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Research Article

Students as Change Agents in the Community: Developing Active Citizenship at Schools*

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Abstract

Promoting active citizenship is seen as invaluable for educational practices in schools particularly in existing social, political, economic, and cultural context of Turkish society. The present study is part of a European Union project that aimed to help students develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to actively participate in democratic life, mainly by learning and exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens both at school and also in their community. The study explored the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values developed by students through the project which are considered to be necessary for active citizenship. Employing qualitative multiple case research design, the sample consisted of 82 eight-grade students and 3 social studies teachers from three different middle schools in Ankara. The data were collected during and after the implementation of activities through observation, formative evaluation forms, student focus group discussions, teacher interviews, and the project evaluation form. The data were analyzed by content analysis method. The findings portrayed that the project activities were conducive to develop the characteristics of active citizenship in students in terms of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Keywords

Active citizenship • Citizenship education • Democracy and human rights • Middle schools • Qualitative research • Turkey

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Engaging young people in public life is essential if we are to build and advance a democratic culture. A powerful democracy mostly depends on the development of active democratic citizenship. For the European network, active citizenship is defined as:

the participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and nonviolence and in accordance with human rights and democracy (Hoskins, 2006, p. 6).

An active citizen is who does not readily accept the common practices but questions them, shows an active participation in social and political arenas, and becomes aware of his or her rights as well as responsibilities (Andersen, 2012). However, Turkish democracy is rated as hybrid regime in the democracy index formed by Economist Intelligence Unit (Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU], 2015).

Hybrid regimes “...constitute ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits.” (Ottaway, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, promoting active citizenship is crucial in educational practices in Turkish schools.

Active citizenship consists of a number of elements which are civic engagement, political engagement, civic participation, conventional political participation, and unconventional political participation. While political and civic engagement require individuals to be aware of the civic or political issues, civic and political participation refer to their specific actions, such as voting, as an individual or as part of a social group (Bee & Kaya, 2017). In this sense, active citizenship involves both the critical engagement with existing political and social institutions and the (re)production of common desires and needs in the interactions of the daily life (Jansen, Chinoel, & Dekkers, 2006). Hence, active citizens should have a sense of responsibility and tolerance, and a willingness to cooperate with each other. Furthermore, the respect towards individual differences, the recognition of the diversity in the society, working together for the common good, and the conflict resolution are well-known characteristics of active citizens (Stubbs, 1995). To this end, citizenship education as a school-based experience for democratic societies (Print & Coleman, 2003) plays a prominent role on individual citizens through encouraging them learn more about political and civic society as well as becoming more engaged, cooperative, and trusting (Print & Coleman, 2003). There is a common concern across different democratic systems all over the world towards what to cover by citizenship education. Accordingly, democratic principles and processes, democratic citizenship values, rights and responsibilities, history and constitutions, legal systems, rule of law and judicial independence, human, political, economic, and social rights, national identity, global and multiple citizenship are some examples of the subject matter elements of citizenship education (Print, 2001, as cited in Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 25).

In European contexts, the main purpose of citizenship education is to improve individuals' political literacy, critical thinking skills, and active participation (Eurydice, 2005). Citizenship education, indeed, attempts to educate individuals to help them engage in democratic life and enable them to practice their rights and responsibilities through knowledge and activities provided in school context. Citizenship education cannot be experienced without considering the social and political contexts that emerge as a result of the changes in the social, political, and economic value realms. Individuals work together on those community-wide issues since they learn better about democratic practices in a participatory and collaborative manner. They also develop the communication and affective skills that are necessary for negotiation (Wyness, 2015).

Citizenship education has been offered in Turkey since the Proclamation of Republic in 1923 (Keser, Akar, & Yildirim, 2011). During the single party period (1923-1950), the multiparty period (1950-1987), and the military intervention period (1960-1980), citizenship education mostly focused on teaching duties and responsibilities such as taxation, military service, sacrificing the self for the country, patriotism and rights such as liberty, equality, and freedom of movement (Caymaz, 2008; Ince, 2012). Teacher-centered instructional strategies were employed in the classrooms and the students were treated as the passive receivers of the information, which did not provide much room for the development of active citizenship.

In the last decades, parallel with the changes in the world, the social, economic, and political changes occasioned by Turkey's internal state and its relationships with European Union (EU) put forward a need to change the notion of citizenship, the curricula, and the textbooks of civic-related courses as well as those of other courses. In the late 1990s, Copenhagen Criteria fostered the developments in citizenship education by a distinct emphasis on the establishment and the maintenance of democracy, law, human rights, and respect for minorities (Keser et al., 2011). Therefore, the emphasis has shifted from raising good citizens to equipping students with participation, collaboration, reflection, and critical thinking skills in the modern schooling system. Hence, active and democratic citizenship education started to be considered as a school education that encourages the involvement of children as responsible citizens in order to contribute to the well-being of the society they live in (Acun, Demir, Akar, & Göz, 2010). To be able to contribute to the progress of the society that they live in, citizens have been required to acquire social and civic skills such as having awareness about basic rights and sharing common values (Acun, Göz, Busher, & Wilkins, 2009).

