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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Human Rights And Citizenship Education In The Primary School Curriculum In Turkey

Necmi Aksit,
Bilkent University (Turkey)

Abstract

Citizenship education is increasingly considered as a means to addressing social, political and economic challenges facing societies today. Many countries define values that determine the parameters of such education, and include courses in their curriculum to foster them. Citizenship education in Turkey has been provided under various titles since 1924, and the recent Citizenship and Human Rights Education strand was included in the curriculum in 1998. The main aim of the study is to identify the salient characteristics of this strand as reflected through the grades seven and eight textbooks within the framework of the new constructivist primary school curriculum.

Turkey has a population of 73 million, about 21 million of which is under fifteen years old. Of these, more than ten million are enrolled in the primary educational institutions (TÜİK, 2007). Compulsory basic education in Turkey is eight years. Education in schools is governed centrally by the Ministry of National Education (MONE). Turkey has been making changes to its national curriculum since 2004. The new primary school curriculum is constructivist in nature, placing significant emphasis on student-centred teaching. Many textbooks have been rewritten in the primary school curriculum, and some others are in the process of redesigning.

Although textbooks are not the sole means of acquisition or adoption of any key concepts or skills, they reflect the essence of a particular curriculum, and determine most instructional aims, content and activities.

What constitutes citizenship education and how it is implemented explicitly and implicitly vary across countries. In Turkey, *Citizenship and Human Rights Education* strand is explicitly introduced through two courses, one offered in grade seven and the other in grade eight.

The main focus of the study is to analyze content, cognitive and instructional domains of this strand within the framework of the new curriculum in Turkey.

Methodology

This study used content and didactic analysis to collect descriptive data about various aspects of grade seven and eight textbooks. To facilitate data collection, the study concentrated on the following domains: content, cognitive, and instructional.

Didactic analysis focuses on ‘the methodological approach to the topic, exploring the pedagogy behind the text, while content analysis examines the text itself’ (Pingel, 1999; p.18).

To this end, the following steps have been followed:

- identifying themes and topics in each textbook
- describing the structure of each textbook
- explaining what each unit in each textbook includes
- displaying the instructional time allocated in each unit
- presenting cognitive gains within the framework of Bloom’s taxonomy
- demonstrating range of activities/tasks within the framework of Bloom’s taxonomy

Results

The *Citizenship and Human Rights Education* course is one hour-a-week course implemented in grades 7 and 8 until the end of 2007-08 academic year.

Overall themes

The central themes of grades seven and eight textbooks are: *Common Heritage of Humanity, Human Rights, Citizenship and National Security*. These themes are covered under the following headings:

- Common Heritage of Humanity
- Human Rights
- Ethics and Human Rights
- Fundamental Rights and Freedoms
- State, Democracy, Constitution, Citizenship, and Rights and Responsibilities
- Protection of Human Rights
- National Security and Elements of National Security
- Obstacles to Protection of Human Rights

Grade seven textbook

Structure

There are 172 pages in the textbook, and it is composed of four units: I. *Common Heritage of Humanity*; II. *Human Rights*; III. *Ethic and Human Rights*; IV. *Fundamental Rights and Freedoms*.

Each unit opens with the introduction of central themes and topics, and continues with an explanation of what students will be able to do after completing the unit, and how they should be studying. Writing is descriptive and explanatory in general but there are statements suggesting who should be doing what. There are questions and extension activities between headings and sub-headings to guide student learning. Graphic elements are used to support the explanations given. Each unit finishes with a summary, set of exercises and evaluation questions.

Each unit follows the pattern below:

- Topics: what are we going to learn?:
- Targets: why should we study this unit?
- Study strategies: How should we study?
- Main content with headings and sub-heading
- Tasks, activities and questions between texts
- Graphic elements (illustrations, charts, etc)
- Summary
- Exercises
- Evaluation questions

The textbook begins, under the flag of Turkey, with the lyrics of the Turkish national anthem, and it continues with Ataturk's address to the Turkish Youth, and a portrait of Ataturk. It finishes with the following sections: *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (abridged), Answer Key, Glossary, References*

Units

The first unit of grade seven opens with the introduction of the following key concepts: human, humanity, and common heritage. The next sub-section further explores the common heritage of humanity in the areas of art, philosophy, literature and science. The unit finishes with the importance of common heritage: how it is formed, and importance of contributing to and the right to benefit from heritage. This unit constitutes about ten percent of the textbook.

The next unit introduces the concept of human rights: the concept of *right*, emergence and development of human rights; characteristics of human rights in terms of universal, behavioural and legal principles. This unit forms about eleven percent of the textbook.

The third unit begins with the concepts of morality and ethics, and focuses on ethic values, ethic foundations of human rights, and being responsible as a human being. This unit occupies about twelve percent of the textbook.

The opening part of the last unit presents fundamental rights such as right to live, right to health care and education, privacy, right to vote and to be elected. The unit continues with basic freedoms; for example,

freedom of speech, press, religion, petition, and assembly. After the introduction of basic rights and freedoms, the remaining part of the unit is centred around duties of the state in the manifestation of human rights: executive, legislative, and judiciary powers. The fourth unit finishes with children’s rights, right to the conservation and protection of the environment, and copyright and patent rights. This unit represents about fifty percent of the textbook.

