

Full Length Research Paper

Assessing the opinions of social studies teacher candidates in relation to their definition and features of a democratic citizen

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The objective of the study is to determine the opinions of social studies teacher candidates about the definitions of democratic citizen. The study was conducted with 50 teacher candidates enrolled in a social studies teaching program in a state university in the province of Ankara. In the study, which is of a general scanning type, an open-ended data collection tool was used. According to results of the study in which qualitative research techniques were used, while the teacher candidates defined people respecting the rights of the others, knowing their rights and responsibilities and expressing their opinions in an open way as democratic citizens; they determined that democratic citizens should know their rights and responsibilities, have knowledge of the constitution and democracy, be respectful and tolerant, hold values such as being honest and responsible and being equalitarian, on the other hand, they should have the skill to express their opinions and able to use their rights and develop empathy.

Key words: Citizen, democratic citizen, education.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of education in democratic countries is to raise citizens that can support democratic political systems. Putting the effect of family and environment in the sustaining and developing democracy to one side, educational institutions have an important mission. It is necessary to have knowledge about democracy; democratic values should become a part of life and some skills should be acquired for participatory citizenship supporting democratic governance.

Exploring the definition of democracy which is generally considered to be an ideal regime, according to Sönmez (2003), in its most general meaning, democracy can be defined as "a person's using his rights to elect and be elected, to supervision and to enforcement for the happiness of himself and the society". Democracy respects not only the right to elect and be elected and certain freedoms but also the opinions which are against such rights and freedoms (Sönmez, 2003).

In democracies, people should be more active and

participatory. Citizenship education should aim to raise democratic citizens. According to Giddens (2009), "the development of democracy depends on raising a strong citizenship culture" (Giddens, 2000). According to Dharmo et al. (1996), citizenship education aims to raise citizens that know how to participate actively in social life, who are experienced in undertaking responsibilities and able to successfully overcome the obstacles that they will be face. In order to achieve these goals, citizenship education aims to help the individual gain the information, values and skills required for democratic citizenship (Dharmo et al., 1996).

According to Shively (1999), a citizen in a democratic society should be able to acquire and use knowledge, should have certain values and attitudes, and be able to act as a citizen. A democratic individual is the one who has adapted to being democratic with his knowledge and behaviors (Shively, 1999). Shively (1999) lists the characteristics of a democratic citizen as presented thus:

- i. Tolerance: if different groups can support each other, it means that there is a reasonable amount of tolerance between people. At least in democracies, free expression of differences such as different opinions, beliefs and social behaviors should be allowed.
- ii. Active participation: the minimum level of participation is voting in elections and participation in advanced level covers being in a closer relationship with the government.
- iii. High level of interest and knowledge: the model citizen required by democracies is the one who is constructive and active.
- iv. Supporting the state: apart from the three types of participation afore mentioned, citizens should support their government since the government depends on this to sustain their authority (Shively, 1999).

In Turkey, according to the results of studies carried out by Gömleksiz (1988), Metin (2002), Akdağ and Güneş (2003) and Yetek (2003), some problems occur in some attitudes and behaviors within the educational system which may threaten the future of democracy in the Turkish republic.

It is important to understand how social studies teacher candidates who aim to raise democratic citizens define the democratic citizen. According to Patrick (2001), citizenship skills and attitudes should be the basis of the education of social studies teachers. Otherwise, teaching democratic attitudes and features that are necessary to develop the quality of political and civilian life to school students becomes difficult (Patrick, 2001).

Making concrete the ideal definitions related to democracy within the educational system, can increase the reality of the concept. In recent years, the literature on this topic concerning the definition and features of a democratic citizen can contribute to restructuring curricula in order to present the concept of a democratic citizen in a more understandable way. The objective of this study is to seek answers to the questions of who is a democratic citizen and what are the features of a democratic citizen and what are the concepts frequently used in the literature. In the study, a general scanning method was used.

The objective of the study

The objective of this study is to present the opinions of social studies teacher candidates in relation to the definitions and features of democratic citizen. The answers were sought for the following questions in order to reach this objective.

1. Who is a democratic citizen according to the opinions of social studies teacher candidates?
2. What should be known by a democratic citizen according to the opinions of social studies teacher candidates?

3. What kind of skills should a democratic citizen have according to the opinions of social studies teacher candidates?
4. What kind of values should a democratic citizen have according to the opinions of social studies teacher candidates?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a general scanning method was used since the aim was to present the social studies teacher candidates' opinions in relation to their definition of a democratic citizen.

