

Full Length Research Paper

Teacher perspectives on civic and human rights education

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This study aims to obtain teacher perspectives on the civic and human rights education course included in the eighth grade curriculum in Turkish schools. The study group was selected with criterion sampling from among teachers who were teaching the eighth grade civic and human rights education at elementary schools in central Hatay. Using the qualitative research design, this study gathered its data through semistructured interviews and analyzed it descriptively. Data reliability was .89. The results showed that the objectives of the civic and human rights education course were well-understood by the teachers and that it was perceived as an important course. It was also found that these objectives could not be achieved, course content was not adequate, and the course was mostly conducted through traditional methods such as question and answer. The majority of participants identified "not seeing children as adolescents" as the most serious problem of the civic and human rights education course and recommended "establishing a democratic environment at schools" as a solution.

Key words: Democracy, democracy education, citizenship, effective citizen, human rights.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy, citizenship and human rights are interrelated and ever-present concepts that make human life easier and better. Relationships between societies and cultural interactions are increasing everyday in the information age that we live in, making these concepts more and more important. There is a meaningful and undisputed relationship between democracy, citizenship and human rights. An awareness of human rights and citizenship can only be fostered in democratic environments.

Based on public sovereignty and self governance, democracy is a type of political system and administration. However, it would be misleading to view democracy merely as a type of administration. It needs to be

considered in relation to the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions that reflect a certain way of life and political philosophy (Ertürk, 1981: 3). Democracy is not only a form of government but a way of life. Regardless of its various definitions, democracy is a freedom regime that promises human rights. That is why democracy today is often defined with its personal dimensions rather than social (Touraine 1991:266). Democracy education firstly requires self-awareness and then an awareness of others. As individuals in democratic systems learn about their personal rights and freedoms, they also realize the extent to which the opinions of "the other" are valued in the historical, economic, cultural and moral structure of

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their society and understand the problems that arise due to this (Çalık, 2002: 46).

The way to a democratic personality and possession of democratic values is undoubtedly a well structured and organized educational process. Education is therefore one of the most important factors in the development and strengthening of democracy. An education system can fulfill its function of establishing a democratic society by fostering individuals with democratic values and making democracy the dominant culture. Democratic life habits can only be fostered within a democratic education system (Gürşimşek and Göregenli, 2004: 78). A democratic society requires democratic individuals and these individuals can only flourish in a society with democratic values (Gözütok, 1998: 56). In truly democratic countries, the state is responsible for introducing and teaching human rights and basic freedoms to citizens because those who do not know the scope and dimensions of these cannot exercise their rights.

The right to know human rights can only be insured through democracy education (Gözütok, 1998: 57). One of the basic aims of democracy education is to foster respect for individual differences. At the heart of the thought that human rights and freedoms must be valued lies a democratic and humanistic worldview. The idea for a democratic society was born out of individual human differences and needs. Democracy accepts that individuals are autonomous, responsible for self-governance, and able to choices and decisions for themselves. This approach considers each individual as valuable and unique, and endorses personal development (Yeşilyaprak, 2000: 13). Then, the main goal of democracy education should be to foster individuals with a humanistic attitude and respect for other humans. The democratic lifestyle in modern societies requires individuals in line with this lifestyle because democracy can only be realized through individuals that understand and adopt it (Demirtaş, 2008: 3). Democracy education in Turkey started with the establishment of the republic. In this era, a secular, innovative, and national understanding of education was adopted, and this was made official on 3 March, 1924 with the *Tevhid-i Tedrisat* law. The emphasis here was on educating freethinking, productive, questioning, scientific and democratic citizens required by the new democratic regime (Atasoy, 1997).

