



EXPLORING CITIZENSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TÜRKİYE

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Abstract

This study aims to explore classroom teachers' views on the concept of citizenship and citizenship education. In line with this purpose, teachers' views on citizenship, their interpretations of the concept of "active" citizenship, the aims of citizenship education, and their classroom practices related to citizenship education were investigated. The study employed an exploratory phenomenological approach, a qualitative research method. The results revealed that teachers conceptualized citizenship as the acquisition of national legal status and identity, rights and responsibilities, participation, and patriotism. It was concluded that teachers often emphasized the themes of "responsibility," "social sensitivity," "participation," and "collaboration" when defining the qualities that an active citizen should possess. In teachers' opinions about the aim of citizenship education, the categories "contributing to the political socialization of students, teaching rights and responsibilities, and contributing to the development of students' values and skills" were most emphasized. It was concluded that teachers mainly included citizenship education in social studies and life sciences courses and used "providing examples" and "direct narration." Teachers also reported school councils and class president elections as extracurricular activities.

Keywords: Citizenship, citizenship education, primary education.

INTRODUCTION

In today's societies, which face various social, cultural, and political changes, the development of citizenship remains a crucial issue in contemporary policy initiatives and public debates. (Dusi et al., 2012). The emergence of social and educational challenges, such as globalization, technological advances, and migration, has necessitated a rethink of the role of schools in developing citizenship. Indeed, education in the 21st century extends beyond meeting the basic needs of the curriculum to become a dynamic process that encompasses the knowledge, skills, and values individuals need in global contexts, preparing them for this complex world (Evans et al., 2009; Pike, 2007). In this context, citizenship education, which plays a fundamental role in the formation of citizens who act with a sense of social responsibility, have critical and democratic thinking and develop social awareness, has become an essential part of the educational curriculum in many countries (Euridyce, 2017; Martínez Guzmán & González Gutiérrez, 2010; Willemse et al., 2015).

Since the twentieth century, many countries around the world have incorporated citizenship education into their education systems as a cross-curricular course, integrated with other subjects, or as a separate course to strengthen their developing political/administrative structures and develop their democratic institutions. (Akar & Aschenberger, 2016; Euridyce, 2017). Some researchers argue that citizenship education can be structured according to countries' own political goals and the influence of the dominant culture (Parker, 2008; Sunal & Haas, 2011). Currently, curricula are among the most essential tools countries use to produce the kind of citizens they desire. Citizenship education, integrated into curricula for courses such as civics, history, and social studies (Kwan-Choi Tse, 2000), is mainly provided within the framework of social education in Turkey, as in many countries.



Today, in many countries' curricula, an emphasis on active, participatory, and critical citizenship can be observed (Lin, 2015; Weinberg & Flinders, 2018). However, to what extent this emphasis in curricula is reflected in teachers' pedagogical practices remains a matter of debate. Many studies show an inconsistency between the curriculum and pedagogical practices in citizenship education. While curricula emphasize active, participatory, and critical citizenship, teachers tend toward traditional, transmission-based citizenship education (Fuentes-Moreno et al., 2020; Marovah, 2019; Obiagu, 2024). In this context, alongside the philosophy of the curriculum, it should not be overlooked that teachers, as practitioners, are the most important actors in the formation of citizenship awareness in students and in raising ideal citizens (Güven, Tertemiz, & Bulut, 2009; Zaman, 2006).

Citizenship education is influenced by many factors such as family, society, and media. Among all these factors, teachers who implement national education policies, the school's vision, and the curriculum are the most important and constitute an indispensable part of citizenship education (Kuş & Aksu, 2017; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Veugelers, 2007). Considering that the concept of citizenship is a complex notion that can be understood differently across social, political, historical, and cultural contexts, it should not be ignored that perceptions related to this concept may also affect the way it is taught (Lee & Fouts, 2005; Veugelers, 2011; Walkington & Wilkins, 2000). In fact, teachers, as practitioners in schools, can influence students' citizenship development either consciously through the formal curriculum or implicitly in line with their own understanding of citizenship (Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat, 2008; Leenders & Veugelers, 2006; Westheimer & Ladson-Billings, 2024).

Citizenship Education in the National Context

To effectively analyze the structure of citizenship education in Turkey, it is essential to understand the concept of citizenship within its national context. The notion of citizenship in Turkey has evolved over different periods. Still, it has consistently centered on the themes of "modernity" and "patriotism," particularly after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire's multinational structure (Kuş, 2020). During the Republican era, significant efforts were made to develop a new nation, culture, and sense of citizenship (Keyman, 2008). This period, marked by nation-building, underscored the importance of establishing a national and secular state structure alongside a cultural and social framework compatible with those attributes (Keyman & İçduygu, 1998).

Consequently, the republican model of citizenship dominated Turkey until the 1950s. This model emphasized duties and obligations more than social rights (Üstel, 2004). In other words, early in the republic, the understanding of citizenship focused on citizens' responsibilities to society and the state, as dictated by the republican tradition (Kadioğlu, 2006). This duty-oriented and collectivist interpretation of citizenship, which positioned citizenship at the heart of national identity and prioritized obedience to the state alongside adherence to law and order, began to transform with the transition to a multi-party system in the 1950s (Caymaz, 2007; İşyar, 2005). This period witnessed two significant developments: Islam became integral to civic identity, and a more liberal definition of citizenship emerged. Following the 1980s, Turkey's integration into the global neoliberal economic system—prompted by rapid social and economic changes worldwide, along with the rise of rights-based policies—brought citizenship back into focus in terms of rights, duties, and identity recognition. (Keyman & İçduygu, 2005). Additionally, social movements addressing global issues and the migration phenomenon from the 2000s onward have amplified the demands of various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, fostering a more individualistic, liberal, and multicultural understanding of citizenship (Keyman, 2005; Şimşek & Karaduman, 2023). Throughout this process, significant events such as coups or coup attempts, along with legal reforms, have played a crucial role in shaping the content and direction of citizenship education in Turkey. Militaristic discourses, which intensified after the 1960 military coup, have also been reflected in educational materials (Sen, 2018). During this period, the understanding of political citizenship gained momentum, as the boundaries of the public sphere were defined and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship were emphasized (Şimşek & Karaduman, 2023).



In the 1990s, Turkey's participation in the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education initiative helped integrate human rights into the country's citizenship curriculum. In the early 2000s, significant changes were implemented in education within the scope of the European Union membership policy. Citizenship education was restructured to move away from a militaristic understanding of citizenship. Instead, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted, emphasizing national values while highlighting universal values and citizenship skills (Sen, 2023). This transition from a traditional approach based on national identity to a modern understanding of citizenship education was realized with a curriculum change in 2005 (Kayacan, 2014). The revised program removed citizenship education as a compulsory subject and integrated it into the social studies curriculum as an intermediate discipline. The current social studies curriculum 2018 includes components related to citizenship education under the theme "Active Citizenship and Global Connections," which focuses on contemporary concepts of rights, freedom, and justice. Furthermore, the Human Rights and Citizenship course for fourth-grade students aims to enhance their awareness of citizenship (MoNE, 2018).

Overall, it can be said that citizenship education in Turkey has been shaped by a duty-and-responsibility framework. This historical background of the concept of citizenship may shape teachers' understandings of citizenship. In this context, it is thought that not only teachers' perceptions of citizenship but also the country's citizenship culture may influence citizenship education.