Study group

The study group consisted of 50 social studies teacher candidates receiving education in a state university in Ankara Province in spring semester of the 2008/2009 academic years. Twenty-eight participants were females (56%) and the remaining 22 were male (44%). In addition, the majority of the teacher candidates participating in the study were first grade students (14 students with a rate of 28%) and the remainder were the second, the third and the fourth grade students (12 students from each grade) (each with a rate of 24%).

Data collection tool and collecting data

In the study, a semi-structured data collection tool was used by the researcher to obtain the opinions of social studies teacher candidates' definitions of democratic citizen. After carrying out a related literature review, a trial of the questionnaire was implemented with 5 teacher candidates in order to provide the content validity of the data collection tool. These data were only used for trial purposes and not for the actual study. The 5 teacher candidates were asked the following open-ended questions: "Who is democratic citizen?" "What should be known by democratic citizens?" "What kind of skills should a democratic citizen have?" and "What kind of values should a democratic citizen have?" and they were required to write down their opinions. After examining the data for trial purposes, and receiving advice from an expert, it was decided to use qualitative research techniques for the actual study.

The data collection tool prepared by the researcher was applied to 50 teacher candidates participating in the study. In this scope, word, concept and sentence combinations were carefully analyzed, each as a unit of content. In order to ensure that the answers given were understood correctly, content analysis was carried out with the help of an expert. The reliability provided from the assessments of the researcher and the other expert, gave a correlation of 80%. Then, the frequencies were checked in order to determine how many times the word; concept or sentence combinations were repeated.

Data analyses

In the study, the percentages of the responses obtained data collection tool were observed. Content analysis was carried out for the answers given to open-ended questions. In the study in which word, concept and sentence combinations were used as a content unit, similar and different answers were separated and collated under specific categories. In order to determine the importance of

Table 1. The numbers and percentage of teacher candidates' expressions related to their definitions of a democratic citizen.

Expression	Number	Percentage
Showing respect for others' rights	20	24
Knowing his rights and responsibilities	17	21
Expressing his opinions clearly	16	20
Showing respect for different opinions	12	15
Behaving in equalitarian manner	6	7
Respecting human rights	4	5
Behaving freely	2	2.5
Tolerant	2	2.5
Knowledgeable	1	1
Behaving democratically in his daily life	1	1
Having the right to elect and be elected	1	1
Total	82	100

each subject, an assessment was made later according to their frequencies.

RESULTS

The findings and interpretations about the opinions of the teacher candidates' definitions of democratic citizen are presented in respect of the objective of the study.

Finding related to the definition of democratic citizenship

Content analysis was carried out on the expression of the teacher candidates in relation to their definitions of a democratic citizen and the results are presented in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, the intensity of the expressions of teacher candidates in relation to their definitions of democratic citizen are as follows; the ones expressing their opinions stating that a democratic citizen is someone "respecting the rights of the others" are first with 20 expressions (24%); the ones expressing their opinions stating that a democratic citizen is someone "knowing his rights and responsibilities" are second with 17 expressions (21%) and the ones expressing their opinions stating that a democratic citizen is someone "expressing his opinions clearly" are third line with 16 expressions (20%). It can be suggested that the fact that teacher candidates' define democratic citizen as someone respecting the rights of the others, knowing his rights and responsibilities and expressing his opinions is clearly in compliance with the definitions of democracy and citizenship in the literature. Some examples from teacher candidates' opinions about this issue, according to the number of data collection tool, are:

1: "People protecting their rights without violating the rights of others".

4: "People being aware of the rights they have and using these rights when necessary".

14: "People protecting their rights and responsibilities, and not interfering in other's rights and responsibilities".

24: "People not abstaining from expressing their thoughts openly".

33: "People expressing their opinions freely and being aware of the limits of their freedoms".

41: "People who are tolerant and knowledgeable".

43: "People knowing and using their rights, treating everyone equally; and people who are responsible, thoughtful, do not forget others' freedoms while using their own freedoms".

Findings related to the knowledge of democratic citizenship

Content analysis was carried out on the expressions of teacher candidates in relation to the knowledge of democratic citizenship and the results are given in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, the intensity of the expressions of teacher candidates in relation to the things that should be known by a democratic citizen are as follows; the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen "should know his rights and responsibilities" were determined to be first with 32 expressions (53%); the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should know the "constitution" were determined second with 9 expressions (15%) and the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should know "democracy" were determined third with 6 expressions (10%). Teacher candidates' definitions of a democratic citizen and their expressions

Table 2. The number and percentage of teacher candidates' expressions related to the things which are necessary for democratic citizen to know.

Expression	Number	Percentage
His rights and responsibilities	32	53.3
Constitution	9	15
Democracy	6	10
Human rights	6	10
Behaving democratically	4	6.7
Following current events	3	5
Total	60	100

Table 3. The number and percentage of teacher candidates' expressions related to the values which are necessary for democratic citizen to have.

