

Full Length Research Paper

The relationships between students' attitudes towards social studies and their perceptions of democracy

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Social studies is one of the foundation subjects that takes place in curricula of 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades. This subject aims to train good citizens. The concept of democracy is an essential topic for the students to comprehend so as to achieve this aim through this subject. Therefore, it is aimed, in this study, to determine the relationship between students' attitudes towards social studies subject and their perception of democracy concept. A total of 665 primary 7th grade students participated in the study, 333 of whom were girls and 332 were boys. It was found that there was a positive relationship between the students' attitudes towards social studies subject and their perception of democracy. In addition, there was no significant difference between students' attitudes towards social studies subject and their perceptions of democracy concept in terms of their genders.

Key words: Attitudes, democracy, social studies.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a term which is generally misunderstood and misused in contemporary society. It has been defined in various ways in different situations and times. Therefore, it is difficult to fix one definition for it (Jouvenel, 1945 cited in Adeyemi and Asimeng-Boahene, 2001).

Derived from "demos," which means public and "kratos," which means sovereignty and power, and simply defined as the "sovereignty of public" or "authority of the public in the administration" (Doğan, 2001; Flising, 2009), democracy is a system that takes the differences for granted, considers the responsibilities between the individuals and societies as an ethical necessity to prevent someone's supremacy on others; and it aims not to unite all in a single right way but to have them learn to respect the others' ideas to live together in peace with those who think and behave differently (Yeşil, 2002).

Democracy is a functional system in which people have a say in political power; and principles like liberty, justice, equality, consultation, tolerance, and exchange of ideas are ensured (Büyükkaragöz, 1995). It is a political way of life that ensures people the greatest freedom and protects them (Touraine, 1997). In this century, almost all societies have adopted democracy as a way of life, but some societies endeavour much more to make it more qualified. Sustainability and adaptation of this way of life

by everyone depends on the perception and internalization of democracy (Kerimgil, 2008), which can only be achieved in a democratic atmosphere where democracy is perceived as a life style. It depends on compatibility of wisdom, feeling and science with one another to form a political society convenient for political criterion by becoming a more democratic society and by individual's adaptation to democratic criterion, attitudes and beliefs (Duman, 2004). Otherwise, democracy disrupts in the societies consisted of individuals who do not live in accordance with requirements of democracy.

Democracy needs people who understand and believe in democracy and adapt their behaviours according to democratic principles, and its development is based on the intellects, skills and attitudes of people who live in that society. It is the responsibility of education to bring up individuals who have these qualities (Doğanay et al., 2004) because democratisation of the forthcoming society depends on the number of democrats brought up through education (Özsoy, 2004).

Education has an important role in getting individuals to gain democratic attitudes and behaviours because individuals who have compatible qualifications with social order are brought up best only through education. The easiest way to get individuals to acquire democratic

personality features which society requires is to educate them in this way (Çelik, 1997 cited in Başaran, 2006).

Furthermore, it is only possible through education to pass democracy from political authority on to individual, the smallest unit of society (Emir and Kaya, 2004). Education and democratic level of a country interrelate with each other because the basic aim of education system in a democratic society is to actualise individuals' compliance with social structure, and to enable them, through this process, to take part in social structure according to their interests and abilities. Therefore, every country brings up individuals who will adopt and develop the values of their society through education. In a word, education is a process that reflects society. In this respect, if a society is to adopt democracy as a lifestyle, it should establish an education system which improves democratic lifestyle (Kuzgun, 2002). Education is not the only factor used to teach individuals democratic attitudes and values, but it can be said that it is one of the important factors because a strong, stable, and effectual democracy is neither a process which emerges without striving, nor a mechanism which can teach and last itself. Schools have to teach young individuals democracy and democratic attitudes, values, and applications in order to develop and lead a democratic life (Yanıklar and Yildirim, 2004). It is an important mission of schools to have students comprehend democratic values (Bademci, 2000).

