

Documentaries as a Tool to Convey Life into Geography Education

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Abstract

Documentaries are used in different fields of science but they are significant resources to utilize in Geography education either as homework or as classwork. Because, one of the most crucial actions to be taken in order to keep Geography courses away from rote learning is to correlate Geogragraphy subjects with life and to apply different techniques and methods during the teaching process. The purpose of this paper is to disentangle Geography education from conventional teaching approach, to emphasize the significance of documentaries as effective means to convey real life into Geography education and to guide educators. Descriptive Research Method has been used during the preparation process of this paper. At the end of the study it was revealed that various types of documentaries such as, News, Travel, Social, Research, History, Compilation, Archeology , Sports documentaries and documentary films could be utilized as subsidiary materials and as assignments for Geography education. Thus; a more colourful, rich, motivating, effective and permanent learning environment could be provided.

Key words: Constructivist learning, geography education, documentaries, real life experience.

1. Introduction

A Documentary is concisely defined as a film which is produced to present a country, a person or a society. (Grolier,1993:161). Documentaries tell individuals and societies about the world they live in ; present various aspects of life that they could not access due to time, space and financial restrictions; introduce people living all around the world and present nature with all its living and non-living creatures. For this reason, documentaries build up relations between individuals and other people, world and nature. The first documentary film was made in 1897 in England. The first Turkish documentary movie is "The Hittite Sun" by Şevket İpşiroğlu and Sabahattin Eyüboğlu (tarihteilkler.com 2014). Based on their first examples in Turkey and in the world, the most significant feature of documentaries is their quality and potential to be utilized in education.

Documentaries are significant resources to utilize in Geography education either as homework or as classwork. Thus, one of the most significant approaches proposed for the

correlation between education and media is utilization of media as a subsidiary means in education. (Mavroudi and Jöns, 2011 ; Clarck 1977; Özder 2014 ; Aitken 1994) .It has been suggested that publishings of newspapers and journals, radio and TV programmes should be utilized especially in social studies and to enhance general knowledge (History,Geography,Turkish civics, Turkish Language and Literature and Sociology).It has also been defined that media instruments contribute to the education as supplementary materials (Topuz,2006 ; Özder,2014).

Due to variety of TV channels, education has become one of the basic functions that is aimed through documentary programmes, such that , documentaries pave the way for social awareness and development and substantially contribute to citizens' social awareness and transformation. (Geray, 1971) Nowadays, many documentaries about politics, economy, music, entertainment, food, history and geography are produced and presented via visual media.Thus, education is also circuitously contributed.Nowadays, technology constitutes an extensive area of use in our daily lives.Accordingly, it has also become indispensable and has been used for education. Information that has been discovered by renowned scientists,such as video conferences,could anytime be accessed or significant cultural, judicial and political documents , photographs,maps,sound recordings, film recordings and any type of information could be utilized as a material for education (Birkök, 2008).

Owing to technology which has been impressively developing as of the last quarter of our century, any information or experience is accessible no matter where it is in the world. Technology and demonstration method have a substantial role in Geography education. Since geography subjects have predominantly visual content , demonstration method is one of the most common instruction methods in Geography education. This has been one of the methods to keep students away from rote learning, to assist them gain speed and permanence in comprehension (Doğanay, 2002).

In addition, geography is integrated with life and thus is a dynamic discipline. Therefore, it is not appropriate to approach Geography education with conventional and mostly monotonous teaching methods. (Doğanay, 1993) Educational means of technology develops as the technology develops itself. The most prominent reflection of technology over the current Geography education is the constant progress in visualization facilities.This process which has started with utilization of photographs in classroom setting has come to a point where high resolution video recordings, 3D imaging systems and real-like animations are used. (Ateş,2013) Owing to this , motion videos have become widespread ,which is more compatible with the dynamism of Geography in terms of its transformation/progress in time. Motion factor, which places abstract instruction with motionless images into a more concrete basis , is significant in terms of education (Rieber 1994).