The Present Study

Studies in the literature show that teachers' beliefs serve as epistemological and moral filters for their pedagogical practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Knowles, 2018; Thornton, 2005). While this is true for all disciplines across the curriculum, it becomes even more critical when teaching citizenship competencies. This is because citizenship education is an area of the curriculum where teachers often have greater discretion (Jara et al., 2023). Therefore, it becomes essential to uncover the beliefs of teachers responsible for developing citizenship competencies. Knowles (2018) argues that teachers are guided by their beliefs, and that their approach to policy and citizenship issues can align significantly with these beliefs. Therefore, it is essential to consider teachers' approaches to teaching citizenship competencies and the core beliefs that underpin these approaches.

Upon reviewing the relevant literature, numerous studies have been conducted both nationally and internationally on teachers' perspectives on various aspects of citizenship. Research in Turkey reveals that teachers mostly define the concept of citizenship in terms of national identity, duties, and responsibilities (Güven et al., 2009; Malkoç & Ata, 2021). However, these studies show limitations in how teachers reflect their perceptions of citizenship in classroom teaching processes. Indeed, some international studies have shown that teachers' perceptions of the concept of citizenship influence classroom teaching processes in citizenship education. For example, some studies focusing on the relationship between teachers' citizenship ideals and teaching methods have shown that teachers with a participatory and multifaceted understanding of citizenship frequently use activities based on active teaching methods such as discussion and projects; whereas teachers with a duty and responsibility-oriented understanding of citizenship prefer traditional and teacher-centered activities (Sampermans et al., 2021; De Schaepmeester et al., 2022). Some studies have shown that teachers with a justice-oriented understanding of citizenship are more likely to encourage their students' critical thinking and participation orientations through activities such as inquiry, discussion, and projects (Cleovoulou, 2021; Smith et al., 2024).

When the relevant literature is evaluated together, the limited number of studies on the reasons why this understanding is not sufficiently reflected in teachers' pedagogical practices, despite the emphasis of curricula on active and participatory citizenship, creates a significant gap in the field of citizenship education. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between teachers' understanding of citizenship and their pedagogical practices.

The aim of this research is to determine classroom teachers' understanding of citizenship and citizenship education and to reveal the extent to which citizenship ideals are reflected in classroom teaching practices. In line with this aim, the following questions are addressed:



- ✓ How do classroom teachers understand the concept of citizenship and effective citizenship?
- ✓ How do classroom teachers interpret the aims of citizenship education?
- ✓ To what extent are the citizenship ideals of classroom teachers reflected in classroom teaching practices?

METHOD

Research Design

This research was designed as an interpretive qualitative study to investigate classroom teachers' perceptions of the concept of citizenship and citizenship education, and how these perceptions are reflected in their pedagogical practices. The interpretive qualitative research approach forms the basis of research inquiries aimed at understanding individuals' experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attribute to these experiences (Merriam & Graneier, 2019; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

Participants

Participants consisted of 27 classroom teachers working in 5 different primary schools in Sarıçam, Seyhan, Yüreğir, and Çukurova districts of Adana province in the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the criterion was "classroom teachers who have taught 4th grade". In Turkey, citizenship education is introduced in the 4th grade of primary school through the course "Human Rights and Civics." Therefore, this criterion was established. Thus, the aim was to include participants who had experienced the central phenomenon under study. Before the study, permission was obtained by submitting and application to the Adana Provincial Directorate of National Education. The participants were volunteers. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on demographic characteristics of the participants.

Variables		n
Gender	Female	20
	Male	7
Educational Level	Licence	17
	Master's Degree	8
	Ph.D.	2
Professional experience	1-5 years	1
	6-10 years	2
	11-15 years	3
	15-20 years	3
	21 years and over	18
Frequency of teaching 4 th grade	1-3 years	10
	4-6 years	13
	7 years and over	4

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional background of the participants. Among the 27 participants, 7 were male, and 20 were female. In terms of academic qualifications, 2 participants held a Ph.D., 8 had a Master's degree, and 17 possessed a Bachelor's degree. Regarding teaching experience, 18 participants had 21 or more years, while 1 participant had fewer than 5 years. When focusing specifically on 4th-grade teaching experience, 10 participants had 1 to 3 years of experience, 13 had 4 to 6 years, and 4 had 7 years or more. To ensure participants' privacy, ethical guidelines were followed, and codes (e.g., P1, P2, P3) were used to protect their identities.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, the researcher created a semi-structured interview form to explore primary school teachers' perceptions of citizenship concepts and education in depth. The design of the semi-structured interview aimed to encourage teachers to articulate their thoughts and experiences clearly and in detail. The researcher carefully crafted the interview questions based on existing literature regarding citizenship education in primary schools, with a particular focus on teachers' perceptions (see Appendix 1). The semi-structured interview form consisted of three parts: 1. An informed consent form, which obtained



participants' written consent for ethical compliance. 2. A demographic information section, which collected details such as gender, age, education level, and teaching experience. 3. A series of open-ended questions that explored classroom teachers' perceptions of citizenship and citizenship education, consisting of eight questions. One of the open-ended questions was: "There are different types of citizenship, such as global citizenship, digital citizenship, and active citizenship. Are you familiar with these types? If so, can you explain them? Which concepts do you think are important, and why?" This format allowed participants to express their views and experiences in a detailed and comfortable manner while encouraging them to clarify concepts through exploratory questions regarding the 'why' and 'how.' To enhance content validity, it is standard practice to involve a team of experts (Polit & Beck, 2006). This approach helps to prevent the research questions from being limited to the researchers' perceptions or experiences of the topic (Davis, 1992). In this context, three experts with experience in classroom teaching, social studies education, and civic education reviewed the questions for clarity and content quality to ensure their validity. Based on the feedback from these experts, the open-ended questions were reorganized.

The researcher utilized the content validity index to evaluate the content validity of the semi-structured interview form. The validity of each item was assessed based on ratings from experts, who were asked to evaluate the relevance of each question to the underlying construct. The rating scale was defined as follows: (1) = not relevant, (2) = somewhat relevant, (3) = relevant, and (4) = highly relevant. The content validity index was calculated by dividing the number of experts who rated each item as a 3 or 4 by the total number of experts consulted (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019). For content validity, the content validity index should be 1.00 when there are five or fewer experts, and it should not be lower than .78 when there are six or more experts (Polit & Beck, 2006; Rubio et al., 2003). In this study, the content validity index was 1.00. Furthermore, the content validity index for the questions was .87, based on the interrater agreement index. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive study of teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding citizenship and citizenship education.

Data Collection

This study gathered data from participants selected through purposive sampling. Individual interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the perceptions and understandings of 4th-grade elementary school teachers regarding citizenship and citizenship education. The interviews took place during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Prior to participating in the interviews, participants provided informed consent to address ethical concerns. They were then asked to complete a demographic information questionnaire, followed by a semi-structured written interview. To ensure accurate data collection without time and space constraints, online versions of the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were created using Google Forms and distributed to participants via WhatsApp. The data collection process continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no new information was being gathered. The decision to stop sampling was made when repeated interviews yielded no new content, confirming that the data had been sufficiently replicated (Brod et al., 2009). The sampling process lasted approximately two months, from April to June 2024.