Individuals who are aware of their civic rights and responsibilities help the development of a democratic attitude within the society. Karip (2006:321) states that civic education is based on the teaching of basic knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are synonymous with being a citizen of a given country and are part of its compulsory education. Civic education is a process through which individuals are taught their position in the society and its basic values. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) state that a democratic society has three types of citizens: Socially responsible (knows and fulfills social responsibilities), participating (becomes involved in social

life activities on a national and regional level) and justice-oriented (makes meaning of and analyzes the interaction between social, economic and political power). All democratic societies strive for citizens that harbor all three of these characteristics.

Humans must think and know in order to live, but merely knowing is not enough because they must also understand the purposes of knowing and also experience welfare, happiness and freedom (Değirmencioğlu, 1997: 26). Therefore, modern countries value the teaching of democratic behaviors in their schools. As social beings, humans are educated to comply with social rules, values and norms, but at the same time to make necessary adjustments in these when this is necessary for social change. Education is the medium through which individuals learn how the state – citizen relationship needs to occur. Democracy and civic knowledge also brings knowing and defending human rights. In European countries there are several educational programs, initiatives and projects that offer students practical civic experiences during school. Successful civic education requires a participatory school culture based on democratic principles and offering students opportunities to become involved in the decisions that affect them. School culture refers to the system of attitudes, values, norms, beliefs, daily practices, principles, rules, and institutional regulations developed within the school. National curriculum and/or educational regulations support the adoption of democratic attitudes and values by the entire school (Eurydice, 2013).

Civic understanding is closely related to public sovereignty. So is democracy to citizenship (Akbaşlı, 2009: 48). The citizen that democracy calls for is one that is aware of his rights, respects those of others, believes in civic duties, fulfills social and moral responsibilities, and is in solidarity with others. In addition, he can think critically, respects others, displays tolerance, and believes in such values, attitudes and behaviors as national identity and belonging. It is a major goal of education to raise students as democratic and effective citizens. In this respect, schools are a universe for students where they learn how to become active and responsible citizens through their daily experiences (Eurydice, 2005).

Human rights are not an abstract, theoretical or philosophical concept; they are the birthright of all humans regardless of gender, age or other differences (Kepenekçi, 2000:113). They refer to untouchable and indispensable rights that all humans are entitled to regardless of religious, linguistic, racial, social, cultural and economic differences (Donnelley, 1995; Kocaoğlu, 1997; Duman et al., 2010). Among these are the right to education, health, personal untouchability, living in a healthy environment, petition writing, privacy of personal life, accommodation and the vote. It is only possible to exercise these rights if human rights education is a part of social and political education (Cunningham, 1991: 102). Human rights are based on the rights freedoms, duties

and responsibilities brought by the concept of citizenship. It is perhaps the most important goal of education to foster individuals who know and use these rights and responsibilities effectively. It is the belief of many educators that democracy, citizenship and human rights concepts are multidimensional and interdisciplinary, and therefore they should be taught in relation to multiple courses (Magendzo, 1994; Tibbitts, 2002; Paykoç, 2005: 56; Eurydice, 2005).

Civic education was launched in Turkey with the ministry of education's board of education decree dated 01.08.1995 and numbered 289 to include a course entitled civic and human rights education to 8th grade curriculum as of the 1995 to 1996 school year (MEB 1995: 188). Starting from the 1997 to 1998 school year, the course was included in both 7th and 8th grade curricula as a one-hour class every week. The aims of the civic and human rights curriculum include:

1. To contribute to a democratic and fair society as independent, free, tolerant, peace-promoting and self confident individuals.
2. To internalize the importance of preserving and enhancing common values
3. To fulfill civic responsibilities as citizens of Turkish Republic.

The civic and human rights curriculum has four themes: humans as precious beings, a culture of democracy, rights and freedoms, duties and responsibilities. Teaching activities are designed around these four themes to meet the aims of the curriculum. There are plans to rename the course human rights, citizenship and democracy and to move it from the 8th to the 4th grade curriculum as a compulsory two-hour weekly course as of the 2014 to 2015 school year.