Human rights and democracy literacy of pupils, cultural and historical diversity, self-respect and respect for others, positive self-image, conflict resolution,

transformation into a pluralist society, active involvement at school and in community life, and practicing democratic principles have all been encouraged to be incorporated into the citizenship education in European countries (Eurydice, 2005). Since 1990s, Turkey has also incorporated the human rights themes into the citizenship education. With the establishment of the Turkish National Committee on the Decade for Human Rights Education in 1997 to endorse human rights education based on contemporary standards (Karaman-Kepekci, 2005), civics or citizenship course was renamed as “Citizenship and Human Rights Education” for 7th and 8th grades in 1998 (Çayır, 2002). For the 10th graders at high schools, “Democracy and Human Rights” course started to be offered as an elective course (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008). Basically, the 7th grade “Citizenship and Human Rights Education” course underlined the themes such as common heritage of humanity, development of human rights, the relationship between ethics and human rights, and basic rights and freedoms. In the 8th grade, the same course covered topics such as state, democracy, constitution, citizenship rights, responsibilities, protection of human rights, national security and power, and the problems regarding the protection of human rights (Çayır & Bağlı, 2011; Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008). However, as part of one of the most comprehensive reforms in the system of Turkish education, these courses have been abolished in 2005. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has decided to integrate the citizenship and human rights themes into the other courses rather than offering it as a separate course. Hence, a more holistic approach was followed for the Citizenship and Human Rights education since the curricula of other courses such as mathematics, Turkish, science and technology involved elements from Citizenship and Human Rights education (Keser et al., 2011).

Later, on the other hand, the MoNE initiated a 3-year “Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education” project which was an attempt to re-introduce a separate citizenship education. Along with this project, a new course named as “Citizenship and Democracy Education” started to be offered in 2011-2012 academic year and the main purpose of democracy education has been stated by the MoNE as “to raise conscious citizens who make sense of the changing world” (Çayır, 2011). The name of this course has been attributed to the importance of democratic citizenship and to the idea that human rights education is an essential element of democracy education. Hence, the course underlines human dignity, humanitarian values, democracy and characteristics of democratic citizen, tolerance, human rights, NGOs, and responsibilities such as taxes, voting, and duties related to national unity (Çayır, 2011).

Currently, the one-hour compulsory “Citizenship and Democracy Education” course is implemented in middle schools for the 8th graders. In the curriculum, the content is organized around four themes: “Each individual is valuable;” “The culture

of democracy,” “Our rights and freedoms;” and “Our duties and responsibilities.” It is believed that the curriculum is based on the notion of democratic citizenship and it describes citizenship based on rights and freedoms rather than duties and responsibilities. Along with the goals of the “Citizenship and Democracy Education” course curriculum, Ministry of National Education, Board of Education and Discipline [MoNE] (2010) states that the values that are desired to be developed by students through Citizenship and Democracy Education are cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, love, respect, helpfulness, self-sacrifice, peace, honor, fairness, self-respect, sharing, patriotism, freedom, negotiation, equality, respect for the differences, sensitivity to the protection of cultural heritage, sensitivity to the national, moral, and universal values. To teach these values and develop these characteristics, teachers are expected to employ child-centered approaches in their classes.

Given that there have been numerous endeavors by the MoNE to change the notion of citizenship education from raising “good” citizens to raising “active democratic” citizens, several projects related to the democracy and human rights education were conducted by different organizations in collaboration with the MoNE in Turkey. Those projects mostly involved students from varying ages and aimed to examine or improve their decision making processes as citizens regarding the democratic issues and the fulfillment of responsibilities and tasks. They also sought to develop necessary skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, cooperation, and negotiation (Altan, 2012; Gözütok, Gülbahar, & Köse, 2007; Tezgel, 2006). However, many studies still point out the need for the improvement of the textbooks and the curriculum to become compatible with the notion of “democratic and active” citizenship (e.g., Akşit, 2009; Başaran, 2007; Çayır, 2002, 2009, 2011; Çayır & Bağlı, 2011; Er, Ünal, & Özmen, 2013; İnce, 2012; Karaman-Kepeneci, 2005; Keleş & Tonga, 2014; Tonga & Uslu, 2015; Ülger, 2013; Ünal, 2012). Similarly, a number of studies addressed the need for the improvement of student outcomes (e.g., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) in relation to democratic citizenship and human rights (e.g., Akengin, 2008; Bağlı, 2013; Dolmacı & Kuşat, 2015; Keser et al., 2011; Sadık & Sarı, 2012) and others stressed the need for the improvement of teaching democratic citizenship and human rights by improving knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers and teacher candidates (e.g., Doğanay, Çuhadar, & Sarı, 2007; Ersoy, 2012a, 2014; Gündoğdu, 2011; Memişoğlu, 2014). It is not surprising that there are such pitfalls in democracy and human rights education in Turkey considering the general trend in the country that Turkish democracy has been categorized as a hybrid democracy. Remarkably, in a recent study by Kuş and Çetin (2014), it was underlined that the eighth grade middle school students’ views regarding the democracy in Turkey were considerably lower than other 28 countries where the study was conducted. Not only in the elementary school settings, but the state of democracy also seems to be similar in the context of higher education. For instance, Dündar (2013) reported that

the students of a leading Turkish public university perceived their role as passive and compliant. In this regard, parents might have an influential role on raising their children who are to be active citizens. However, as [Ersoy \(2012b\)](#) portrayed, Turkish mothers describe a good citizen as someone who complies with the widely-accepted social norms and values. Grounded in this perception, most mothers also said that they tended to raise their children according to those moral principles which, indeed, impedes the development of active citizenship from the beginning.