Data Analysis

This study gathered data from 27 classroom teachers who shared their perspectives and experiences regarding citizenship and citizenship education. After collecting the data, the researcher reviewed the semi-structured interview forms to identify and correct any missing information and spelling errors. The researcher then employed a content analysis to examine participants' responses to the interview questions. This method was chosen to uncover concepts that could explain the collected data and to systematically categorize it (Schreier, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The goal was to gain insight into the participants' understanding and experiences of citizenship. A structured content analysis procedure was implemented in this study (Mayring, 2015). To enhance the reliability of the analysis, the content analysis was conducted using MAXQDA 2020 software. Utilizing computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software significantly improves the reliability of the coding process (Baralt, 2012). The analysis followed a five-step procedure proposed by Gao and Zhang (2020), which included:



1. Cleaning the original data: Reading through the data, identifying and correcting errors, and checking for consistency.
2. Data coding: Reading the original data multiple times to develop clear codes.
3. Creating themes: Comparing original codes, examining the relationships between them, and naming the themes.
4. Categorizing themes: Organizing themes into various categories based on specific standards and principles.
5. Writing the report: Composing a scholarly report based on the analyzed data, which includes appropriate and persuasive citations relevant to the research questions and literature (p. 8).

The data were organized using MAXQDA 2020, a data analysis software, following a systematic analysis procedure. In the initial stage, the original data was cleaned, and transcriptions were checked for typos and inconsistencies. The data analysis process aimed to identify recurring patterns of meaning in participants' narratives rather than simply quantifying their responses to the interview form. During the coding phase, the data sets were re-examined, and initial codes were created. In the theme generation stage, the coders categorized the initial codes into relevant themes. The derived themes were then organized into higher-level concepts during the categorization stage. To develop the coding framework, both conceptual and data-driven strategies were employed (Schreier, 2012). The coders defined the main categories based on existing literature and theories regarding teachers' perceptions of citizenship and citizenship education (Margot & Kettler, 2019). After reviewing all interviews, additional categories were integrated into the main coding framework. In the final stage, the researcher compiled a concise report detailing the entire process. To enhance the reliability of the coding and categorization, an expert faculty member in the field collaborated with the researcher throughout all five stages. Reliability was assessed using Miles and Huberman's formula: $\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{number of consensus}}{\text{total number of consensus} + \text{disagreements}}$. According to Miles and Huberman (2016), a reliability coefficient of 90% is generally expected. In this study, the reliability calculation indicated a high level of agreement between the coders ($\alpha = .96$). Disagreements regarding codes and categories were reviewed, and a joint decision was made. Finally, participants' statements were presented with direct quotes to clarify the tables and enhance the understanding of the codes and themes. During the presentation of the teachers' statements, the coding, such as P/1, P/2, and P/27, adhered to the ethical rules of the research.

RESULTS

In this section of the study, the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the interview data on classroom teachers' views of citizenship and citizenship education were analyzed and visually presented using MAXQDA 2020. Below, you will find a "code matrix" visualization that clusters the data according to the participants' opinions, offering a comprehensive perspective on the research.

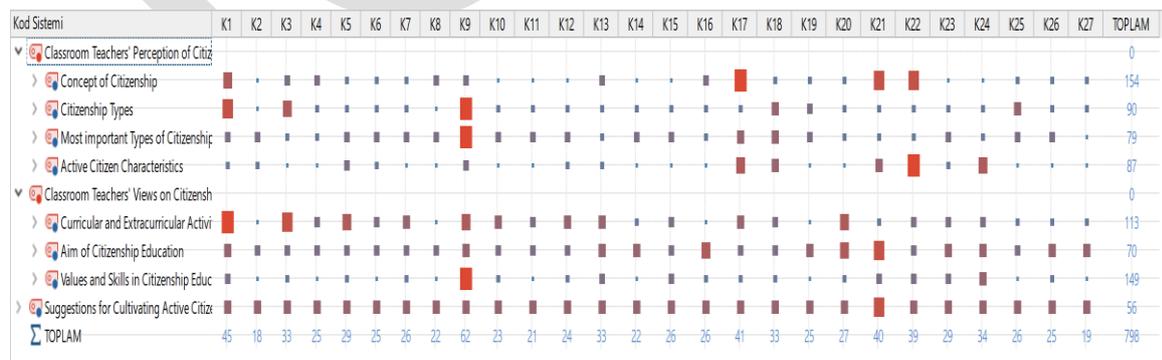


Figure 1. MAXMap code matrix.

Figure 1 illustrates that a total of 798 codes were generated for three sub-objectives based on the opinions of 27 participants regarding the research. The participants categorized their codes as follows: P17, P21, and P22 pertained to the concept of citizenship; P1, P3, and P9 were categorized under types



of citizenship; P9 and P17 represented the most important types of citizenship; and P5, P9, P17, and P24 were associated with characteristics of active citizens. Regarding the subgoal focused on classroom teachers' perspectives on citizenship education, participants assigned codes P9, P23, and P24 to the category of values and sPills relevant to citizenship education. In the category concerning the purpose of citizenship education, participants P16, P20, and P21 expressed their opinions more fervently. Lastly, when discussing suggestions for developing influential citizens in our country, participant P21's views were particularly prominent, while overall, participants expressed their opinions on this topic less frequently.

Citizenship as a Normative Identity

In this section, we present the classroom teachers' views of citizenship, their understanding of the different types of citizenship, and their views on what constitutes effective citizenship. These findings, reflecting the first sub-objective of the study, are illustrated visually in Figure 2, which showcases the participants' views of citizenship.

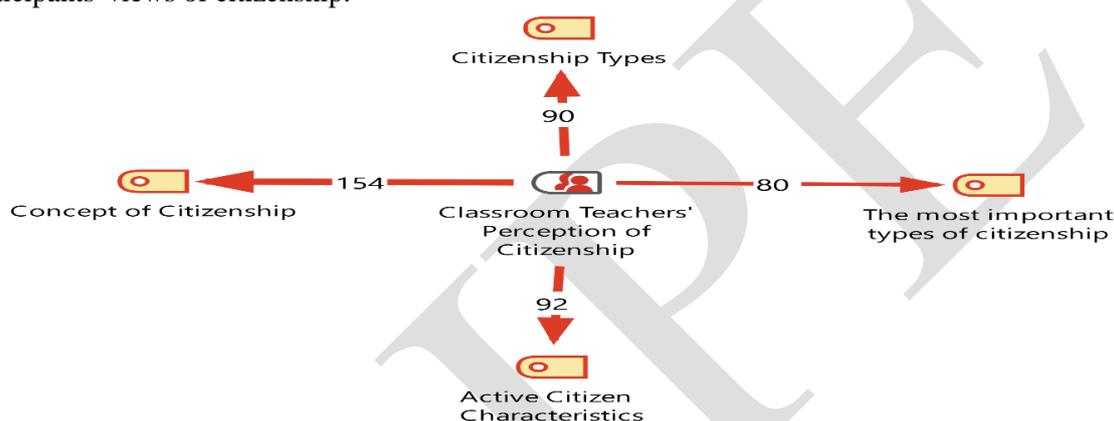


Figure 2. MAXMap Code Theory Model of teachers' views on citizenship perception.

The concept of citizenship

To explore classroom teachers' views of citizenship, participants were asked to define citizenship during the interviews, and their responses were analyzed. The meanings that participants attributed to citizenship are illustrated in Figure 3.