The basic mission of social studies education is to endow students with the knowledge, skills and values that will turn them into effective citizens (NCSS, 2012). This course must teach students that they are citizens of the world. In this way, they can learn to see the world through multiple perspectives and compare different points of view (Merryfield and Subedi, 2001). Even though the overall goal of education is to foster good citizens, within most school curricula this huge task falls only onto the shoulders of the social studies course (Doğanay, 2002: 17). Osler and Starkey (2005: 9-24) state that citizenship does not stop at the borders of a country. Gradually globalizing, the world requires education of global citizens who has free and equal rights. That is why it is important for the social studies course to teach the importance of national and universal values for effective citizens.

Elementary education aims to equip children with certain knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can become effective humans and citizens (Yeşil, 2002).

Civic and human rights are among the most popular

topics in the country and around the globe. Naturally it is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate whether civic and human rights are internalized in the country. However, democracy, human rights and civic understanding are processes that can be fostered through education. Today, civic education in most countries takes place in the social studies course, and aims to raise sensitive individuals with national and universal values, rather than people who only lie for their own nation (Kan, 2009: 25-30). In other words, civic and human rights education today encompasses world citizenship. Individuals are no longer only expected to be good citizens in their own countries, but effective world citizens as well. They need to be sensitized to global events such as famine, economic recession, earthquakes, wars and terrorism, and be able to view these events independently and critically, thus requiring a global civic education approach.

This shows the importance of the civic and human rights education course, and the need to know the perspectives of teachers on this course. Naturally, teachers' knowledge, views and philosophies will affect their perspectives on the course as well as their classroom implementations. Teachers' understanding the meaning of a democratic society is the first step towards teaching democratic values and behaviors (Ravitch, 1991). Then, democratic education is only possible with teachers who believe in democracy as a lifestyle, thus the importance of their views on the civic and human rights course.

Literature review

The studies in the literature can mostly be grouped into three. The first group covers studies evaluating the dimensions of the civic and human rights education course curriculum (objectives, behaviors and methods) and investigating course books in the area (Gözütok, 1998; Kenez, 1993; Toraman, 2012; Yiğittir, 2003; Uyangör, 2007; Elkatmış, 2012; Türker, 1999; Üstündağ, 1995; Yeşil, 2004).

The second one covers studies on the effectiveness of civic and human rights education, teacher and school principals' views about democracy and democracy education, teacher needs regarding civic education, the mission of the course civic and human rights, and the problems faced in its implementation (Karaman and Kepenekçi, 2005; Yağan, 2010; Ersoy, 2007; Torun, 2009). The third group includes teacher studies on democracy education and school parliaments (Doğan, 2008; Uyanık, 2009; Özdemir, 2009; Genç and Güner, 2012).

The aim of the present study is to obtain teacher views about the 8th grade course civic and human rights education, which has a role in the fostering of "effective human beings" and "effective citizens".

The study conducted by Başaran (2007) at Trakya university about "the views of social studies teachers on the implementation of the elementary civic and human

rights education curriculum” is similar to this study with its content and qualitative nature. However, the purpose of Başaran's study was to “evaluate the elementary civic and human rights education curriculum based on teacher views and offer practical recommendations”. Başaran's study is therefore one on curriculum evaluation. Different from others in the literature, the present study aims to obtain teacher views on the civic and human rights education course and identify how it is perceived by teachers. In order to enable teachers to freely express their opinions without limitations, the study used the qualitative research design.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to obtain teacher views on the 8th grade civic and human rights education course. Within the scope of this overall purpose, the following research questions were formed:

- 1- How do teachers of the Civic and Human Rights course conceptualize civic and human rights?
- 2-To what extent do teachers think that the objectives of the Civic and Human Rights Education course are met?
- 3- What are the teachers' views on the contents of the Civic and Human Rights Education course?
- 4-What do teachers think about the implementation of the Civic and Human Rights Education course?
- 5- What are the problems and proposed solutions for the Civic and Human Rights Education course that the teachers could identify?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study collected its data through semi-structured interviews. Brannigan (1985: 196 to 205) writes that this type of interview aims to find the parallelisms and differences between the data obtained from the interviewees and make comparisons. Semi-structured items were used so interviewees could express themselves comfortably. The items were formed in five themes reflecting the main purpose of the study in order to reveal how teachers viewed the meaning of the course, whether objectives were being met, what they thought about the course content, how they taught the course, what problems they faced as they taught it, and what recommendations they had to tackle them. The items were finalized after obtaining the views of two experts in the field.