School directs the process of getting the determined behaviours with the education it provides. The things learned at school help children or the young get academic knowledge and skills, develop personality that will enable them to comply actively with the society, developing spiritually and socially (Gözütok, 1995). With the democratic education given at schools, individuals will learn the values that fill in the concept of democracy. Schools should educate individuals in the way needed by the society. If it is aimed to bring up citizens having democratic attitudes, they should be taught democracy effectively. In this context, the need to teach democracy to the individuals comes into prominence (Kontaş, 2009). Democracy education means to provide individuals with the values that constitute the core of democracy through education and to get the individuals to internalize democratic attitudes and values (Can, 2005). According to Oğuzkan (1981), democracy education is an education that puts the emphasis on collaborative work, mutual respect, and student's integrity and value as an individual, in the phases of education, in the teacher-student relations, and in educational activities. Democracy education is the first of the principles to be given to individuals in each society governed with democracy. A democratic society requires individuals and society having some knowledge and skills (Kaldırım, 2003). A great number of countries that have adopted democracy are trying to get their citizens to have democratic attitudes and skills through education programmes. The individuals in Turkey

are also made to acquire democratic values through various subjects in the direction of goals taking place in education programmes. It is seen that although human rights and democracy are dealt with in all of the lessons in elementary education programs, the social studies lesson definitely takes the precedence. When the aims and content of social studies lesson are examined, it will be seen that, unlike the others, it provides the individuals with democratic values not indirectly but directly through the units and subjects.

Social studies have been associated with the preparation of citizens to democracy since the times in the distant past (Lybarger, 1991). Throughout the 20th century, many scientists have agreed that the primary goal of social studies is to supply the knowledge, capacity, and values required to develop the democratic understanding and maintain democracy (Hertzberg, 1981).

There is an intimate relationship between social studies lesson and communal living. It is aimed in this lesson to bring up good citizens by teaching them cultural heritage, historical development, constitution, human rights, democratic values, political processes and basic skills and knowledge a fully matured man needs. Social studies is universally perceived as a preparation to the citizenship in democracy (Deveci, 2005).

According to National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), it is a subject that comprises social studies and humanities with the aim of providing individuals with the necessary qualification of citizenship. The main purpose of this field is to help young people be good citizens, aware of the cultural differences and able to make rational decisions in a democratic society in an independent world (NCSS, 1994).

Moffatt (1957) stated that the purpose of social studies is to train young people who know the value of democratic life. Karagözoğlu (1996) stated that the purpose of social studies is to train young people who believe in democracy, have and adopt the democratic life style. Social studies' teachers, who take up the responsibility of preparing the citizens to democratic life style, play the greatest part in maintaining the democratic character of the society, as well (Cuenca, 2011).

The vision of social studies' curriculum renewed in Turkey in 2005 was determined as bringing up effective and productive citizens who adopt democratic values and have advanced thinking skills (MEB, 2005).

When the total four-year curriculum of social studies, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grades is examined, it will be seen that the topics and units (the adventure of democracy or the living democracy) directly related with democracy are dealt with in that lesson. In addition, it is aimed, through the social studies lesson in Turkey, to have children comprehend the principles of democracy, the individual responsibilities of Turkish citizens in a democratic atmosphere, and the ways of keeping up Turkish democracy (Akengin et al., 2002). As it is seen, social

studies is an important lesson which aims to make children have democratic values, to improve the democratic life, and to bring up individuals with democratic characteristics. Owing to the relationship between democracy and social studies, there are some studies dealing with democracy and social studies together in Turkey (Aydeniz, 2010; Başaran, 2006; Beldağ, 2003; Duman et al., 2008; Hürfikir, 2004; Küçük, 2008; Koçoğlu, 2008; Sağlam, 2000; Yazici, 2003, 2011).

In the direction of those studies this study aims to examine and reveal the relationships between students' attitudes towards social studies and their perceptions of democracy.

Sub-problems

1. Do students' attitudes towards social studies lesson vary significantly with respect to gender?
2. Do students' perceptions of democracy vary significantly with respect to gender?
3. Is there any relationship between students' attitudes towards social studies lesson and their perceptions of democracy?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the study, relational survey model was used. Relational survey model is a study model used to determine the existence and/or the extent of the covariance between two or more variables (Karasar, 2003). This research model, also named as 'correlation research,' attempts to reveal the relationships between two or more variables without interfering in these variables (Büyükoztürk et al., 2008). The population of the study consists of 7th grade students in Konya in 2009 to 2010. The sample of the study consists of 7th grade students in nine village schools of Konya. 665 students in which 333 were girls and 332 boys took part in the study.

Instruments

In data collection, the attitude scale and scale of democracy perception pertaining to social studies lessons were used.