Drawing on the above mentioned studies, it can be inferred that the practices in Turkish schools still do not provide much opportunity for students to develop the characteristics of active citizenship. Indeed, this may traditionally result from the prevalence of two opposite tendencies: On the one hand, historically, Turkish Republic has adopted a policy of national developmentalism with an emphasis on the indivisibility of the nation by diverse groups. On the other hand, especially due to being an official candidate for the European Union (EU) since 1999, Turkey has attempted to align its administrative and legal structure with human rights agreements and European standards ([Çayır & Bağlı, 2011](#); [Keyman & İçduygu, 2005](#)). In particular, human rights discourse was identified as a high priority area for the EU membership ([Ilkkaracan & Ercevik-Amado, 2005](#)). In addition, as the United Nations General Assembly initiated the proclamation of the years 1995-2004 as the Decade for Human Rights Education, “human rights and human rights education” has consequently become an issue for the international arrangements ([Çayır, 2002](#); [Karaman-Kepeneci, 2005](#)).

As part of the present study, a needs assessment study was conducted to understand how well middle schools foster active democratic citizenship and human rights as perceived by 8th grade students and their social studies teachers. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, the results indicated that both students and teachers described the good citizenship focusing more on roles and responsibilities rather than rights, equality, and freedom ([Engin-Demir, Cobanoglu, & Akin, 2014](#)). That is, there were still problems in teachers’ and students’ conceptions of citizenship that affect teachers’ selection and use of teaching methods which might not provide enough room to support students’ active participation to develop active citizenship skills and characteristics. Similarly, there were many problems in creating a democratic school atmosphere for students to help them develop democratic understandings and values. Some of the problems mentioned by the students were as follows: lack of opportunities to form student clubs, a humiliating treatment by the school staff, discouraging students to discuss and act on the problems concerning social, cultural, and economic issues of the country, problems in teaching students to be reactive to the violation of rights and freedoms. Therefore, schools in Turkish context still seem to have an authoritarian environment which does not provide much support in

the development of understandings, attitudes, and values for an active democratic citizenship (Engin-Demir et al., 2014).

Herein, this study used part of the data collected during and after the implementation of activities developed for a project titled “From School to Community: Children and Students as Change Agents in their Community” (FS2C) and co-financed by European Union and Turkish Republic. The project aimed to help students develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to participate actively in democratic life by learning and exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens both at school and in their community. To this end, throughout the project, students were expected to take initiatives in improving their environment and developing democratic civic skills. They engaged in series of activities to determine the priority issues and problems related to democracy and human rights in their community, develop solutions for them, take actions in the community, and evaluate their actions. The activities, offered by the project team, were based on the findings of the above mentioned needs assessment study which attempted to portray the current state of democratic citizenship and human rights education in the context of Ankara, Turkey from the perspectives of eight-grade students and social studies teachers in three different schools which were located in three different neighborhoods with different socioeconomic statuses. The activities were planned by using a methodology that aimed to promote students’ active participation in their own learning process and to turn them into self-directed change agents with a strong motivation towards the common good. Students participated in authentic settings and designed proposals to improve the quality of their environment. In developing the project activities, the project team was inspired by Child-to-Child approach which is a child-driven approach grounded on the idea of active engagement of children in studying and analyzing the community problems especially on health care issues, planning and taking appropriate actions within the community to improve their own and others’ situations (Woznica, 2014). Therefore, the teachers and the researchers acted as facilitators during the project. To illustrate, they helped students obtain the necessary permissions from school administrators and they worked to overcome the difficulties that emerged during the project.

Students engaged in a six-step problem solving activity with their group members. They were divided into groups of four or five once the class decided how to form the groups. In the first step, students identified a real problem related to democracy and human rights in their community through brain storming, voting, and small group discussions to determine priorities in their groups. Examples of the problems are the state of homeless people, the violation of animals’ right to life, the environmental pollution as a result of the common tendency to use plastic bags, the violence against women, the lack of respect for others, the unhygienic conditions of hospitals, the discrimination among people, and the lack of justice in the election

system. In the second step, students worked for finding out more on the selected topic by collecting data from different sources such as books, journals, or interviews with experts. Therefore, by elaborating on the causes and the consequences of the selected issue or the problem, they gained an in-depth understanding about the problem. Moreover, they organized the obtained knowledge by creating tables and graphs. In the third step, they engaged in discussions and brainstorming activities on the reasons and the consequences of the problem as well as the possible solutions based on all the information that they collected in the second step. In the end, to contribute to solutions of the problems, they prepared an action plan not only by considering what actions to undertake, but also how, where, when, and by whom to achieve those actions. In the fourth step, they made necessary preparations to carry out their plans under the guidance of the researchers and the teachers. To support the groups to work collaboratively, they were provided with the materials and tools that they would need. In the fifth step, students followed alternative pathways to the solution of the problems by implementing their plans and taking actions in their community to convey their messages to the people and to raise their awareness about those problems. For example, they wrote and performed sketches in the communities that they targeted. Similarly, they designed websites and created pages on the social media, prepared brochures and distributed them, wrote and recited poetry, drew caricatures, demonstrated them, and unfurled banners at appropriate locations, hung posters, prepared slides and delivered presentations, compiled news from newspapers and magazines, visited a particular women's association, and interviewed with the key authorities about the problems that they addressed regarding democracy and human rights (See Table 1). In the sixth step, they engaged in an evaluation activity to determine the effectiveness of the tasks that they performed. They also reflected on what they accomplished and liked most or what they could have done differently through the project.

Table 1
Activities Performed by Students for the Solution of Identified Problems

Writing and performing sketches
Designing websites
Creating pages on social media
Preparing and distributing brochures
Writing and reciting poetry
Preparing school magazines
Drawing caricatures
Unfurling banners
Hanging posters
Preparing slides and delivering presentations
Compiling news from newspapers and magazines
Visiting women's association
Interviewing with the key authorities
Setting up a booth at several organizations

Drawing upon the above discussions, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the project activities were conducive to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are considered as necessary for active citizenship. More specifically, the following question guided the analysis of data collected throughout the project implementation:

As perceived by the teachers and the students, what are the characteristics of active citizenship that the activities students engaged in during the project implementation were conducive to develop in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values?