The participants were formed by using the purposive method of “criterion sampling”. The basic approach here is to study all conditions meeting a set of prespecified criteria. These criteria may be created by the researcher or a list of existing criteria may be used (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011: 112). As a result, the sample included the teachers teaching the 8th grade civic and human rights education course at elementary schools in the center of Hatay province of Turkey. However, 12 of these 43 teachers did not want to participate and the study was conducted with 31 teachers who volunteered to take place. Of these teachers, 25 had been educated as social studies teachers, four as history teachers, and two as geography teachers. They were 21 males and 9 females. While five teachers had 25 and more years of work experience, 17 had between 15 to 24 years, five between 10 to 14 years, and four

between 5 to 13 years. In sum, the majority (81%) were social studies teachers, more than half (67%) were female, and (55%) had over 15 years of work experience.

All 31 participants were contacted separately to inform them about the study. The date and place of interviews were decided according to their wishes. The interviews were made in an informal setting. Responses were recorded with the consent of the teachers without mentioning their names. During the interview, follow up questions were asked as needed in order to get in-depth data. After collecting data, the recordings were transcribed and written into indices. After data classification, a thematic framework was drawn for descriptive analysis. In order to ensure reliability of data analysis, another field expert as a second coder was also given the data along with the coding key and asked to code the responses. Agreement between the coders was calculated by using the Miles and Huberman formula (1994) $\text{agreement} / \text{disagreement} + \text{agreement} \times 100$. The resulting reliability level was 89%. As it surpassed 80%, the study was concluded as reliable. When the results were presented, certain teacher views were quoted using code such as Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2).

RESULTS

The data were gathered under five themes in line with the aim of the study. The results are presented in tables and explained in accordance with the research questions. Interpretation of the results are made in discussion section.

Findings about the conceptualization of the civic and human rights education

The participants were asked what the course civic and human rights education meant for them, and the responses are given in Table 1 in subthemes.

Table 1 shows that all 31 teachers viewed the civic and human rights education course as one that “teaches the requirements of a democratic life and informs about human rights (demanding rights, respect for difference of opinion and belief, freedom of thought and expression, the right to vote, etc.). In addition, 29 of the 31 teachers also perceived the course as one that teaches civic rights and responsibilities (establishing civic awareness, health, following legal rules, constitution, paying taxes, education, etc.). Further, 26 participants stated that they viewed it as a course that improves character development, samples all aspects of the democratic lifestyle, and teaches that everyone has equal rights. Some teacher views were as follows.

- *If taught properly, this course teaches how to be a good citizen (T.1).*
- *It teaches students to look out for their rights (T2).*
- *It aims to teach conscious citizens how to demand your rights legally when they are breached (T.3).*
- *I really value this course as it teaches the requirements of democratic life (T4).*
- *I see it as a course that serves to train children as*

Table 1. Distribution of the theme "views on the civic and human rights education" into subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Number
Views on the Civic and Human Rights Education course	*A course that teaches the requirements of a democratic life and informs about human rights	31
	*A course that teaches civic rights and responsibilities	29
	*A course that teaches everyone has equal rights, prepares students for life and contributes to personal development	26

Table2. Distribution of the theme "objectives of the the civic and human rights education Course" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Achievement level of the objectives of the Civic and Human Rights education course	*Objectives are not met.	23
	*Objectives are partially met.	6
	*Objectives are met.	2

Table3. Distribution of the theme "reasons for failing to meet the objectives of the civic and human rights education course" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Reasons for Failing to Meet the Objectives of the Civic and Human Rights Education course	*Lack of a democratic environment at schools and classrooms	20
	*The theoretical nature of the course	20
	*Negative events and news in visual and print media	17
	*Parent attitudes	12

democratically conscious citizens who know how to demand their rights in line with democracy (T.5).

