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Primary school students' conceptions of citizenship

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative case study is to define the primary school fourth grade students' perception of citizenship. Data in this study were gathered using a qualitative approach that relied on semi-structured interview form. The questions were shaped with taking the expert opinions into consideration and were aimed to determine the perceptions of the students about "citizenship" and to find how they give a meaning for the "good citizen". The data were collected from 30 students who are in fourth grade in Istanbul Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak Primary School in Turkey in 2008-2009 academic year and data were analyzed by descriptive analysis approach, content analysis approach. After analyzing the answers given by the primary school students who aged 9-10, the citizenship on their minds can be categorized in four main categories: To live in country, to be belonging any nation, to be young adult and emphasise national identity.

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Keywords: Citizenship; citizenship education; primary school; social studies education; citizenship perception.

1. Introduction

Identity is a subject argued with all aspects about citizenship and related subjects. Citizenship can be defined as a bound which connects the citizens to the government; citizen is a person who is bound to a country with a nationality tie (Karaman Kepenekçi, 2008:30). Citizenship is a person who allowed to have some political and legal rights, has a relation to the society as doing military service, taxing and being constant, to have some an ability of partaking government's collective life (Pamuk, 2007). According to Doğanay and Sarı (2009:48) citizenship is defined as in the center of "good citizenship" concept in institutional and empirical researches. Kadioğlu (2008:21) categorizes citizenship into four groups according to kinds of usage in literature.

These are:

1. National identity or citizenship determined as nationality,
2. Citizenship on the basis of paper,
3. Citizenship on the basis of rights,
4. Citizenship on the basis of duties and responsibilities.

In the history of citizenship, citizenship on the basis of relation between person and government has had a lot of meaning such as having the same meaning with nationality and citizenship, having some minority problems in post-

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modernism and globalization era, having some problems because of existing multicultural structure. Although it has different perception, growing up means do not change (Pamuk, Alabaş, 2008:34-35). Schools are supposed to grow up citizens like good citizen, democratic student, effective student, conscious citizen, etc.

According to Doğan (1994:13) a child is not born as equipped with social values, believes and attitudes; s/he learns these values in the society later. Child's socialization environment starts with the family, and then continues with in many different groups such as peer groups, school and media instruments. When the topic is growing up a good citizen, schools are supposed to do this duty in general, but especially history and social sciences education are used as a means of forming the conscious of nation and common values. Education system that adopts individuals who completed their national identity and attained socialization the identity tries to decrease tension between different cultures and collective top identity. In other words, the structure that individuals complete their identity and feel common state of belonging is on monopoly of the government (Caymaz, 2007: 5). At this point, Dilek (2007:34) implies that history course at school reflects society values according to government's existing methods of management. As seen above, schools have an important role at projects of bringing up citizens. In fact, first aim and duty of the primary education in National Education Substantial Law in our country is explained as "to bring up each Turkish child according to national morals and supply them needed basic knowledge, skill, attitude and habit for being a good citizen."

In education, growing up citizens by ordering lives is on the agenda of the governments' education aims. Aim of educating citizens is to let the citizens to know their main rights, duties and main concepts related to citizenship; to be conscious and to behave conscious about their duties. Knowing what kind of citizenship attitude is improved contributes to citizenship education. As mentioned above, it is not the main reason that determines citizenship knowledge and perception of students. With all these ideas, this research is oriented to find out students' ideas on citizenship and to determine primary school students' citizenship perception. To this end, students' ideas on "citizen" concept, what citizenship remind them at first and how a good citizen should be are stated.

Researches that try to find out students' citizenship perception, citizenship education, and kind of a good citizen that school programs bring up are quite few.

2. Method

This research which is a qualitative study is applied on 30 4th grade primary students in Istanbul province. Subject is analyzed by qualitative method naturally because a group of primary students' ideas on citizenship perception is searched.

2.1. Research Group

This research's study group is formed from primary school (Istanbul Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak Primary School) students in Istanbul province in 2008-2009 academic years. Students from 4th grades are chosen by random selection system. Participation are 14 boys and 16 girls.

2.2. Data Collection Means

Semi structured form is used in project². Questions are formed by getting expert ideas and then the questions are applied to students in order to identify what their ideas and perceptions on how a good citizen can be.

2.3. Data Analysis and Coding

Students' replies on semi structured questionnaire are typed on Microsoft Office Word processor without making any changes; coded by thematic coding. In the meantime, qualitative content analysis and comment analysis are

² I would like to thank to Social Studies Teacher, Çiğdem Yağcı who helped me during data collecting process.

used by supporting students' replies. While coding student's answers, students are numbered from 1 to 30 without using their names.