Method

Design

This study employed qualitative multi-case research design to investigate the characteristics of active citizenship that the activities students engaged in during the project implementation were conducive to develop in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. In case designs, data are collected from multiple sources to cover contextual conditions which might be related to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). In this sense, in-depth exploration of the actual “case” is considered in case studies (Creswell, 2007). Particularly, multi-case studies explore two or more subjects, settings, or sources of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The study was conducted in the cases of three middle schools in Ankara, Turkey. In the selection of the schools, maximum variation sampling was used as it allows for a variation on certain aspects (Patton, 1990). In this study, participating schools showed variation regarding low, middle, and high socio-economic status.

Participants

Among three participating schools, one was private while other two were public schools. The private school is located at a university campus in Çankaya district including students from middle or high socio-economic status. There are nearly 2000 students studying and 300 teachers working at this school. One of the public schools is also located in Çankaya district but in a different neighborhood where the majority of residents are workers and civil servants living in lower-middle and low socio-economic conditions. This school has 268 students and 23 teachers. The second public school is located in Mamak district which is farther from the city center and where residents mostly consist of the migrants from rural areas who live in low socio-economic conditions. This school has 710 students and 47 teachers.

Selecting one class from each school, a total of 82 eight-grade students involved in the sample of the study whose average age was 14. Of the participating students,

45.1% were female ($n = 37$) while 54.9% were male ($n = 45$). Among them, 16 students (19.51%) were from the private school, whereas 32 students (39.02%) were from the public school in Çankaya district and 34 students (41.46%) were from the public school in Mamak district. The sample also consisted of 3 teachers who teach social studies, including the citizenship and democracy education course. All teachers were female and their teaching experience ranged from 13 to 21 years with an average of 16.67 ($SD = 4.04$). While two of them held a bachelor's degree and had 3-year experience particularly in teaching citizenship and democracy education, one of them held a master's degree and had 13-year experience.

Data Collection Instruments

To understand what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values were developed by the students as a result of performing several activities through the project (presented in Table 2), the data were collected by observation and formative evaluation forms, 3 teacher interviews, 3 student focus group interviews involving 6 students in each group, and project evaluation form.

Table 2

Activities Performed by the Students through the Project

Identifying a real problem or issue

Finding out more on the identified problem or issue

Discussion for an action plan

Preparation to carry out the action plan

Implementing the action plan

Evaluating the experience

The data collection instruments, which were developed by the researchers, are described below:

Observations and formative evaluation form. To monitor what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values were developed by the students through the project, they were observed by the researchers during the activities. The observations that were conducted at each session were recorded by formative evaluation forms. The formative evaluation forms aimed to understand the extent to which students achieved the goals and the objectives of the activities.

Teacher interview schedule. For the teacher interviews, a fourteen-question semi-structured teacher interview schedule was developed in parallel with the student focus group interview schedule. The interview questions attempted to evaluate the project activities regarding the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values developed throughout the project from teachers' perspectives. The sample questions are as follows: "What kind of activities do you think the students performed?" "According to you, what students gained throughout the project?" "In your opinion, to what

extent the activities that students engaged in were effective?" The teacher interviews took nearly 20-30 minutes in each school.

Focus group interview schedule. For the focus group discussions with students, a focus group interview schedule was developed by the researchers. After having discussions for the content validity, the interview schedule was finalized. The interview questions attempted to explore the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values developed through the project in the words of the students. The interview schedule consisted of fifteen questions. The sample questions are as follows: "What kind of knowledge and skills do you think that you acquired through the project?" "In your opinion, what you learned about yourselves during the project?" and "What was your responsibilities in your own group?" The focus group interviews also took nearly 20-30 minutes in each school.

Evaluation form. The project evaluation form consisted of questions related to students' feelings, what they found interesting, their positive and negative thoughts about the project activities, and their recommendations. Facilitated by the teachers and the researchers, students shared their opinions in a 40-minute class hour in each school.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis which involves the synthesis of certain patterns that are observed after breaking the data into manageable parts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To this end, all the focus group and teacher interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then, each transcript was coded and emerging codes were grouped together to derive larger themes.

Trustworthiness

The soundness or the overall quality of qualitative research is judged by its trustworthiness which is a term that is based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this study, first, credibility was ensured by asking the opinions of experts after developing each instrument; collecting in-depth data both through interviews and observation; prolonged engagement with data by means of a rigorous data collection and analysis procedure in which the researchers were immersed in; persistent observation with the help of detailed data collection, verbatim transcriptions, and researchers' field notes; intercoder reliability through checking the codes and the categories across the researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994); referential adequacy by way of presenting the findings with the relevant quotations so as to provide sufficient reference for the interpretations, triangulation by relying on different instruments (interviews and observation) and different groups of participants (students and teachers) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007;

Patton, 1990); and lastly peer debriefing by consulting an expert in qualitative research to engage in conceptual discussions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Second, to assure transferability, the participants were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Third, dependability and confirmability were addressed by audit trail through which an expert monitored all stages of the study to establish that the study revealed objective results (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Findings

Based on the teacher interviews, student focus group interviews, and observations, the findings of this study were categorized as (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) attitudes and values that were developed by the students during the implementation of the project activities.