Findings on the objectives of the civic and human rights education Course

The views of participants about the achievement level of the civic and human rights course objectives can be seen in subthemes in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that while two participants stated that course objectives were met, six stated that they were partially met, and 23 stated that they were not met. Considering the latter two together, it may be stated that the majority (29) agreed that the objectives of the civic and human rights education COURSE were not met. Teacher views on the underlying reasons for that are given in Table 3 in subthemes.

Table 3 displays that 20 participants believed that the reason for failing to meet course objectives was "lack of

a civic and human rights environment at schools and classrooms", 20 believed that it was "the theoretical nature of the course", 17 believed that it was the "negative events and news in print and visual media", and 12 believed that it was "parent attitudes".

Below are some sample views from teachers why objectives of the course civic and human rights education could not be met.

- *The course content is theoretical. We cannot teach practical real-life topics (T2).*
- *Newspapers and TV show so many bad examples about democracy and human rights that children believe these rather than what they are taught at school (T3).*
- *Schools lack a democratic environment to set an example (T.6).*
- *Parent attitudes conflict with the information taught through this course (T7).*
- *Neither families nor schools are able to teach children humanistic values and their responsibilities to others as*

Table 4. Distribution of the theme "contents of the civic and human rights education course" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Opinions on course content	*Contents are inadequate	21
	*Contents are partially adequate	6
	*Contents are fully adequate	4

Table 5. Distribution of the theme "reasons why contents of the civic and human rights education course are inadequate" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Reasons why contents of the Civic and Human Rights Education course are inadequate	*Contradiction between course content and real-life events	27
	*Theoretical course contents	20
	*Lack of up-to-date and concrete examples	15

attitudes (T.8).

- *Non-democratic teacher and parent attitudes contradict with those taught in class. Therefore, classroom learning cannot be seen in real behaviors. Children become irritable and disrespectful (T10).*

Findings on the contents of the civic and human rights education course

The views of teachers on the contents of the civic and human rights education course are shown in Table 4 in subthemes.

A total of 21 participants viewed the contents of the civic and human rights education course as inadequate. If we add the 6 who thought the contents to be partially adequate, 27 participants were not satisfied with the contents of the civic and human rights education course. The reasons behind this are given in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, 27 participants blamed the inadequacy of course contents on "the contradiction between course contents and real-life events", while 20 blamed it on the "theoretical course content". Similarly, 15 participants stated that "lack of up-to-date and concrete examples" is the reason. Some of the opinions about why the contents of civic and human rights education course we thought to be inadequate are given below.

- *As the Civic and Human Rights Education course involves theoretical information, students cannot acquire real life behaviors (T.9).*

- *The information needs updating and more practicality (T12).*

- *We have difficulty making the topics more concrete. Therefore, students merely memorize with no meaningful learning (T.16).*

- *The information in the course does not translate to real life (T7).*

- *In fact, all teachers should primarily focus on democracy and civic education (T.19).*

Findings on the implementation of the course civic and human rights education

The views of the participants on the "implementation of the course civic and human rights education are given below in Table 6.

According to Table 6, 20 participants stated that they used "lecturing and question-answer methods" as they taught the course civic and human rights education, seven used "repetition and memorization", while four assigned the topics as homework. Some views about the implementation of the course are given below.