The scale of democracy perceptions

In the scale of democracy perceptions developed by Kaldırım (2003), 22 questions were asked to identify what students think about democracy and the factors influencing it. These questions comprise four subscales, the fundamental principles of democracy: Sovereignty, Political Parties, Freedom, and Equality. In order to determine the reliability of data collection means, it is implemented on 52 eighth grade students and the reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.83. To calculate the reliability of the scale in this research, 148 people participated, and the reliability of the total scale was found to be 0.74. The reliability values of the sub-scales, on the other hand, were calculated as follows: 0.75 for the independence sub-scale, 0.73 for the political parties sub-scale, 0.75 for the freedom sub-scale, and 0.72 for the equality sub-scale.

For the validity of the data collection instrument an expert's opinion was taken. Data collection means was examined by experts

to determine whether or not the items on the measurement scale were convenient and whether they represent the intended field. The means of data collection took its latest form in the direction of views of the experts who examined it (Kaldırım, 2003).

Social studies attitude scale

In order to measure students' affective tendency towards social studies, the social studies attitude scale prepared by Meydan (2004) and which comprises 18 items was used. In order to determine the reliability of the scale, it was implemented on 103 students in 6th class, and the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.86.

Analysis of data

After data collection, some statistical analysis procedures were carried out on the data. At the first stage, t test was applied to the students in order to determine the students' attitudes and perceptions of democracy according to gender. At the second stage, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated according to the scores obtained for each scale, and the analysis of multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the explanation and regression power of social studies.

FINDINGS

The findings of the survey are given in this section.

When Table 1 is analysed, it was seen that the points obtained in equality, political parties, freedom, and national sovereignty sub dimensions of students' perceptions of democracy varied significantly according to gender ($p>0.05$).

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that the scale of social studies attitudes of females was $\bar{X} = 2,1028$ and males, $\bar{X} = 2,1570$. Whether the difference between the averages was significant or not was checked with t test and 1,887 t value was not found significant at 0.05 level. According to this result, the points of students' attitude related with social studies vary significantly with respect to gender variables ($p>0.05$).

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen, that there is a positive relation between the point of students' attitude to social studies and equality, political parties, freedom and national sovereignty sub dimensions of their democracy comprehension scale.

It can be observed from Table 4 that the students' attitude to social studies placed the equality sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale at the level of 0.59 according to results of regression analysis. That is, the capacity to explain the equality sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale for social studies attitude scale was 0.059. This can be interpreted that 0.059 of variability of democracy comprehension scale concerning equality sub dimension is based on scale of social studies attitude, whereas the rest is based on the variables not included in the study ($t = .6467$).

Table 1. Comparison of the students' perceptions of democracy by gender.

Scale	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	T	
perception of democracy	Equality	Female	333	11.99	1,736	1,706*
		Male	332	11.76	1,860	
	Political parties	Female	333	12.87	2,444	-1,396*
		Male	332	13.13	2,334	
	Freedom	Female	333	15.87	3,001	0,650*
		Male	332	15.72	2,866	
	National sovereignty	Female	333	8.63	1,687	0,144*
		Male	332	8.61	1,751	

P>0.05.

Table 2. Comparison of the students' attitudes to social studies by gender

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	t
Female	333	2,1028	,37186	1.8
Male	332	2,1570	,36877	87*

P>0.05.

Table 5 illustrates that students' attitude to social studies placed the political parties sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale at the level of 0.086 according to results of regression analysis. That is, the capacity to explain the political party sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale for social studies attitude scale was 0.086. This can be interpreted that 0.086 of variability of democracy comprehension scale concerning political parties sub dimension is based on scale of social studies attitude, whereas the rest is based on the variables not included in the study ($t = 7.900$).

When Table 6 is examined, it can be seen that the students' attitude to social studies placed the national sovereignty sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale at the level of 0.063 according to results of regression analysis. That is, the capacity to explain the national sovereignty sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale for social studies attitude scale was 0.063. This can be interpreted that 0.063 of variability of democracy comprehension scale concerning national sovereignty sub dimension is based on scale of social studies attitude, whereas the rest is based on the variables not included in the study ($t = .6.666$).