Knowledge

Students mentioned that they developed their knowledge on the social problems and issues that themselves and their peers worked on. They searched the possible causes and the consequences of several problems such as violence against women; inequality of human rights against discrimination, disrespect for others, environmental pollution as a result of the common tendency to use plastic bags, unhygienic conditions of hospitals, and family conflicts. To illustrate, Student A, Student D, Student F, and Student H expressed that:

Most people do not know how chewing gums on the streets harms to birds. We have learned that when chewing gums sticks to beaks of birds, they cannot eat and drink water and; therefore, they die. (Student A)

While talking with the authorities in our neighborhood, we learned that there were no homeless people around. Yet, if we rather think about Ankara than our own neighborhood, approximately one million people are homeless. Turkish population is around 75 million, so one million is considerably high and we did not actually know this before. We also learned about the circumstances that lead to this problem such as not having any guardians, family, or relatives; as a daughter, being forced by the family to get married at an early age, and therefore, escaping from home; and losing home due to several problems that result from terrorism. In addition to these, we became familiar with several institutions and organizations that are relevant to those particular issues. (Student D)

We did not know before that other countries, as well as our country, also have the problem of violence against women. In addition to recognizing this, once we further explored this issue, we understood that cultural or economic factors play an important role on violence against women. (Student F)

Before we interviewed with the authorities from hospitals, I did not have much information about how the hygiene of hospitals is ensured, such as how many times in a day hospitals are cleaned and the garbage is collected. (Student H)

The findings suggest that students had opportunity to gain knowledge about the violation of human rights, the responsibilities of citizens, and the major local and global social problems affecting people's lives. CRELL Research Network on Active Citizenship for Democracy has proposed a detailed list of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as necessary for active citizenship. Their list of knowledge that an active citizens need to have includes the knowledge on human rights and responsibilities, political literacy, historical knowledge, current affairs, diversity, cultural heritage, legal matters, and how to influence policy and society. Drawing upon these, it can be argued that FS2C project activities encouraged students to gain more knowledge on issues related to human rights and democracy in Turkish context.

Skills

In the present study, as a result of working on different activities in groups through the project and contacting with the people in their community, both teachers and students agreed that students developed several skills which are mainly categorized under thinking, participation, research, and communication skills. To start with, regarding the thinking skills, both students and teachers mainly underlined the development of critical thinking, questioning, discussion, creative thinking, reflective thinking, decision making, and evaluation skills. For instance, Student G and Teacher B stated that:

When we visited the health center, doctors really appreciated our work and read the brochures that we distributed to them, so we found ourselves successful and we were pretty satisfied for doing well on the dissemination. (Student G)

The activities through the project provided students with the opportunity to show their creativity. Especially, in the end, I was totally surprised when they presented their work. (Teacher B)

Second, concerning the participation skills, teachers especially highlighted that students were able to develop their collaboration skills to work with their peers in the groups. To illustrate, Teacher A and Teacher B expressed that:

Students were quite responsible and they performed each task mostly by themselves. My role was only to facilitate the process and provide guidance. While some groups were more successful in grasping the expected tasks, there were others that could not do as quickly as their peers. However, those were asking quite good questions to clear all the confusion in their minds. (Teacher A)

Overall, this project was very successful. For example, our school district is quite conservative. Parents are worried to send their 14-year-old daughters, who are adolescences, to somewhere. However, one of the students in my class, the group leader, went to the hospital alone to provide some necessary materials for their role playing and her mother surprisingly allowed her to go there. Such things barely happen here. In this project, students achieved such things and increased their self-confidence. Neither me nor the project team urged them, they worked completely voluntarily. (Teacher A)

The project fostered the self-confidence of students and the class 8B became the most popular class in the school. While students were working on the project, I encouraged the seventh graders to visit them and seventh graders said that they also would like to engage in such activities next year. On the whole, it was kind of a present for 8B at the end of the academic year. They expressed their appreciation for participating in this project and having been engaged in the activities. (Teacher A)

I had a chance to observe several characteristics of my students. For instance, it was interesting to see that while a student was not successful enough in the class in general, he, on the other hand, participated very well for the group tasks. Therefore, I believe that the activities through the project provided students with the opportunity to show their creativity. (Teacher B)

Third, students remarkably pointed out that they had an opportunity to develop their research skills. Accordingly, Student A and Student B articulated that:

I think that our project was successful in motivating us to do research. For instance, I learned about a few institutions and organizations that are relevant to the issue that our group worked on. (Student A)

While concentrating on the problem that we selected, we searched for in-depth information on the topic. As another source of information, we also asked people whether they experienced any violation of human rights. As a result, we have seen that some people stood upon their rights and went to law while others did not do so but felt regretful about that. This also helped us reflect on the importance of not remaining silent on violation of human rights. (Student B)

Lastly, both teachers and students clearly explained that students were able to advance their self-expression, self-confidence, presentation, communication, and social skills. For example, Student D, Student H, Student I, Student K, Teacher A, and Teacher C emphasized that:

We were always shy to talk to the authorized people and we were wondering whether they would even listen to us or how they would respond. This does not happen anymore, we believe that we can visit them confidently and express whatever we would like to. (Student D)

I used to be shy and introverted until we had an opportunity to interact especially with the project team and interview with the people in our community. Now, I feel much more confident. (Student H)

I had always felt too excited and nervous whenever I talked to new people. Thanks to our project, I had an opportunity to overcome and control this. (Student I)

Noone took the brochures unless we first tried to communicate with them before giving the brochures. Therefore, we figured out the importance of communication skills. (Student K)