- *I teach the topic but ask students to prepare at home. As - I teach, I ask questions and elicit opinions (T.23).*

- *As the topics are mostly abstract, I prefer to explain the topics myself (T8).*

- *I give home assignments about the topics and make students explain them. Then I give a summary and complete any missing parts (T.18).*

- *As I teach, I keep asking about previous topics to help them retain their knowledge (T.5).*

Findings on the problems and solutions that teacher identified in the course civic and human rights education

The participants were asked about the "problems they faced as they taught the course civic and human rights

Table 6. Distribution of the theme "implementation of the civic and human rights education course" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Implementation of the course Civic and Human Rights education	*Lecturing and question-answer	20
	*Repetition and memorization	7
	*Assigning topics as homework	4

Table 7. Distribution of the theme "problems faced in the civic and human rights education course" into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Main problems in the Civic and Human Rights Education course	*Not viewing children as adolescents	25
	*Principals and teachers not setting good role models	18
	*Inadequate class hours	9
	*Overcrowded classes	7
	*Lack of a democratic family environment	7

Table 8. Distribution of the theme "solutions to the problems faced in the the civic and human rights education course " into subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Number
Solutions proposed for the problems in the the Civic and Human Rights Education course	*A democratic environment should be established at schools.	27
	*A teacher's handbook should be prepared to implement the course	25
	*TV should create more room for programs on democracy, civic knowledge and human rights.	18
	*Cooperation should be established with NGOs.	15
	*Seminars and visits should be offered to families.	10
	*The course should be taught by field experts.	6

Education" and their solutions to these. The problems are shown in Table 7. Table 7 indicates that most participants (25 teachers) perceived "not seeing students as adolescents" as a major problem. On the other hand, 18 mentioned "the failure of principals and teachers in becoming role models", and 9 mentioned "inadequate class hours".

Seven participants mentioned "overcrowded classes" and "lack of a democratic family environment" as the reason. Below are some of the opinions on the problems experienced in the course.

- *Student rights are not honored (T2).*
- *When children are treated democratically, they conceive this as a concession and become more disrespectful. This is because their families don't teach them these concepts (T.6).*
- *Class sizes are so big that we feel forced to use*

restrictions to maintain authority (T.10).

- *Children develop a negative perception of Civic and Human Rights Education when they come across teachers who use violence and set a bad example (T.3).*
- *The contradiction between the organizational culture of schools and the contents of the Civic and Human Rights Education Course creates a dilemma for children (T.8).*
- *Most families are not democratic (T11).*

The solutions proposed by participants for the problems faced in the civic and human rights education course are given in subthemes in Table 8. Of the participants, 27 proposed "the establishment of a democratic environment at schools" and 25 proposed "a teacher's handbook on course implementation". This was followed by the proposal of 18 participants that "TV should show more programs on democracy, civic knowledge and human rights". Fifteen participants proposed that "cooperation

should be established with non governmental organization (NGOs)", 10 proposed that "families should be offered informative seminars and visits", while 6 proposed that "the course be taught by field experts".

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that the civic and human rights education course is viewed as one that informs students about civic rights and duties. Teacher responses suggested that course objectives had been perceived accurately and the course is valued. However, there seems to be a serious contradiction between their opinions on course objectives and their own actions towards this study. This causes doubts about how teachers can establish a democratic environment for their students when they themselves worry about democracy at their schools.

Most participants also stated that the objectives of the civic and human rights education course were not met and its contents were not adequate. This view resembles the finding of Koca (1998) that "teachers believed that the written objectives of the civic and human rights education curriculum could not be fully met with the existing content". Gözütok (1998), Türker (1999) and Güdücü (2008) also obtained similar results in their respective studies.

Teachers stated that they mostly preferred classical methods of implementations such as lecturing and question-answer. This finding corroborates earlier findings that teachers who teach social studies, a course which includes the teaching of the civic and human rights education, use lecturing and question-answer (Kalaycı, 2001; Yılmaz, 2002; Başaran, 2007; Kan, 2009). Naturally, if the course is taught through traditional methods, their objectives could not be met. The teacher-centered methods and techniques used in this course may also have caused this. Indeed, Table 2 shows that 23 participants agreed that course objectives could not be met. Assigning topics as homework or merely repeating them will not be enough to teach the attitudes and behaviors aimed by the course. As is the case for other courses, the civic and human rights education may also benefit from using learning by doing and active learning. Indeed, it is argued that the topics of the the civic and human rights education course should be taught through effective learning methods and techniques that promote real-life critical thinking, discussion and problem-solving (Chapman et al., 1997: 366).