Expression	Number	Percentage
Respectful and tolerant	26	33
Honest and responsible	11	14
Equalitarian	8	10
Liberal	5	6
Respect for differences	5	6
Loyal to his motherland and nation	5	6
Responsible	5	6
Having all the democratic values	3	4
Open to renewal	3	4
Respect human rights	3	4
Ethical	2	3
Respect the law	2	3
Participatory	1	1
Total	79	100

in relation to the things that should be known by a democratic citizen show consistency. Some examples from teacher candidates' opinions about this issue according to the number of data collection tool are as follows:

3: "A democratic citizen should know about human rights, justice and laws"

12: "A democratic citizen should know about individual rights and freedoms"

46: "A democratic citizen should know about human rights"

48: "A democratic citizen should know about constitution and laws"

31: "A democratic citizen should know his rights and laws"

29: "A democratic citizen should know his rights, certain principles of the constitution and laws"

8: "A democratic citizen should follow events and be able to make interpretations"

30: "A democratic citizen should know how to behave in a

democratic way"

Findings related to the values held by a democratic citizen

Content analysis was carried out on the expressions of teacher candidates about the values of democratic citizenship and the results are presented in Table 3. As seen in Table 3, the intensity of the expressions of teacher candidates in relation to the values that should be had by a democratic citizen is respectively as follows; the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen "should be respectful and tolerant" are first with 26 expressions (33%); the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen "should be honest and responsible" are second with 11 expressions (14%); the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should be "equalitarian" are third with 8 expressions (10%). Some examples from teacher

Table 4. The numbers and percentages of teacher candidates' expressions related to the skills which are necessary for democratic citizen to have.

Expressions	Number	Percentage
Being able to express his ideas	21	34
Being able to use his rights	9	15
Developing empathy	7	11.5
Renewing himself	6	10
Being able to make criticism	6	10
Treating equally	4	6.5
Being able to use the right to elect and be elected	3	5
Being participatory	2	3
Acting feely	2	3
Problem solving	1	2
Total	61	100

candidates' opinions about this issue, according to the number of data collection too, are as follows:

- 1: "Respect different opinions"
- 6: "Be responsible"
- 11: "Be honest and respect the values of others"
- 19: "Being democratic and equalitarian"
- 25: "Being loyal to his state and motherland"

Findings related to the skill of democratic citizenship

Content analysis was carried out on the expressions of teacher candidates about the skill of democratic citizenship and the results are presented in Table 4. As seen in Table 4, the intensity of the expressions of teacher candidates in relation to the skills that a democratic citizen should possess is as follows; the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should be able to "express his opinions" are first 21 expressions (34%), the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should be able to "use his rights" are second with 9 expressions (15%) and the ones expressing their opinions by stating that a democratic citizen should "develop empathy" are third with 7 expressions (11.5%). The opinions of teacher candidates about this subject with their own expressions according to the numbers of data collection tools are as follows:

- 1: "A democratic citizen can express his opinions openly"
- 2: "A democratic citizen criticize"
- 13: "A democratic citizen can discover his rights"
- 37: "A democratic citizen can develop himself"
- 42: "A democratic citizen should be participatory and present solutions"
- 48: "A democratic citizen can use the right to elect and be elected"

DISCUSSION

Teacher candidates' definitions of democratic citizen were assessed. According to the opinions of teacher candidates, while an individual respects the rights of others, knowing his rights and responsibilities and being able to express his opinions openly is defined as a democratic citizen; also required are; knowledge of his rights and responsibilities, the constitution and democracy; having the values such as being respectful and tolerant, being honest and responsible, and equalitarian are required; in addition, he should also have the skills of expressing his thoughts, being able to use his rights and develop empathy.

In this study, the features of a democratic citizen were collected under the themes of information, value, and skills. These themes support the distinction made by Veldhuis (1997) in relation to the definitions of citizenship education. The issues about attitudes and participation were handled and assessed under the themes of information, value, and skill in this study. According to Veldhuis (1997), the definitions related to citizenship education include the subjects of information, skill (social, intellectual and technologic), attitude (respecting cultural and political differences, respecting reasonable discussion, dealing with social events), values (justice, democracy, rules of law) and encouraging participation (Veldhuis, 1997).

In this study, respecting the rights of others which was determined as the most distinctive feature that defines a democratic citizen, supports the opinion of Sönmez (2003). According to Sönmez (2003), democracy respects not only the right to elect and be elected and some freedoms but also the opinions which are against such rights and freedoms. Tolerance is an important feature of democracy (Sönmez, 2003).