Students developed their skills to communicate with government and private institutions that were relevant to the issue that a particular group had decided to work on. In addition, they realized how important it was to adequately explain the purpose of their visit at the beginning and thank to those people at the end. To illustrate, while students sent my thanks to the District Administrator after they interviewed with him/her, on the other hand, after

talking to the authorities in the hospital, they rather sent the school's messages than mine or anyone else's message. (Teacher A)

I believe that students developed their social skills especially since they had a chance to meet, demonstrate, and share their products with students from other schools. I observed that they were not nervous and expressing themselves effectively. (Teacher C)

In addition to aforementioned skills, students and teachers also mentioned that planning and implementing activities in a limited time helped students develop their skills on planning, decision-making, and time management:

I encountered with certain difficulties such as deciding how to assign the responsibilities among group members but I solved the problem by considering their salient characteristics or distinct abilities. (Student B)

As a group leader, I learned how to do planning. (Student J)

I noticed that the students from other schools performed sketches and prepared effective presentations. This helped me to consider, first and foremost, the planning aspect more meticulously for my further studies. (Student M)

From the findings related to the skills that students developed through the project, it can be concluded that the project activities might be considered effective in developing necessary skills for active citizenship.

Attitudes and Values

In the present study, both students and teachers asserted that students developed a number of attitudes such as respecting others' ideas, understanding the cruciality of several issues regarding democracy and human rights, developing an interest and motivation to social and political issues in the society, and enjoying the process of learning and practicing the civic issues. Regarding the values, students expressed that they gained awareness about certain societal issues and problems they see and experience in their environment. For instance, Student C, Student E, and Student L said that:

Since we were actively engaged in the project, therefore, first and foremost, it was us who gained awareness about animal rights. Besides, I believe that people around us will also take us as a model and be influenced by our behaviors. (Student C)

In addition to raising awareness of our classmates on using plastic bags and its consequences, our team was also informed by the topics that our classmates elaborated on and by the actions that they took. (Student E)

I recognized the discrimination that people experience based on their occupations. Being a municipal worker is as prestigious as being a computer engineer since both serve for the public. They all need to have equal rights. (Student L)

Not only students but also their teachers mentioned that students developed awareness about the topics that they selected regarding the democracy and human rights issues in Turkish society as well as in their own community. For example; one of the teachers expressed that students who focused on the issue of being discriminated for religious differences eventually aimed to raise the awareness of their peers and the people in their community.

In addition, students developed a strong sense of responsibility towards participating to the solution of the selected problems in their groups. Accordingly, Student A, Student N, and Teacher A stressed that:

We were successful not only at sharing our responsibilities but also collaborating with each other. Thereby, everyone developed a strong sense of responsibility. (Student A)

I assigned the responsibilities in our group, but some of the group members did not want to undertake those roles, so I made some changes on the responsibilities because I thought that if they engaged in their work with enjoyment, they would work more productively and their self-confidence would increase. (Student N)

No one did the activities under pressure, students did every task eagerly and highly enjoyed them. To raise the awareness in the community, we identified real problems, which might be minor or major according to others, then a strong effort was given to look for the solutions to these problems. (Teacher A)

This project definitely raised students' sense of responsibility and developed their collaboration skills. (Teacher A)

Except the findings of the student focus group discussions and teacher interviews, the current study also relied on the results of the observations conducted by the researchers. At this point, since the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of the teachers and the students regarding the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values that the students developed throughout the project implementation, the observations that were conducted by the researchers were mainly used to supplement the findings. Accordingly, it was seen that the observations conducted by the researchers complied with the perceptions of the teachers and the students regarding the characteristics of active citizenship that the activities students engaged in during the project were conducive to develop.

Along with the aforementioned findings, on the project evaluation forms, students stated that they were excited, happy and enjoyed very much through the project especially as they had a chance to meet with different people and present the outcomes of the project in a university environment. Besides, they mentioned that not only had they a chance to increase their sense of responsibility but they also raised the awareness of individuals who were in their community. In addition to these, students expressed their admiration of the project objectives, their increased motivation, and enthusiasm for further projects. Furthermore, they reported that it was interesting to

see the attention and the appreciation they received from the people for the activities that they were engaged in the project.

Drawing upon the findings, it can be argued that the project activities were conducive to develop certain characteristics of active citizen regarding knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Despite their distinctions, those three categories complement each other considerably.

The findings of this study are summarized in Table 3 below as (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) attitudes and values that were developed by the students during the implementation of the project activities.

Table 3
Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Values Acquired by the Students

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes and Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing knowledge on the social problems (e.g., unhygienic conditions of hospitals, family conflicts, and violence against women) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration in team work • Group discussion • Questioning • Research • Self-expression • Self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and group evaluation • Creativity • Social Skills • Communication • Effective presentation • Organization • Planning • Time management • Critical thinking • Reflective thinking • Decision-making • Self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting others' ideas • Understanding the cruciality of several issues • Developing an interest and motivation to social and political issues in the society • Enjoying the process of learning and practicing the civic issues • Gaining awareness towards societal issues and problems • Developing a sense of responsibility

Discussion

Through the implementation of this European Union Project (FS2C), students engaged in a series of activities to address the priority issues and problems related to democracy and human rights in their community. They also developed solutions for those problems, took appropriate actions within their community to improve their own and others' situations, and finally, they evaluated their actions. From the present data, it might be argued that the activities developed and implemented by the students helped them develop (1) knowledge on problems related to human rights and democracy, (2) skills to work together and develop creative solutions to the problems in their community, and (3) attitudes and values that motivate them to willingly participate and take actions for improving the conditions in their community. These characteristics are considered to be necessary for an active citizen as reported by many researchers (Hoskins & Deakin Crick, 2010; Jansen et al., 2006; Print &

Coleman, 2003; Stubbs, 1995). CRELL Research Network on Active Citizenship for Democracy also listed similar characteristics such as making creative and critical reflections, communicating and working with others, solving problems, being open and respecting others' ideas, advocating human rights and democracy, showing political interest, being responsible, autonomous, and independent, valuing equity and involvement (Hoskins & Deakin Crick, 2010) which largely comply with the findings of this study.