The view that the contents of the the civic and human rights education course are not adequate due to its theoretical and abstract nature is supported by Karaman and Kepenekçi's (2005) study on the effectiveness of the civic and human rights education course in Turkish elementary schools. Practice is the best, if not the only, way of teaching democratic ideals such as tolerance,

responsibility, solidarity, rights, agreement and participation. Lister (1982:11) states that these attitudes and behaviors must first be displayed by teachers and then practiced together with students. Similarly, he states that democracy can be taught within the school culture and with self-learning (Tibbits, 1994:364). It is of utmost importance that teachers and principals create a school culture that is in line with their attitudes and behaviors concerning democracy and human rights.

The majority of teachers pinpointed "not viewing students as adolescents" as the most serious problem in the civic and human rights education course. Teachers view students as children who are not ready to understand civic and human rights rather than seeing those students as young citizens. It would be unfair and wrong to expect these children to develop attitudes regarding democracy, and civic and human rights. As a result of this, today's generations have difficulty deciding what is right or wrong, and what is good or bad (Yel and Aladağ, 2009: 124-125). At the heart of human rights lies the idea that all humans have equal moral value regardless of their differences. In other words, the source of human rights is the equal moral nature of all humans (Drucer 1994: 19). Human rights are basically about independence; they denote the freedom of individuals to act in accordance with their own judgments and aims (Erdoğan, 2001: 134).

The first and foremost solution proposed to the problems in the civic and human rights education course was "establishing a democratic environment at schools". According to Gömleksiz (1988:17 to 29), class environment is the main factor that affects student involvement in school activities and the organizational structure of the school is the main factor that affects students' political attitudes. The presence of a democratic class environment not only maximizes student achievement but also helps students develop democratic attitudes and behaviors. Democracy can only be learned through practice in a democratic environment. If teachers at all stages of education can display tolerant, respectful, unbiased, open, guiding, helpful and consistent democratic behaviors towards their students, this will undoubtedly be more effective than any democracy lesson. Therefore, democratic attitudes and practices of teachers and school principals will contribute significantly to creating democratic attitudes and behaviors among children.

The suggestion that a teacher's handbook should be prepared to guide teachers in the civic and human rights education course shows that there are problems with the implementation of the course. Indeed, Tables 3 and 5 also show that the majority of participants believed that course objectives could not be met due to the theoretical and abstract nature of the course and its contents were inadequate.

The majority of participants (18) advocated the view that TV should broadcast more programs on democracy, civic knowledge and human rights. Indeed, violent

programs on TV where strong people with bad motives win over weaker but better ones, films and shows that overlook human rights set a bad example for children. Programs that set good examples for students regarding the civic and human rights education may help raise youngsters with democratic attitudes who know their rights and respect those of others. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations may be made:

- The civic and human rights education course needs to be taught by persons with adequate information and skills in this field. To this end, it may be useful to organize seminars and in-service training programs for teachers who come from other majors. This would enable teachers to become role models for students.

Successful civic education requires a participatory school culture.

- Teacher's handbooks may be written to guide teachers in implementing the civic and human rights education course more functionally and in line with its objectives.

Print and visual media may broadcast programs to help children develop an awareness of democracy, human rights, and civic rights and responsibilities.

- Families may be informed on the civic and human rights education. Home visits may be made to explain that a democratic attitude in family-child relationships may help child development.

- If the topics of the the civic and human rights education course course are taught cyclically in grades 5, 6 and 7, more permanent knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and values may be engendered in students.

In order to foster democratic attitudes and behaviors in children, future studies may be more comprehensive, and they may focus on the Civic and Human Rights Education curriculum and how to teach the course better.

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