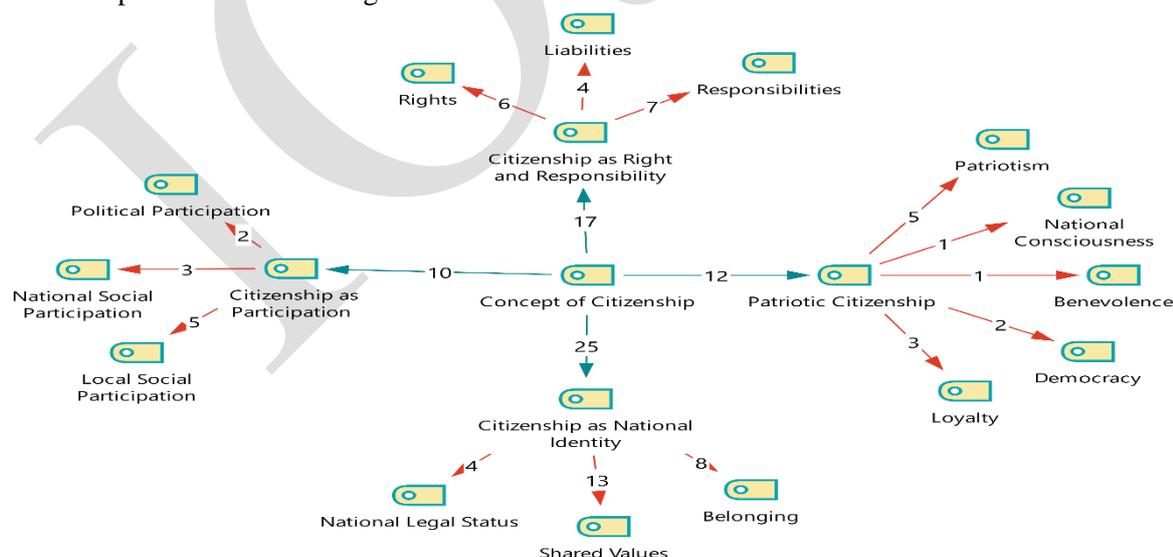


Figure 3. MAXMap Code Theory Model for the concept of citizenship.



Figure 3 shows that participants defined the concept of citizenship within the frameworks of national identity, rights and responsibilities, patriotic citizenship, and participation. Participants' views were mostly concentrated around national identity and rights and responsibilities.

Citizenship as national identity: In this category, participants most frequently defined citizenship in terms of shared values and a sense of belonging. Citizenship was explained by most participants through language, culture, flag, and common history, and was associated with the feeling of “being part of a community.” In this context, citizenship was expressed more as an identity and a sense of belonging rather than a legal bond between the individual and the state. Accordingly, one participant defined citizenship as “the identity of a country, belonging to a common group and a sense of belonging” (P16), while another participant expressed it as “being part of a community at the local, national, or global level” (P1). Some teachers explained citizenship in terms of the legal bond between the individual and the state. Nevertheless, these definitions were also primarily located within the domain of national identity and belonging. This suggests that teachers primarily conceptualised citizenship as a social and cultural identity rather than a legal status.

Citizenship as rights and responsibilities: A significant number of teachers explained citizenship in terms of rights and responsibilities. In participants' narratives, duties such as complying with constitutional rules, protecting national interests, and maintaining social order were associated with the concept of citizenship. Obligations such as paying taxes, completing military service, and contributing to society were expressed as core elements of citizenship. In one teacher's words, a citizen is “a person who safeguards national interests and does not avoid taking responsibility” (P3). Similarly, another teacher emphasized that citizenship “includes both rights and certain obligations” (P22). In these views, the concept of rights was mostly addressed in connection with responsibilities.

Patriotic citizenship: Some teachers explained citizenship directly through love of country and loyalty. In this context, citizenship was associated with values such as loyalty to the country, social sensitivity, and protecting the continuity of the nation. One teacher expressed citizenship as “loyalty to the country and sensitivity toward society” (P7), while another defined it as “a sacred concept worth dying for” (P10). These views indicate that citizenship was perceived as an emotional and moral responsibility.

Citizenship as participation: Some participants addressed citizenship within the context of social and political participation. For these participants, citizenship was associated with identifying national problems, developing solutions, and participating in decision-making processes. One teacher defined citizenship as “identifying the country's problems and taking steps to improve quality of life” (P24), while another expressed it as “having the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in national decisions” (P16). However, the relatively limited presence of these views compared to other definitions indicates that political participation processes remained secondary in the perception of citizenship.

When the findings are evaluated together, they show that teachers conceptualize citizenship more in terms of identity, belonging, and responsibility, and attach less importance to participation and democratic processes. These narratives show that teachers interpret citizenship as a means of maintaining social order, duty, responsibility, and loyalty rather than as an active, participatory, and political process. Consequently, citizenship emerges as a normative ideal associated with social order.

Conceptualization of Active Citizenship

Classroom teachers' knowledge and assessments of types of citizenship, the types they consider most important, and their views on the characteristics of an active citizen are compiled under this theme.

According to the classroom teachers' views on defining the types of citizenship, the results are presented in Figure 4.

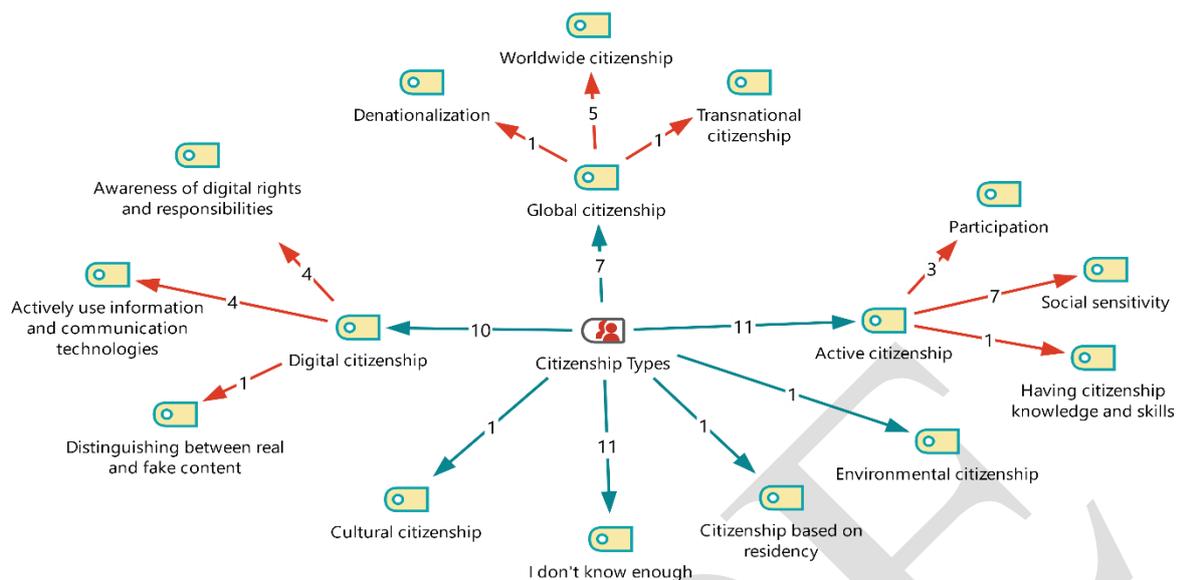


Figure 4. MAXMaps the Code Theory Model of types of citizenship.