Active citizenship education requires three types of learning: cognitive, pragmatic, and affective which complement each other. The cognitive learning aspect, shaped through formal methods of education, mostly involves learning the facts and expanding the knowledge about democracy, politics, and democratic and political institutions. The pragmatic learning aspect highlights learning especially by getting involved in the society. In this sense, individuals master the citizenship through their own experiences. Lastly, the affective learning aspect addresses the particular values, behaviors, and attitudes which help individuals get attached to the societies that they belong to (Çakmaklı, 2015; Scheerens, 2011). For the attainment of affective learning outcomes, basically experiential learning and involvement in extracurricular or community activities are suggested (Çakmaklı, 2015; Keser et al., 2011). Similar to these, Memişoğlu (2014) classifies the active citizenship competencies into three dimensions which are citizenship knowledge, citizenship skills, and citizenship values. For the knowledge dimension, people are basically expected to learn the essential concepts related to active citizenship. For the skills dimension, they are expected to gain the basic skills such as communication, critical thinking, discussion, problem solving, conflict resolution, analysis and synthesis skills. Lastly, for the values dimension, people are expected to develop beliefs and attitudes towards the necessity of active citizenship. In line with these, it is imperative for an active citizenship education to equip the individuals with all those three elements (Karatekin, Merey, Sönmez, & Kuş, 2012). Regarding the FS2C project, where students took the opportunity of identifying the problems related to democracy and human rights in their community and offered suggestions to those problems, the results of the current study unraveled that students were able to develop the essential (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) attitudes and values that are related to the cognitive, pragmatic, and affective learning aspects of active citizenship education respectively.

In relation to the aforementioned elements of active citizenship, the results might further raise the question of how an active citizenship education should be embodied and which strategies and methods should be applied in middle schools as it is evident that teaching methods play an important role in offering an effective citizenship education (Karaman-Kepeneci, 2005). In the studies carried out by Ersoy (2014) and Memişoğlu (2014), the results revealed that social studies teachers in Turkey

mostly apply teacher centered practices in citizenship education such as direct explanation, question and answer method, and narration techniques, which poses a challenge to the active citizenship education. As Çayır (2002) suggests, an effective citizenship education needs to promote inquiry and action with the aim of creating behavioral and attitudinal changes rather than limiting itself to the cognitive domain. To this end, the use of teamwork, role-playing, visual aids, activity-based scenarios, problem-based learning, school trips, and case studies are widely recommended (Çayır, 2002; Som & Karataş, 2015) which basically enable students to be active in the learning process and provide them with the opportunity to practice active citizenship in the real life (Sadık & Sarı, 2012). For teaching citizenship at school, Scheerens (2011) talks about two distinct methods which are “the context embedded approach” and “the explicit teaching approach.” Bridging the societal citizenship and state citizenship, the former considers the school as a place to practice “school citizenship.” In this approach, active citizenship is advanced by informal learning. On the other hand, the latter underscores formal education to accomplish the goals of active citizenship (Scheerens, 2011). Employing the context embedded approach through the FS2C project, students who participated in this study were encouraged to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values about democracy and human rights based on their own experiences supported with informal learning opportunities in the school and the community. Given that the whole six-step problem-solving approach and the activities implemented through the project were conducive to develop the characteristics of active citizenship by allowing for a learner-centered environment, it could be suggested that schools might integrate the project activities into the formal curriculum in teaching democratic active citizenship. In particular, the six-step problem-solving approach, which was adapted from Child-to-Child approach (Woznica, 2014), and the activities developed by the project team to facilitate each step might be used as extra-curricular activities. As Child-to-Child approach encourages the active participation of students in the teaching and learning process by providing them with the opportunity to take actions in the community, students could contribute to the solution of social problems in their school and the community. Several researchers (e.g., Akşit, 2009; Ersoy, 2014; Keser et al., 2011; Karaman-Kepeneci, 2005; Mısırlı-Özsoy, 2010; Som & Karataş, 2015; Şensoy, 2014; Ülger, 2013) also underline the positive impact of authentic and extra-curricular activities on the development of active citizenship and the promotion of active citizenship values and competencies in Turkish schools. In particular, as Keser et al. (2011) argue, these extra-curricular activities enable students to develop an active citizenship perception, social accountability, intercultural awareness, awareness of democracy and human rights, thinking and research skills, and interaction and intrapersonal skills which comply with the findings of this study. Active participation of students in solving the community problems around their school would also contribute to the development

of in-school democracy, which is crucial in developing the competencies for active citizenship. Yet, it is still a shortfall in most Turkish schools (Engin-Demir et al., 2014) which could be attributed to several reasons such as the use of traditional teaching methods (Ersoy, 2012a, 2014; Memişoğlu, 2014), the lack of necessary instructional materials (Akşit; 2009; Çayır, 2002), the lack of appropriate curricula and textbooks (Başaran, 2007; Çayır & Bağlı, 2011; Er et al., 2013; Keleş & Tonga, 2014; Tonga & Uslu, 2015; Ülger, 2013; Ünal, 2012), and the traditional school culture (Ersoy, 2014). Given the existing social, political, cultural, and economic context of Turkish society, the improvement of those elements might facilitate the development of in-school democracy (Şişman, Güleş, & Dönmez, 2010), and in the long run, might also contribute to the improvement of the existing hybrid democracy. To this end, promoting student councils and student clubs could also be an important way to promote the democratic culture in schools (Ersoy, 2012a, 2014).