Documentaries are used in different fields of science. (Demircioğlu 2007; Strong 1964; Farmer and Knight 1995; McCullogh and Richardson 2000; Avcioğlu 2012). However; there hasn't been sufficient work pertaining to the utilization of documentaries in Geography education. One of the most crucial actions to be taken in order to keep Geography courses away from rote learning is to correlate Geograophy subjects with life and to apply different techniques and methods during the teaching process. Forasmuch as, visualisation method has an important role in Geography education. In this method, demonstration and visualization of

different facts and incidents are the basic teaching elements. Since geography subjects are predominantly visual, visualisation method is one of the most applied teaching methods in Geography education. This is one of the most effective ways to keep students away from rote learning and to enable speed and permanency in their comprehension. (Doğanay,2002) As a matter of fact, the most influential way to emancipate education from rote learning is the utilization of necessary tools and equipment which is the primary requirement of constructive education model (İncekara 2007).

In teaching processes where constructive learning approach is prevalent; depending on the relevant subject and the class level, a wide variety of methods ,techniques ,tools and equipment are utilized by the teacher whose main role is to mentor the student. (Tuna,2012) One of the means utilized for constructive teaching method is Education Technologies. Therefore , all developed countries around the world have accentuated the utilization of technology in education as a requirement for constructive education approach. (Tuna and Ateş 2012). Accordingly, utilization of documentaries as means of technology, which could contribute to constructive education process is highly significant for geography education.

The purpose of this paper is to disentangle Geography education from conventional teaching approach, to emphasize the significance of documentaries as effective means to convey real life into Geography education and to guide educators. For this purpose, there has been search for answers to the questions raised below;

1. What are the most significant documentary resources that could be used in Geography education?
2. What could be the benefits of using documentaries as a means of education ? What could be the potential shortcomings and solutions ?
3. What should be observed for the utilization of documentaries in Geography education ?

2. Methodology

Basically Descriptive Research Method has been used during the preparation process of this paper. Descriptive Research are generally conducted in order to enlighten a current issue, to carry out evaluations based on the standards and to reveal the potential connection between incidents. In accordance with the objective, various national and international, written and visual resources have been scanned in detail for this paper as well.The acquired information has been analysed as a whole and the appropriate information has been attributed to during the process.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

There are various documentary resources that could be used in Geography education, among which some of them could be listed as;

- ✓ News Documentaries
- ✓ Travel Documentaries
- ✓ Social Documentaries
- ✓ Research Documentaries
- ✓ Scientific Documentaries
- ✓ Historical Documentaries

- ✓ Compilation Documentaries
- ✓ Archeological Documentaries
- ✓ Sports Documentaries
- ✓ Documentary Films

News documentaries present the development stages of an incident, which bears news value directly in the way they occur. News documentaries are based on the deep research into the relevant issue by the compilation of documents and on the certification of relevant documents as resources. Evaluation and critics are left to the discretion of the audience. Presumptions pertaining to future are also taken into account and facts are explicitly revealed from an objective point of view. Therefore, news documentaries may directly be presented as news pertaining to the required Geography subjects. For instance, a documentary about Marmaray could generate significant benefits during the instruction of geopolitical position of Turkey.

Travel documentaries present daily incidents and introduce relatively unfamiliar places on earth. Travel documentaries are a significant branch of documentarism and are based on the principle that the relevant region is thoroughly documented. These documentaries are produced to present, to give information and to reflect the circumstances in the relevant region. The most distinctive features of the relevant region are emphasised. Thus, these kind of documentaries are useful to present various regions of Turkey and the world. For instance; TV programmes such as Doğadaki İnsan, Ayna, Davetsiz Misafir, Mavi Tutku, Zamanın Tanığı, Orda bir Köy Var Uzakta, Karadeniz'den, İstanbul İstanbul, Ata Mekan, İstanbul'un Şehirleri, Gezelim-Görelim could be beneficial visual materials for the instruction of geography subjects such as climate, geographical formations, culture, religions, customs and traditions, vegetation that are also included in the content of the aforementioned documentaries (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Views from Some Documentaries in Turkey

Social documentaries present affairs regarding life and the future of a society in a sense of responsibility and in an objective manner. These documentaries search for the underlying facts

behind social acts and protests within legal boundaries and present the results of this research through documentation. These documentaries are especially useful for Geography education in terms of information about social and cultural issues and sustainability.