Figure 4 shows that approximately one-third of teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about types of citizenship. The narratives of teachers who expressed their opinions reveal that teachers are most familiar with the concepts of active citizenship and digital citizenship. This situation shows that teachers define the concept of citizenship primarily through the types of citizenship that are prominent in current, widespread discourse.

When examining participants' definitions of active citizenship, they most often associate it with social awareness and participation. According to teachers, an active citizen is an individual who is not indifferent to events around them, takes responsibility for issues related to the country, and intervenes when necessary. For example, while some participants defined an active citizen as “a person who can intervene in events around them and actively take responsibility for issues related to the country” (P6, P9, P18, P24), others expressed it as “an individual who actively participates in all kinds of decisions and activities related to the country” (P1, P4). Furthermore, one teacher explained active citizenship as “possessing the knowledge and skills required for citizenship in democratic societies” (P25). These findings show that teachers perceive active citizenship primarily through a participatory lens, shaped by responsibility and sensitivity.

In their definitions of digital citizenship, teachers most often emphasized the dimensions of having digital rights and responsibilities and actively and correctly using information and communication technologies. In addition, some participants touched on themes such as distinguishing between correct and incorrect information in the digital environment and the removal of international borders, albeit to a limited extent.

An analysis of participants' narratives reveals that digital citizenship is defined as individuals being aware of their rights and responsibilities in digital environments (P9), using information and communication technologies correctly and effectively (P1, P18), and distinguishing between true and false news (P1). These definitions show that digital citizenship is approached more as conscious use and individual responsibility.

In the definitions of global citizenship, the emphasis was mostly on “world citizenship,” followed by the perception of transnational citizenship. Global citizenship has mostly been associated with a sense of belonging to the world and a global perspective. For example, one teacher defined global citizenship as “belonging to the world at the local, national, and international levels and working for the welfare of the world” (P1). In contrast, another teacher expressed it as “having a global perspective” (P9). However, one participant took a negative view of global citizenship, stating that the concept was



“created to destroy nations” (P3). This statement shows that the concept of global citizenship is perceived differently, and sometimes critically, by teachers.

Overall, the findings show that participants emphasized active and digital citizenship, while having more limited knowledge of other types of citizenship. In particular, environmental, cultural, and transnational dimensions of citizenship showed limited awareness. This suggests that teachers' understanding of citizenship is limited to certain normative and contemporary dimensions.

Teachers' views on the most important types of citizenship were analyzed, and the results are presented in Figure 5.

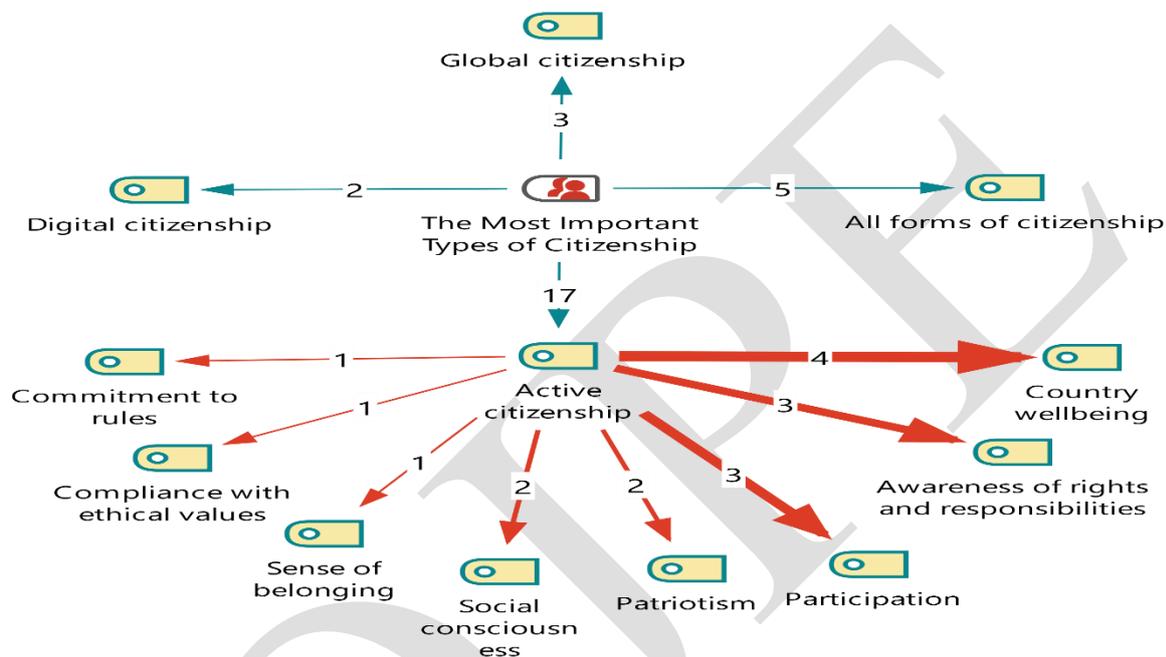


Figure 5. MAXMaps the Code Theory Model of the most important types of citizenship.

Figure 5 shows that the majority of teachers consider active citizenship to be the most important type of citizenship. In addition, some teachers stated that all types of citizenship are important, while others emphasized global and digital citizenship.

When examining why teachers consider active citizenship important, it is evident that this concept is particularly associated with contributing to the country's welfare, a sense of responsibility, and sensitivity to social issues. According to the participants, an active citizen is not only an individual who knows their rights but also someone who strives for the country's development. Indeed, one teacher stated that they see active citizenship as a “duty” to fight for the country's development, contribute to it, and serve the community (P10). Similarly, another participant stated that they do not consider individuals who do not see the country's problems as their own and do not produce solutions to be citizens (P18).

Some teachers explained active citizenship more in terms of duties and responsibilities. For example, one participant emphasized that citizens must fulfill their duties in the country's development (P7). At the same time, another stated that citizenship goes beyond responsibilities such as voting and military service and also includes actively intervening in social issues (P9). In this view, the teacher stated that an active role could be played through means such as petitioning or participating in civil society organizations on issues such as global warming, war, children's rights, and social equality.

When these findings are evaluated together, it is evident that while teachers associate active citizenship with participation, they interpret this participation more in terms of taking responsibility and contributing to society. Therefore, in teachers' perception, active citizenship represents the ideal of



individuals who support social order and work for the benefit of the country, rather than political participation and democratic decision-making processes.

The views of classroom teachers regarding the characteristics of an active citizen are presented in Figure 6.