The development of active citizenship characteristics in students also depends on how well the teachers are equipped with active citizenship skills. However, the teacher training sessions that took place before the implementation of the project activities to prepare teachers with the necessary knowledge about the steps of Child-to-Child approach showed that the social studies teachers were not familiar with the selected approach. As a result, they requested at least one of the researchers to be present in the class to facilitate the implementation of the project activities based on the selected approach, which they believed, would motivate students to participate willingly in the project activities and help the project proceed much easier. Likewise, it was also observed during the project implementation that teachers needed more competence and confidence to guide the student activities. Parallel to these findings, in the study conducted by Ersoy (2014), the results portrayed that the social studies teachers lacked an understanding of the basic characteristics of active and democratic citizenship. Besides, it was observed that those teachers did not have adequate knowledge of active and democratic citizenship education, either. These might originate from the fact that democratic citizenship and human rights courses are not adequately represented in pre-service teacher education programs. Considering the fact that teachers have an essential role in the process of democratic enculturation in democratic societies (Gündoğdu, 2011), teachers' knowledge and skills should be improved by means of several ways (Çayır & Bağlı, 2011; Ersoy, 2012a, 2014). Accordingly, the pre-service teacher education programs in general, and particularly the preparation of social studies teachers need to be reconsidered and improved in terms of developing the active citizenship skills of teachers who, in return, will develop those skills in students. Although undergraduate and graduate level human rights courses are offered by certain teacher education programs such as philosophy education, social studies education, and elementary teacher education programs, there is still a serious need for a human rights course in other pre-

service teacher education programs (Gündoğdu, 2011) and a democracy education course in most teacher education programs (Saracaloğlu, Evin, & Varol, 2004) in Turkey. In addition to developing the knowledge and skills of teacher candidates, such courses are also likely to influence their pre-established perceptions of several issues regarding democracy, human rights, and citizenship (Ersoy & Öztürk, 2015). Along with offering new courses, the existing human rights courses should also be evaluated and reconsidered on the basis of research to enhance the quality of them. In this regard, Dolanbay (2016) conducted a study to evaluate the human rights and education course based on the views of pre-service social studies teachers. According to the findings of the study, the teacher candidates did not find the course activities, instructional methods and techniques, and materials very effective. They particularly criticized that use of direct instruction in the classes was a negative factor influencing the effectiveness of the course. Therefore, the teaching methods used in the courses by the faculty should promote a constructivist, learner-centered, and more democratic approach in the preparation of teachers (Baysal, 2009; Dolanbay, 2016; Gündoğdu, 2010). Such evaluation studies on this course could offer implications of indicating the areas that need to be more strengthened. Lastly, empowering the faculty-school collaboration might be another strategy to equip teacher candidates with active citizenship characteristics since such partnership allows pre-service teachers to get familiar with the real school contexts and practice teaching democracy and human rights education, which especially provides them with the opportunity to select and use the appropriate teaching and learning methods in this course.

Except the pre-service teacher education, Huddleston (2005) also points out the need to revise the in-service teacher training programs with respect to the pedagogical approaches used in citizenship education, especially for the countries, such as Turkey, that adopt top-down approaches in teaching and learning processes. In such countries, since the system of education is more centralized, structured, and the educational process is predominantly subject-centered and exam-oriented (Ersoy, 2014), teachers might not have the opportunity to modify the curriculum to meet the local needs of the society (McKimm & Barrow, 2009). In other words, they might experience difficulties in developing students' critical and analytical thinking skills, values, and behaviors as well as supporting them to participate in activities at school and community levels which are, indeed, the main objectives for citizenship education (Eurydice, 2005, as cited in Eurydice, 2012). To address this issue, sound in-service teacher trainings should be designed (Ersoy, 2012a, 2014) mainly by incorporating the essential subject-matter knowledge and the child-centered teaching and learning methods (Huddleston, 2005). Within this framework, it is particularly recommended that the in-service trainings should be organized on the topics such as children's rights, teachers' rights, democratization of instruction, student-centered approach, character education, professional ethics and democracy (Saracaloğlu et al., 2004),

and democracy education (Baysal, 2009). Finally, it is suggested that those training programs should be implemented by the collaborative efforts of both educational institutions and the media (Ersoy, 2012a).

The results of the current study should be interpreted with caution as the changes in attitudes and values can be observed generally in a longer period of time. In addition, it is hard to reach a clear conclusion about the impact of being involved in the project activities on the development of attitudes and values that are necessary for active citizenship. On the other hand, the development of knowledge and skills can be observed easier and in a shorter period of time compared to the attitudes and values. In addition, eight grade students in middle schools take a nation-wide exam at the end of the academic year and compete against each other to be placed in high schools. Therefore, students might not have fully used their potential to take part in the project activities, but rather might have concentrated on the exam which is a higher priority for them. Bearing these in mind, it is possible to argue that the project activities could be more successful if they were expanded to the lower grades in middle schools. This still does not jeopardize the fact that the project activities led to a mindset change in students and teachers especially since the project enabled them to take new opportunities that they never experienced before. In this sense, future research might be conducted by means of longitudinal designs, which could be strengthened by the triangulation of multiple data collection tools. In particular, observational studies might better lend themselves to draw a more accurate conclusion about the development of attitudes and values for active citizenship.

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