered themselves moderately sufficient, the needle turned towards the inadequacy of teachers, contrary to the quantitative results obtained from the scale. The reasons for these inadequacies are attributed to the lack of education, knowledge, experience, and interest of teachers in the law. Similarly, Davies (2009) attributed the feeling of inadequacy of teachers and administrators in legal issues to their lack of knowledge about the law or thinking that their existing knowledge is wrong, in addition to not being interested in legal issues. These results parallel many studies (Bounds, 2000; Brown, 2004; Paul, 2001; Pena Carranco, 2016; Perry-Hazan & Tal Weibel, 2020; Schimmel & Militello, 2007; Summers et al., 2020; Wagner, 2007; Young et al., 2014) in the literature that conclude that educators (especially school principals or teachers) are mostly insufficient or moderately competent in legal literacy. The results of these studies are parallel to our study, indicating that it would be in favor of teachers to take law-related courses before starting their profession, and after starting, they should receive support such as in-service training and professional development courses to overcome their deficiencies. Similarly, the need for in-service training for educators is expressed in the literature (Brown, 2004; Eberwein, 2008; Naidoo, 2018; Wagner, 2007). In our study, teachers also suggested that development programs should be implemented for teachers as a solution to the problems they face.

It has been found that there are significant deficiencies, especially in the field of law, in the undergraduate education of social studies teaching. This deficiency in this area of undergraduate education has also been revealed in studies (Pena Carranco, 2016; Summers et al., 2020) that include results related to different countries. In the quantitative data of our study, the rate of those who have not received any education related to law is almost 3/4. Many teacher trainees do not feel competent in teaching law topics within the scope of social studies courses (Kara, 2017; Kara & Tangulu, 2021). At the undergraduate level, education related to the law can generally be conducted through a theoretical course that focuses mainly on basic legal concepts and does not offer practical application opportunities. Sometimes, individuals from different fields of expertise who are not competent in this area can even teach law-related courses. In this regard, developing cooperation between faculties of education and faculties based on social sciences can contribute to finding a solution.

It is known that social studies education lays the foundation for citizenship education in many countries around the world. In the context of citizenship education, education related to law is an important component not only in social studies classes but also in the training of social studies teachers. In this regard, experiences related to law in undergraduate education will help develop the legal literacy of teacher trainees (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Young et al., 2014). It has been found that teacher trainees' opinions on legal literacy are shaped by the courses they take, life experiences, and current events (Cengelci-Kose & Bursa, 2020). Additionally, teacher trainees want the teaching of legal topics to be practical and related to daily life (Kara, 2017; Kara & Tangulu, 2021). However, in contrast to these studies, Summers et al. (2020) concluded that taking law-related courses in pre-service/university years would not contribute to legal literacy and that participating in practical legal education after teachers enter the profession would provide more contribution and have a positive impact on their development. Similarly, it was found that legal knowledge tends to increase based on status and professional experience (Bounds, 2000). In our study, it was concluded that pre-professional legal related to the law of teachers would provide awareness and advantage to their legal literacy. All the teachers who participated in our study stated that social studies courses are also insufficient in terms of teaching legal literacy to students. Participants emphasized the inadequacy of the teacher in conveying the subject matter as a primary issue, followed by the inadequacy of teaching materials. In parallel with the inadequacy of teachers, in Oguz-Hacat's (2019) study almost all the teachers stated that education is the primary factor in raising a legal literate individual. In addition, in the same study, more than half of the teachers stated that their education had either no contribution or limited contribution to their legal literacy.

One of the important findings of our study is the existence of problems in the process of conveying legal literacy to students and the solution proposals offered by teachers for these problems. At this point, it was emphasized that the problems are mainly due to the abstract nature of the concept, as well as issues arising from teachers and students. To overcome these problems, solution proposals such as making the lesson more concrete by practicing and relating it to daily life, developing teaching materials, and increasing teachers' mastery of the field have been suggested. Perry-Hazan and Tal Weibel's (2020) findings support the existence of teacher-related problems in transferring legal literacy, along with a reluctance to conduct research on the subject.

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations have been made:

Projects supported by the Ministry of Education and national research institutions can be developed to improve social studies teachers' levels of legal literacy. Measurement tools that comprehensively assess teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding legal literacy can be developed, and large-scale screening studies can be conducted. Studies can be conducted to design educational models aimed at improving teachers' legal literacy.

Teachers can be engaged in long-term and in-depth interviews and observations regarding how to convey legal literacy to students, as they are aware of the importance of imparting this concept to their students but may feel inadequate in terms of how to do so. In addition, support can be provided to teachers, especially for extracurricular activities (visits to courts, law faculties, legal professionals, etc.), to develop their ability to teach legal literacy.

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