In this study, the opinions of teacher candidates suggesting that a democratic citizen should know his rights

and responsibilities, the constitution and democracy support the results of the studies carried out by Bennett and Rhine (2000), Dharmo et al. (1996), Patrick (2002), and Şahin (2008). Bennett and Rhine (2000) conducted a study on the effect of receiving education in America on democratic citizenship. According to the results of this study, the amount of time spent receiving education affected the democratic citizenship of individuals (Bennett and Rhine, 2000).

According to Dharmo et al. (1996), citizens should have knowledge, defined as phenomenon, concept and generalization, to a degree that allows them to participate in democratic process actively. According to Patrick (2002), the field defined as citizenship knowledge contains the concepts applied and assessed in democracy. These are concepts related to democracy and the republic. Subjects such as constitutional governance and rules of law; the rights to live, freedom, equality and property rights; citizenship identity and responsibilities; civil society or free and open society are among these. Along with these concepts, citizens should have profound knowledge as to what democracy is and what it is not. They should be aware of the difference between their own regimes or democracy and other regimes (authoritarian or totalitarian) (Patrick, 2002).

Şahin (2008) carried out research in order to determine the relationship between the democratic attitudes and dogmatic thinking of class teachers and subject teachers working in schools in Istanbul. According to the study results, the dogmatism scores of teachers not receiving in-service training in relation to democratic attitude were found to be higher, it was concluded that in-service training is effective in changing dogmatic attitudes. In addition, it was observed that as the teachers total dogmatism scores increased, their democratic attitude points decreased significantly (Şahin, 2008).

In this study, teacher candidates' opinions suggest that democratic citizens should have values such as being respectful and tolerant, honest and responsible, and equalitarian support the views of Parker (2001) and Dharmo et al. (1996) in relation to democratic values. According to Parker (2001), these values should be taught at schools. Democratic values are general and do not exclude differences (Parker, 2001).

According to Dharmo et al. (1996), some of the democratic values are individual rights, human rights, general benefit, justice, equality, honesty and patriotism. Developing these values in children and the young is one of the important objectives of democratic citizenship education (Dharmo et al., 1996).

In this study, teacher candidates' opinions suggesting that democratic citizens should have the skills to express their views, use their rights and develop empathy support the views of Barth and Demirtaş (1997), and Dharmo et al. (1996) in relation to democratic skills.

According to Barth and Demirtaş (1997), in democratic

societies, citizens require certain skills in order for them to participate in the functioning of governance. Otherwise, governance can turn into arbitrariness and move away from democracy. Some skills that should be possessed by citizens for a democratic society are; acquiring information, learning how to use information analytically, having appropriate attitudes, values and emotions, acting as citizens (Barth and Demirtaş, 1997).

According to Dharmo et al. (1996), skills are, using information in a way that will help think about life in all aspects. In daily life, skills consist of the ability to apply democratic principles and values effectively. While intellectual skills are among the skills that help perceive, interpret and assess information; these skills also provide individuals with participation skills, the skills for effecting public or citizenship life (Dharmo et al., 1996).

In this study, teacher candidates' definitions of democratic citizen and the features that should be possessed by a democratic citizen support the findings in the literature.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Teacher candidates' democratic citizen definitions were evaluated. According to the views of teacher candidates, while an individual who respects the rights of others knows his rights and responsibilities, and expresses his opinions freely is defined as a democratic citizen, they explained that the features of democratic citizen were that: he should be aware of his rights and responsibilities, constitution and democracy; he should have values such as being respectful and tolerant, honest and responsible and equalitarian; a democratic citizen should also have the skills of expressing his opinions, using his rights and developing empathy.

Democratic citizenship is a concept that is frequently used in the literature in recent years. It is observed that citizenship has lost the meaning of being the citizen of a single country and a new development occurred towards democratic citizenship with a universal meaning. A democratic citizen is sensitive towards world problems, participatory, and attaches importance to human rights. The following suggestions are made for raising democratic citizens:

- i. critical thinking skills and engaging in discussions.
- ii. Teacher candidates should be trained to demonstrate democratic attitudes and behaviors.
- iii. Exploring different opinions with tolerance should be encouraged in the classroom
- iv. Education relating to information and approaches related to democracy should be provided.
- v. Awareness should be raised in terms of rights and responsibilities.
- vi. It is not enough to only criticize; producing different

and creative solutions should be encouraged.

vii. Awareness should be raised for universal democratic values such as human rights, peace, justice and equality.

viii. Being open and flexible towards positive change should be taught.

ix. Awareness should be developed of the need to be sensitive and participatory in social problems should be created.

x. The educational system and school personnel have an important mission in terms of the development of democratic citizens.

xi. There are many issues that should be investigated in relation to the education of the democratic citizens of the future therefore; large scale research should be carried out from assessing the current curricula to the personality and training of teachers.

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