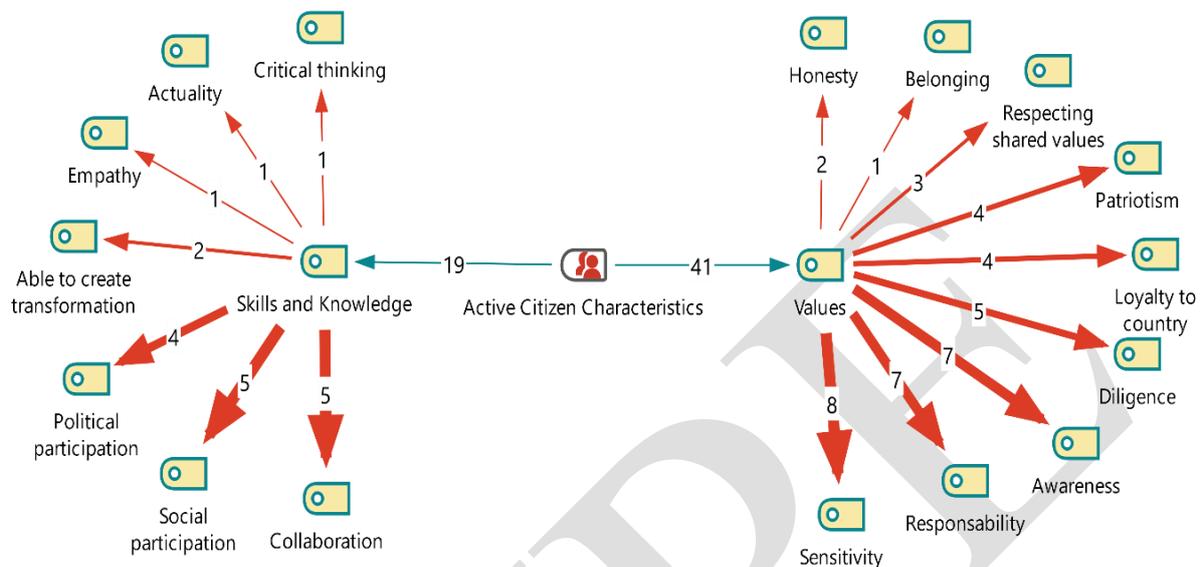


Figure 6. MAXMaps the Code Theory Model of active citizen characteristics.

Figure 6 shows that classroom teachers' views on the characteristics required for active citizenship are grouped around two main dimensions: values and knowledge and skills.

In the teachers' narratives, active citizens are primarily defined as individuals who possess certain personal and social values. Participants particularly emphasized sensitivity, responsibility, and awareness regarding the characteristics of an active citizen; these were followed by values such as diligence, loyalty to the country, patriotism, and respect for shared values. In these definitions, citizenship was primarily associated with an individual's sense of duty to society and the country. Indeed, one teacher defined an active citizen as “a person who is not indifferent to events around them, who can intervene and achieve results” (P14). In contrast, another teacher described them as “an individual who loves their country, is aware of their national and spiritual values, and is sensitive to their surroundings” (P17). Similarly, another participant stated that an active citizen is someone aware of their responsibilities and acts in cooperation with society (P18).

In terms of knowledge and skills, teachers associated cooperation, social participation, and political participation with the characteristics of active citizenship. However, they placed less emphasis on skills such as critical thinking, empathy, staying up to date on current events, and effecting change. Accordingly, it is possible to say that teachers interpret active citizenship more in terms of social harmony and responsibility, placing less emphasis on the dimensions of democratic debate and critical participation. However, some participants explained active citizenship directly through participation. For example, one teacher defined participating in a peaceful protest against a law they believed to be unfair as an act of active citizenship (P1). Another teacher described an active citizen as an honest, responsible, tax-paying individual who strives to protect their country (P22).

Overall, the findings reveal that teachers approach active citizenship in terms of both values and skills, but that the values dimension is more dominant than the skills dimension in this definition. In other words, in teachers' perceptions, active citizenship is highlighted more as an individual who maintains social order, fulfills responsibilities, and adapts to society, rather than as a critical and transformative actor.



Classroom teachers' views on citizenship education

Teachers' views on the aim of citizenship education were analyzed. The findings from classroom teachers on citizenship education are presented in Figure 7.

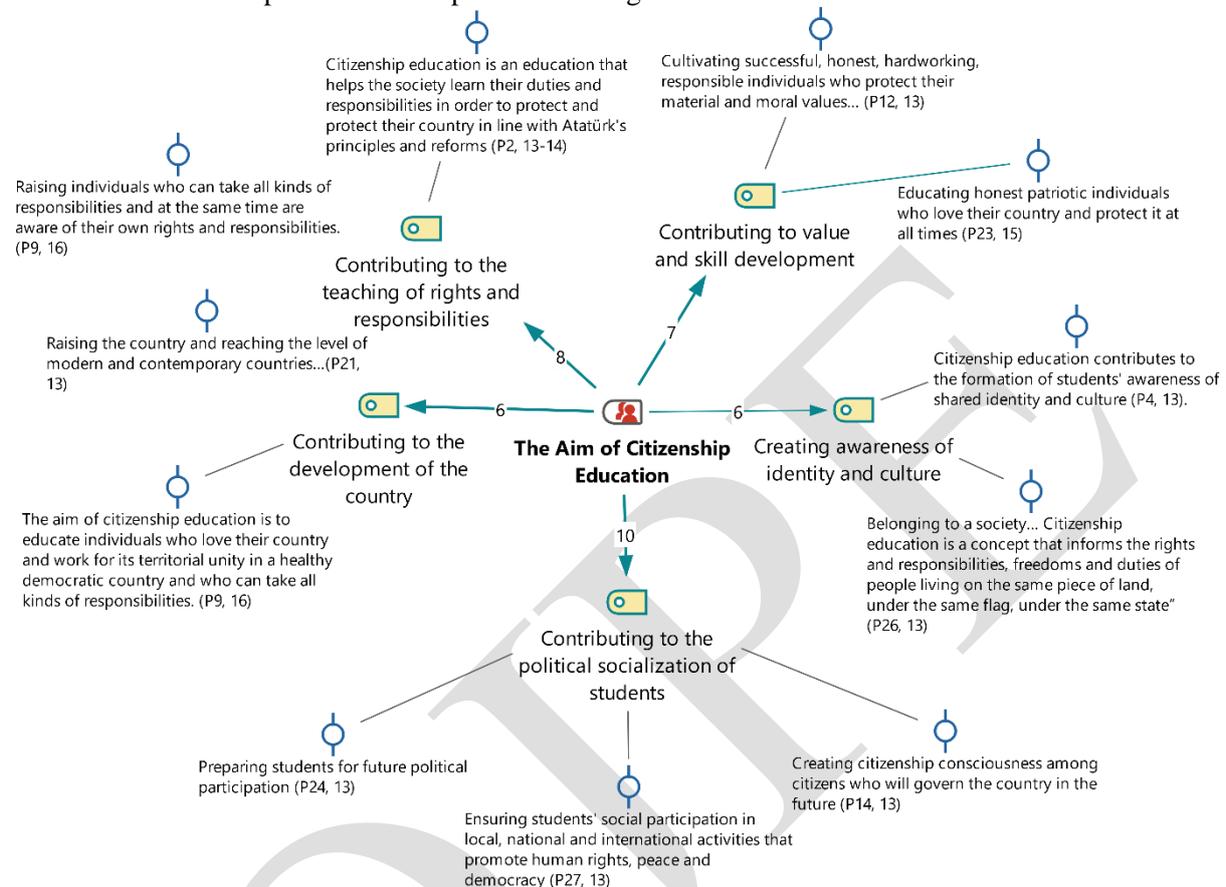


Figure 7. MAXMaps the Code Theory Model regarding the aim of citizenship education.

The opinions of classroom teachers reveal that perceptions of the purpose of citizenship education vary in different dimensions. Teachers define citizenship education not so much as a subject focused on the transfer of knowledge, but rather as a process that prepares students for social life and instills certain behavioral patterns. In this context, teachers' views were grouped around the categories of teaching rights and responsibilities, political socialization, value and skill development, contributing to the country's development, and identity-cultural awareness.