Research documentaries aim to present a research subject in an objective and direct manner through a documentary film which does not bear artistic concerns. In some of the research documentaries; microscopes, telescopes, x-rays and other tools and equipment are utilized with a camera in order to detect and record the incident in detail. These documentaries could be reinforced with animations. Primarily the topic is introduced and the concepts are defined, after which all data is processed and presented. Thus, these documentaries are significant resources for the instruction of various geographical concepts, subjects and processes.

Scientific documentaries generally premeditate and exemplify the results of the scientific research and discoveries and present them in a comprehensible way. These documentaries, which also function as supplementary materials in and out of the education institution and thus which are also known as informative documentaries, are produced in compliance with education principles for the audience whose age and knowledge level is defined and acknowledged. Accordingly, Scientific Documentaries are similar to Research Documentaries as crucial resources for the deep instruction of various geographical concepts, subjects and processes.

Documentaries that are listed above and some of which are defined would bring substantial benefits to Geography education which includes every field of life as a subject of study. Our educators would be able to acquire useful documentaries from various internet resources. In Turkey, archives of especially TRT and private news channels are accessible through a slight research. Besides, various international broadcasting corporations have rich documentary archives. In particular, international channels like National Geographic, Discovery Channel, CNN and BBC include rich content for Geography education (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Views from Some Documentaries in International Channels

Utilization of documentaries in Geography education would yield diverse benefits. Primarily, film dialogues and content are more permanent in the human memory than the information gained from other resources. Especially in developed countries where these resources are intensively utilized and culturally structured, it is regarded that learning and retention of memory is increased probably due to high education and cultural level. Besides, these resources function as cultural resources in these regions. Events and the dialogues in these films are remembered and used for a long period of time. (Norton-Meier 2005). Accordingly, documentaries also provide similar benefits with films.

Documentaries generate more effective, more dynamic and deeper effects than course books. They present real life happenings as they are or in a more realistic way than course books. (Alvarez, Miller, Levy and Svejnova, 2004) In addition, one of the most important reasons for the efficiency of films, thus documentaries, is the high acquaintance of new generations to visual media (Alvarez and oth. 2004). Due to these reasons, documentaries are utilized for education purposes in several countries. While "Tale of Rives" sponsored by American Newyork State Power Authority has informed society about a hydroelectric plant in Niagara, "Donald Duck" sponsored by American Iron-Steel Industry has informed secondary school students about Iron-steel Industry in an enjoyable way (Canfield, 1968).

"Public Relations of America" and Canadian Public Relations Foundation co-produced "Communications that Count" and determined their target audience as public, educators and students, indicating them the rationality and efficiency of public relations through documentary films that present new information and views (Briefing 1990). "Siemens World of Electronics" aims to give information about various work areas, laboratories, factories and apprentice training of the Corporation. "Breakthrough of the Age" has been a milestone in the history of Industrial Documentary films. It has been dubbed in 12 languages and has been watched by more than 8 million people (Dankwart, 1971:181).

Since the aforementioned productions until today, audio-visual documentary films have become widespread. In Turkey, various documentary films have been utilized for educational purposes at various times. In spite of increased documentary utilization in Geography courses in the last 20 years (Corporation for Public Broadcasting 1997), the desired ratio has not been achieved. Nowadays, student centered teaching and learning strategies with a view to individual differences have been adopted. Thus, utilization of diverse materials other than course books has been highly suggested. Among these materials are overhead projectors, films, documentaries, softwares etc. (Ulusoy, Gülüm 2009) According to Hobbs (1999), TVs, videos and films are more commonly used means of media than newspapers, magazines and computers. However, certain points should be heeded in the utilization of documentaries for Geography education.

In a study, Marcus (2007) states that students regard documentary films as an accurate and reliable source of information. Students have also stated that they consider documentary films more accurate and reliable than internet, films, government and their schoolmates. The implications of these conditions on education are highly significant. From this point of view, the principal issue to be paid attention for the utilization of documentaries in education is the reliability of the documentary. Documentaries should present their content accurately and thus without wrong information.