3. Results (Findings)

The first question that is asked to the student to identify their citizenship perception is "How can you describe citizenship?, What occurs to your mind when citizen is mentioned?" students' answers are applied by content analysis. According to this, primary students' citizenship perception is grouped below in content analysis table:

Table 1. Students' citizenship perception

Coding	n
Living in a country	9
Belonging to a nation	2
Being an adult	4
Humanity	7
National Identity	5
Other	3
Total	30

As seen on content analysis table, students' perception on citizenship is to live in a country and humanity. Students' giving answers on open ended question as coded above means most of them discuss that citizenship does not depend on ethnicity. Nine of the students assess citizenship as living in a country. There are some expressions of them below:

(S.1) "when citizen is mentioned, living in a country crosses to my mind ..."

(S.3) "People who live in Turkish Republic. We, living in Turkey are citizens."

(S.7) "...It crosses to my mind that people who were born, grow up and live in there."

Some of the students (4 students) determine citizenship as an adult people. Related students' ideas are below:

(S.20) "Before all else, a person who grown up and can do their job is a citizen."

(S.25) "When one calls me as citizen, I will be happy. Because I understand that I grow up; I am respectful and I am an honest person.."

It is interesting that as describing citizenship, being Turkish is stressed in students' answers. There are some related answers below:

(S.8) "Turkish concept crosses to my mind at first."

(S.21) "Turkey and Turkish people who live in this country. ..."

(S.26) "When citizen is mentioned, being a Turkish child and being a Turkish citizen crosses to my mind."

Seven of the students described citizenship by human and humanity words. Related students' ideas are below:

(S.1) "When citizen is mentioned, human crosses to my mind. I am a human being as well. ..."

(S.13) "Citizenship is being a humans being. Human being is love and respect. ..."

After collecting students' ideas on citizenship perception, students' related ideas on aim of growing up a good citizen at schools is very important. For this aim, "What are the characteristics of being a good citizen according to you?" question is directed to the students. Taken replies are categorized by coding and submitted below as a table 2.

According to students' replies which are obtained by content analysis, good citizen perception can be categorized into three main groups: Respect, responsibility, personal development and love of country. Related answers are below in the first category about being a good citizen:

(S.5) "Being a good citizen means being respectful."

(S.6) "Not ridiculing others means a good citizen. Because when we ridicule someone, it means we humiliate him/her and we cannot be a good citizen."

(S.12) "A good citizen is a reliable person."

Twelve of the students highlight personal developments on being a good citizen. The characteristic of being a good citizen is being helpful according to these students. Related students' replies are below:

(S.11) "Good citizen shares everything with the poor, is a warm hearted person."

(S.15) "Good citizen is good to neighbors and other people at all."

(S.18) "...Good citizen is person who is helpful and fond of helping the poor."

(S. 22) “Good citizens are people who preserve their environments and do not harm their surroundings.”

Table 2 Characteristics of a good citizen according to students

Expressions	N	Catagory	Total N
Not Riduciling	1		
Being respectful	2	Characteristics about being respectful and responsible	8
Being honest	2		
Being generous	1		
Being reliable	2		
Being helpful	6		
Preserving environment	2	Characteristics about personal development	12
Being generous to fault	2		
Being a good person	1		
Not using alcohol	1		
Loving country	2		
Loving nation	2		
Being beneficial to the country	2	Love of country	10
Being a Setting a pace to the nation	1		
Valueing to the nation	1		
Not damaging to the country	2		

Ten of the students describe good citizen as a person who love nation and country. Related students' answers are below:

(S.2) “Good citizen loves country and does not create a disturbance.”

(S.4) “Love of the Turkish country, be proud of it and claim it...”

(S.19) “Being a good person for Turkish Nation and set a pace.”

(S.29) “Good citizen preserves country values country and does not create a disturbance.”

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Formal education is very important in order to supply people live in a democratic society and form a different livings. From this point of view, primary school education has an important role on citizenship education in small children's lives by being conscious about democracy, citizenship, rights and responsibilities. According to Fidan and Baykul (1994:12) primary education which develops source of the society's main culture is a source of political power and a place in which to solve political social and economical problems.

This research aims to identify 4th grade primary school students' citizenship perception and their characterization of a good citizen. According to the research results, More than half of the students highlight that citizen is a person who lives in a country and belongs to a nation. Some of the participants express that being a human being is a citizen. Emphasizing being a Turkish as a citizen is not noticeable characteristic. There are different expressions in the students' answers. Thus, students have different perceptions on citizenship.

One of the other results of the research is that most of the students (6 students) describe a good citizen as a person who is helpful. Values that our country 4th grade students should have gain according to our social science course are these: Respect to feelings and ideas, tolerance, respect to Turkish elders, taking a notice to family unity, patriotism, love of nature, cleanliness, being healthy, scientific, helpful, independence and hospitality.

It is important that participants imply that tolerance, preserving environment, being a good person are the main characteristics of a good citizen. Students can learn democracy by practicing such as obeying the rules, living others together, being tolerant to different ideas and treating with their friends in a good manner.

In the students' answers, although there are expressions about being a responsible person, there aren't any ideas on rights basis. It is important for citizenship education that there are values belongs to human being besides their own societies' values. This result of the research supports Demircioğlu's (2007:56) “students can learn their societies' values and human being values by citizenship education”

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