When Table 7 is examined, it can be seen that the students' attitude to social studies placed the freedom sub-dimension of democracy comprehension scale at the level of 0.147 according to results of regression analysis. That is, the capacity to explain the freedom sub dimension of democracy comprehension scale for social studies attitude scale was 0.147. This can be interpreted

that 0.147 of variability of democracy comprehension scale concerning freedom sub dimension is based on scale of social studies attitude, whereas the rest is based on the variables not included in the study ($t = .10.66$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Main findings of the study illustrate that equality, political parties, freedom and national sovereignty dimensions of the scale of students' perception of democracy concept did not differ according to gender. In a study conducted by Kaldirim (2003), he concluded that political parties and freedom sub dimension of students' perception of democracy differ according to gender. This result was parallel with the study, whereas there was significant difference in equality and national sovereignty in girls. In related literature there is broad range of studies involving attitudes. When the results of those studies were examined, it will be seen that (Ektem and Sünbül, 2011; Kiliç et al., 2004; Ömerustaoğlu, 2004; Yazici, 2011; Bulut, 2006; Bulut-Serin 2006) the points of democratic attitude do not differ according to gender. These results support the result of the present study. Unlike those results, Beldağ (2003), Taçman (2009), Tekin et al. (2009), Aydemir and Aksoy (2010), Gömleksiz and Çetintaş (2011), Genç and Kalafat (2008), Gömleksiz and Kan (2008) and Yiğit and Çolak (2010) concluded that the scores of democratic attitude were statistically significant in favour of females.

The second result obtained from the study showed that there was no difference in students' attitudes towards social studies according to gender. Sidekli (2010) stated in a study that there was no significant difference between the attitudes of girls and boys towards social studies lessons. Ergin (2006), Oğur (2009) and Öztürk and Baysal (1999) concluded also in their studies that there was no difference in students' attitudes toward social studies according to variable of gender. Those results are parallel with the result obtained in this study.

Table 3. The relationship between attitudes in social studies and perceptions of democracy.

Parameter		Equality	Political parties	Freedom	National sovereignty
Social studies attitude	r	0.244**	0.294**	0.384**	0.251**

*p<.05; **p<0.01.

Table 4. Social studies and equality sub-dimension.

	Equality								
	R	R ²	² _{ch}	F	Df	B	β	T	p
Stable	0.244 ^a	0.059	058	41.817	1/6623	9.354		23.663	0.00 ^a
Social studies						0.066	0.244	0.6.467	0.000

a. Stable: Social studies; b: Dependent variable: equality.

Table 5. Social studies and political parties sub dimension.

	Political parties								
	R	R ²	R ² _{ch}	F	Df	B	β	T	p
Stable	0.294 ^a	0.086	0.085	62.410	1/6623	8.970		17.342	0.00 ^a
Social studies						0.105	0.294	0.7.900	0.000

a. stable: social studies; b. dependent variable: political parties.

Table 6. Social studies and national sovereignty sub-dimension.

	National sovereignty								
	R	R ²	R ² _{ch}	F	Df	B	β	T	p
Stable	0.251 ^a	0.063	0.061	44.437	1/6623	6.154		16.348	0.00 ^a
Social Studies						0.064	0.251	.6.666	0.000

a. Stable: social studies; b. dependent variable: national sovereignty.

Table 7. Social studies and freedom sub-dimension.

	Freedom								
	R	R ²	² _{ch}	F	Df	B	β	T	P
Stable	0.384 ^a	0.147	146	114.225	1/6623	9.337		15.226	0.00 ^a
Social studies						0.168	0.384	.10.66	0.000

a. Stable; social studies; b. Dependent variable: freedom.

Unlike those results, Tay and Akyürek-Tay (2006) concluded in a study they conducted that students' attitudes towards social studies differed in favour of female students.

In another result obtained from the research, it was seen that there was a positive relation between the social studies attitude points of the students and their equality, political parties, freedom, and national sovereignty sub dimensions. There was no finding that supported directly the findings obtained in our study. However, it was

reported in some studies that education and democracy were closely related to each other. Glaeser et al. (2007) stated that the relationship between education and democracy had been discussed since Aristotle. According to Aristotle, democracy ensures the transfer of both wisdom and values to forthcoming generations through informal education. As a person who realised the relation between democracy and education, John Locke stated that democracy and education had to concomitantly bring up good citizens in order to maintain

democratic ideas like an impartial, rational and equal society (Adeyemi and Asimeng-Boahane, 2001). When another result obtained from our study was examined, it was seen that the attitude scale of social studies explained equality, political parties, freedom, and national sovereignty sub dimensions of democracy perception.

Gömlüksiz (1993), Küçük (2008), Şahiner (2008) and Yazici (2003) stated in the studies they conducted with different teaching methods that students' democratic attitudes developed positively in social studies lessons.

On the basis of results obtained, it can briefly be said that students' positive attitudes towards social studies lesson affect their perceptions about democracy in a positive way. In other words, in order to help students gain positive perceptions about democracy, not only teaching courses consisting of democracy are effective but also increasing students' attitudes positively towards the lesson.

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