In addition, documentaries to be used in Geography courses should include qualities that support the objectives to encourage sensible reasoning, the broad view towards life and humanity and the concerns for common good (Barton and Levstik 2004). Sensible reasoning is students' ability to reason when, where and why natural, man-made, economic incidents and historical events have occurred. (Barton and Levstik 2004). For instance; one of the methods to propel students to make their own reasoning and deduction is to make them analyse many evidentiary aspects of subjects like climate, earthquake, tsunami, environmental pollution, population and vast migrations that have occurred at a certain period of time in the past.

Another crucial point to be needed is to utilize interesting and motivating documentaries. Documentary films are generally interesting owing to their powerful audio-visual formats and their potential to reach large audiences. However, some documentaries may lack these qualities. Considering plenty of films and documentary programmes with the developing technology, it would be more appropriate for Geography teachers to watch the preferred documentary film beforehand and to use them in the classroom accordingly.

It is possible to find interesting documentary films for the instruction of many occurrences that influence human life and health such as earthquakes which are nowadays frequent, floods, instant mining disasters, climate change, organic food, GDO, transportation and natural life. One of the most significant objectives of Geography education is to raise citizens' awareness for a healthy society, protection of natural life and for environment in general. This objective directs individuals towards sensible decisions over values, to an extensive perception of humanity and to systematic thinking. In case teachers utilize documents and documentary films as a means to discuss different opinions and to teach controversial subjects; the approach of the documentaries and the evidence that they provide would present a potential which support the designated objectives. For this reason, documentaries should be utilized in a way that they serve to this purpose. Otherwise, selecting documentaries that are not previously studied on, analysed and which have no direct connection with the subject and using these in the classroom would misdirect the students and cause confusion for them to reach necessary implications. The image of an unprepared teacher would also cause loss of reliability leading students to question accuracy and reliability of the material.

4. Conclusion

In a nutshell; besides presenting individuals and societies information about the world they live in from accessible aspects, documentaries, which are defined as movies introducing a country, a region, an individual or a society, hold a significant potential to contribute to Geography education. Hence, in terms of their content, documentaries constitute themselves as crucial resources to be utilized in classroom setting or to be assigned as homework. Likewise, utilization of technology and demonstration method play a significant role in Geography education. Since Geography subjects are predominantly visual, demonstration method is one of the most common instruction methods in Geography education. In this respect; documentaries, which are considered appropriate in terms of demonstration method, could be one of the most effective ways to keep students away from rote learning, to improve their comprehension and to help them imbibe the information. Documentaries provide much more eloquent, impressive and dynamic effects and at least present real life happenings in a more realistic way than the excessively simplified models in course books.

Various types of documentaries such as, News, Travel, and Social, Research, History, Compilation, Archeology, Sports documentaries and documentary films could be utilized as subsidiary materials and as assignments for Geography education. Teaching physical and human geography through the utilization of one or a number of these types of documentaries could substantially contribute to Geography education. Presence of documentaries that could be used in Geography courses, content full national and international resources and internet facilities have extensively facilitated Geography education. However; certain aspects should be taken into account in the selection and utilization of these documentaries.

The primary issue to be heeded in the utilization of documentaries is the reliability of the related documentary. First of all, documentaries should present their content in a true and accurate way. Secondly, documentaries should include qualities that would improve students' thinking ability by prompting them to think, analyse and synthesize. Thus, students would develop high level thinking abilities and would realise permanent learning. In addition, interesting and motivating documentaries should be utilized; documentaries, which do not arouse student's interest or appeal to it after a while, could not yield the benefits that are mentioned above.

Consequently, Geography lessons reflect the life itself in terms of their content. Documentaries are also productions which mirror life with their various and rich content. In this respect, documentaries present qualities that are highly appropriate for Geography education. By combining course book content and documentaries, information could easily and effectively be provided to students. Thus; a more colourful, rich, motivating, effective and permanent learning environment could be provided.

Therefore, documentaries should definitely be included as a means of instruction in Geography lessons. In addition, utilization of documentaries in Geography lessons should be encouraged by decision-makers and the necessary resources should be provided to teachers within the scope of possibilities. With this objective, buying out the copyrights of certain documentaries and their inclusion in the Education and Informatics Network (EBA, eba.gov.tr) could provide significant benefits. For the later stages, different documentaries could be produced for the teaching of certain Geography subjects. Relative incentives and the providing necessary materials could substantially contribute to the utilization of documentaries in Geography education.

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