First, teachers expressed the fundamental purpose of citizenship education as developing students as individuals who know their rights and responsibilities. According to the participants, citizenship education is important for individuals learning their duties within society and contributing to the maintenance of social order. In this regard, citizenship education has been seen as a process that helps students acquire behaviors such as obeying rules, taking responsibility, and fulfilling their social obligations. In addition, teachers emphasized that citizenship education contributes to students' political socialization. Students' participation in social life, developing sensitivity to social issues, and understanding democratic processes have been considered important goals of citizenship education. In other words, citizenship education has been interpreted as a process that helps individuals recognize that they are members of society and take an active role in social life. In addition, teachers stated that citizenship education is closely related to the development of values and skills. Among the important goals of citizenship education are instilling values such as respect, responsibility, helpfulness, and social awareness in students, and developing skills such as cooperation, communication, and coexistence. In this respect, citizenship education has been evaluated as an area that supports not only cognitive but also emotional and social development. In the teachers' narratives, another objective of citizenship



education was to contribute to the country's development. Participants associated the progress of society and the development of the country with the cultivation of conscious individuals. Therefore, in civic education, social benefit and collective responsibility were considered important beyond individual gains. Finally, teachers stated that civic education creates identity and cultural awareness in students. Students feeling that they belong to the society they live in, recognizing cultural values, and developing awareness of their shared past were seen as important functions of civic education.

Overall, the findings show that while teachers accept civic education as an area that develops participatory democratic processes, they interpret this process primarily in terms of its functions of maintaining social order, instilling responsibility, and creating a sense of belonging.

Implementation of Citizenship Education: Courses, Methods, and Experiential Contexts

Figure 8 presents classroom teachers' opinions on which courses or extracurricular activities provide citizenship education.

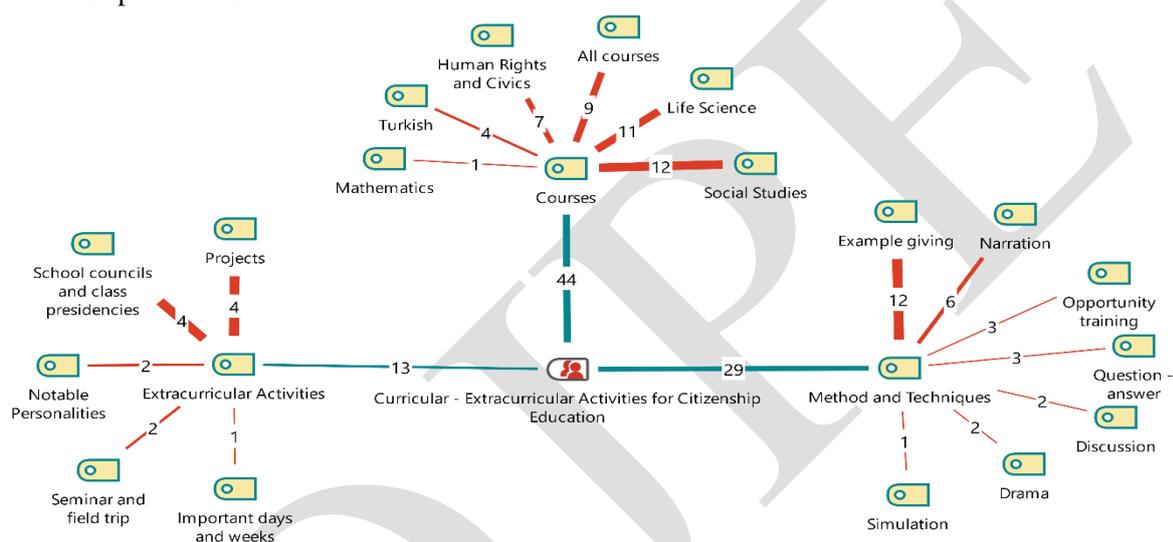


Figure 8. MAXMaps the Code Theory Model regarding activities for citizenship education.

Teachers' views regarding the courses and activities through which they implement citizenship education were grouped under three main categories: courses, instructional methods and techniques, and extracurricular activities.

In their narratives, teachers stated that social studies, life sciences, and the human rights and citizenship course were particularly influential in developing citizenship awareness. However, some teachers also emphasized that citizenship education is not limited to specific subjects and that all courses can contribute to developing this awareness. For example, one teacher stated that “although all courses are important in building citizenship awareness, life sciences, social studies, and human rights courses are more decisive in this regard” (P1). Similarly, another participant expressed that “this awareness can be developed in all courses where activities can be carried out” (P25). These findings indicate that teachers view citizenship education not as content belonging to a particular subject, but as an interdisciplinary area.

When the instructional methods used to develop citizenship awareness are examined, it is evident that teachers rely primarily on exemplification and lecturing. In addition, techniques such as question–answer, drama, incidental teaching, and limited discussion were also mentioned in teacher narratives. One teacher stated that they planned to develop citizenship awareness by explaining important historical figures and national examples (P25). Another teacher reported using lecturing, question–and–answer, and drama methods and noted that they tried to concretize the abstract nature of the concept of citizenship (P3). Another participant stated that they paid special attention to democracy and social identity development in their lessons and asked students questions such as “Who would I be if I had



been born and raised in another family?" in order to foster empathy (P14). Moreover, presenting individuals who contribute to their country in sports, arts, and science was also expressed as a way of building citizenship awareness (P10). These findings show that teachers mainly adopt an information-transmission, teacher-centered, and example-based approach in citizenship education, while participatory and discussion-oriented methods are used more limitedly.

Within extracurricular activities, teachers reported including projects, school councils, class representative elections, seminars, trips, and special days and weeks. These activities were evaluated as environments in which students could experience citizenship. One teacher stated that practices such as school councils and student representation provide students with the opportunity to experience citizenship (P9). Another teacher reported providing a democratic experience through in-class elections and voting practices (P13). International projects were also considered a field that develops citizenship awareness. For instance, one teacher stated that projects such as eTwinning, which enable students to collaborate with peers from different cultures, help develop values such as respect, empathy, and responsibility (P1). Similarly, another participant indicated that they directed students toward projects they could participate in outside school (P21). These findings show that teachers do not limit citizenship education only to classroom instruction and teaching methods, but also include experience-based activities. However, when the scope of these activities is examined, they appear to remain largely limited to school-based settings.

When the research findings are considered together, it can be said that teachers' views on the aims of citizenship education are consistent with their understanding of the concept of citizenship. Teachers most often define citizenship in terms of identity, belonging, responsibility, and social order. Accordingly, they associate citizenship education primarily with students learning their rights and responsibilities, achieving social adaptation, and developing values. In contrast, the participation dimension of citizenship, such as democratic discussion, critical thinking, and political participation, remains in the background.

Teachers also reflect this understanding in their pedagogical practices. Although teachers state that active citizenship is the most important type of citizenship, in classroom practices, they mostly prefer lecturing, exemplification, and guidance-based instructional approaches. Extracurricular activities are seen as those that support student participation; however, this participation generally remains limited to school-based, structured activities.

Therefore, the findings show that teachers' understandings of citizenship do not directly translate into pedagogical practices in citizenship education. In other words, while active citizenship is strongly emphasized in teacher narratives, a more normative, transmission-based approach to citizenship education emerges in teaching practices.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and SUGGESTIONS

Revealing teachers' views and perspectives on the concept of citizenship and citizenship education constitutes an important resource regarding how citizenship education is addressed in schools. This study, in line with research findings, examines classroom teachers' understanding of the concept of citizenship and citizenship education, and how this understanding is reflected in their classroom pedagogical practices.

The findings reveal that classroom teachers conceptualize citizenship as acquiring national legal status and identity, knowing rights and responsibilities, and being participatory and patriotic. In teachers' narratives, citizenship was defined in terms of belonging, shared values, and a sense of responsibility; the dimensions of participation and negotiation were addressed to a lesser extent. This situation shows that teachers primarily perceive citizenship as a cultural and normative identity. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that teachers' understanding of citizenship in Turkey is largely shaped by national identity and duty (Güven et al., 2009; Malkoç & Ata, 2021; Kadioğlu et al., 2016; Gürkan & Doğanay, 2020). However, this research differs from other studies in that it reveals that this normative understanding of citizenship is not merely a matter of perception but also decisive in teachers'



pedagogical practices. In the international literature, teachers' perceptions of citizenship vary by context. While participatory citizenship is prominent in countries such as Chile, Australia, England, and the USA (Chin & Barber, 2010; Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2019), research has shown that national and nationalist understandings of citizenship are dominant in more centralized countries such as Singapore (Sim, 2008). In light of these findings, it is possible to say that teachers' understanding of citizenship is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by national citizenship culture and education policies. In the study, teachers emphasized active citizenship as the most important type of citizenship. However, when examining teachers' definitions of active citizenship, it is evident that this concept is primarily addressed in terms of responsibility, social sensitivity, and working for the benefit of the country. It is noteworthy that dimensions such as political participation, social participation, critical inquiry, and democratic deliberation are given limited attention. This result draws attention to the theoretical distinction between normative and participatory citizenship, which are frequently discussed in the literature (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Veugelers, 2007; Biesta, 2011). Normative citizenship is based on the individual's adaptation to the social order, fulfillment of responsibilities, and commitment to common values. In contrast, participatory citizenship is based on the individual's critical thinking, participation in public debates, and active role in democratic decision-making processes (Parker, 2008; Biesta, 2011). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) consider citizenship in three types: "responsible citizen," "participatory citizen," and "justice-oriented citizen." The findings of this research show that although teachers stated they considered active citizenship important, their understanding of active citizenship was more closely defined within the category of "responsible citizenship." Indeed, teachers define an active citizen as an individual who is responsible, sensitive to social problems, loyal to their country, hardworking, and supportive of social order. Although teachers' narratives refer to social and political participation, it is clear from the relevant definitions that this understanding of participation remains within a normative framework.

These results can be considered a reflection of Turkey's historical citizenship culture. In Turkey, the understanding of citizenship has been shaped around duty, loyalty, and national unity since the proclamation of the Republic (Üstel, 2004; Kadioğlu, 2006). Considering this historical background, it is not surprising that although teachers embrace the discourse of active citizenship, their definitions of active citizenship are closer to the "responsible citizen" typology. In this context, the research results show that ideal citizenship education can be achieved not only through curriculum changes but also through the restructuring of teachers' beliefs and pedagogical backgrounds.

According to the research results, classroom teachers view the main purpose of citizenship education as fostering civic awareness among their students. In addition, in the teachers' narratives, citizenship education is considered important for contributing to students' socialization processes through political and social participation, raising individuals' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, instilling national identity and cultural awareness, and supporting the development of values and skills related to citizenship. In this respect, teachers evaluate citizenship education not so much as a process of information transfer, but as a process that influences students' ability to find their place in social life. These findings largely coincide with studies in the literature. In Önal, Öztürk, and Kenan's (2018) study, teachers in England reported that citizenship education improved students' social skills, increased their political literacy, and strengthened their capacity to question world problems. Çetiner and Şimşir (2024), on the other hand, revealed that teachers expressed the aims of citizenship education more as raising individuals who fulfill their duties, contribute to the social order, and benefit their families and country. Similarly, Badou's (2013) study highlighted the dimensions of developing political literacy, fostering identity awareness, and teaching rights and responsibilities in citizenship education. Parallel to these findings, the Eurydice (2017) report also shows that citizenship education in European countries focuses on goals such as critical thinking, political literacy, and active participation. From this perspective, it is possible to say that the aims expressed by teachers are aligned with those of international citizenship education. However, as seen in the present study, the issue that needs to be discussed is not so much the aims of citizenship education themselves, but rather how these aims are reflected in classroom pedagogical practices.



Regarding the subjects through which citizenship education is provided, social studies, life skills, and human rights and citizenship courses were most frequently mentioned by teachers. This indicates that citizenship education is identified with specific subjects. The literature frequently emphasizes the central role of social studies lessons in acquiring citizenship knowledge, skills, and values (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Uğurlu, 2011; Polat, Özgül, & Bayram, 2023). However, the perception of citizenship education as being integrated into the content of specific courses suggests that citizenship is treated more as a program-based content. Regarding teaching methods, it was found that teachers most frequently use information-transfer-based methods, such as lecturing, providing examples, and question-and-answer sessions. More participatory methods, such as drama, discussion, and projects, are less frequently used, and it appears that a teacher-centered approach generally prevails in citizenship education.

This result presents a striking picture, given that active citizenship is widely regarded as the most important type of citizenship in teachers' discourse. The emphasis on active and participatory citizenship in teachers' narratives shows inconsistency with their classroom practices. However, international literature indicates a strong relationship between teachers' beliefs and pedagogical preferences (Thornton, 2005; Sampermans et al., 2021; De Schaepmeester et al., 2022). However, when viewed specifically in Turkey, this inconsistency can be explained by several factors: the historical shaping of the understanding of citizenship in Turkey around the axes of duty, commitment, and social unity; insufficient emphasis on the practical application of citizenship education in teacher training programs; and the perception of political issues as sensitive in the classroom environment, leading teachers to prefer more controllable methods.

Conclusion

This research reveals how classroom teachers understand the concept of citizenship and citizenship education, and how this understanding is reflected in classroom practices. The research findings show that teachers largely address citizenship within the framework of national identity, belonging, responsibility, and social order. Despite the emphasis on active citizenship in teachers' discourse, the study concludes that this concept is primarily understood in terms of raising responsible and compliant individuals. The study also concluded that there is a certain gap between the aims of citizenship education and teachers' classroom pedagogical practices. Accordingly, teachers value students' political and social participation through citizenship education; however, in classroom practice, they tend towards a more information-transfer-based, teacher-centered approach.

In conclusion, strengthening citizenship education within a more participatory, critical, and democratic framework seems possible not only through program changes but also through a reassessment of teachers' understanding of citizenship and their classroom practices. In this context, this study makes a conceptual and contextual contribution to the literature by highlighting the gap between teachers' ideals and practical applications in citizenship education.

Recommendations

This research has revealed a gap between teachers' understanding of citizenship and their classroom practices. Therefore, teacher training programs should focus more on democratic and participatory approaches to citizenship education, rather than solely on conceptual content. Teacher candidates should be equipped with skills in discussion-based teaching, creating a conducive classroom environment, and fostering community engagement. Future research could compare the relationship between teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices across various contexts.

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest

This study was approved by Çukurova University, Social and Humanities Research Ethics Board, no 957032, on 14.03.2024. The author declares that they acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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