Each unit ends with a summary, a set of exercises, and unit evaluation questions.

The textbook finishes with the following sections: *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (abridged), *the Declaration of the Rights of Children* (abridged), *Answer Key*, *Glossary*, and *References*.

Instructional time

Students meet for about an hour every week for 36 weeks: 34 hours of instruction and 2 hours for two exams. A total of 61 content areas are introduced in two semesters.

Table 1 – Topics and instructional time

Grade 7		
	Number of topics/sub-topics	Instructional time allocated (hours)
Unit 1	12	11
Unit 2	11	6
Unit 3	13	10
Unit 4	27	7
Total	61	34

Intended Cognitive Gains

This study uses Benjamin Bloom’s conception of taxonomy of educational objectives to show the range of cognitive gains aimed in the grade seven and eight textbooks (Bloom, Hastings and Madaus, 1971; Bloom, 1956). The cognitive domain of the taxonomy is composed of six levels: knowledge (recall), comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. To bring forth the cognitive gains in each theme and unit of the textbook, the main objectives of each teaching unit were identified and listed first, and to quantify the qualitative data, they were coded and categorized using a spreadsheet program (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

There are twenty-one objectives in the cognitive domain: eleven at the *knowledge* level, seven at *comprehension* level, and three at the *application* level. There are also four objectives in the affective domain of the Bloom’s Taxonomy.

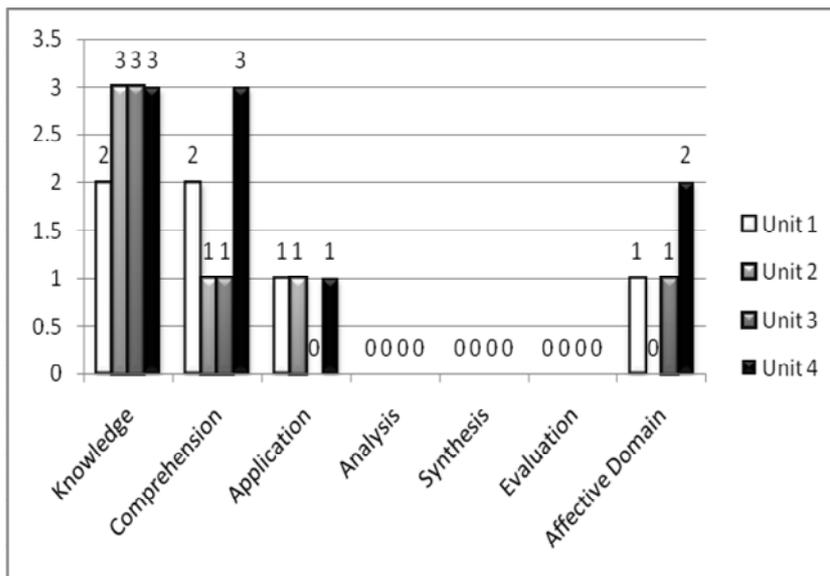


Figure 1 -Number of objectives in each unit

There are no objectives at the level of *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation*. The textbook does not intend to focus on developing higher-order thinking skills.

Range of activities/tasks

There are about eighty seven small-scale activities and tasks included in the grade seven textbook.

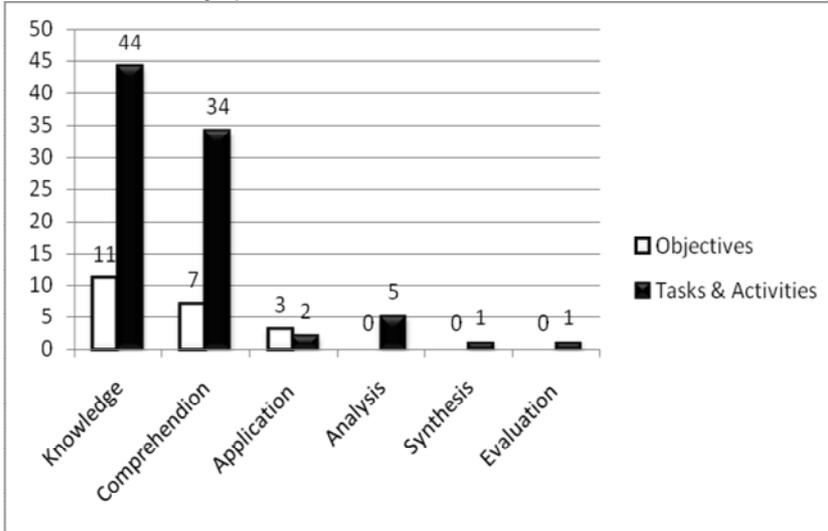


Figure 2 -Objectives and activities and tasks

What the activities and tasks expect students to do reflect the formal course objectives to a large extent. However, although there are no objective formulated at analysis, synthesis and evaluation levels, there are tasks/activities expecting student to demonstrate these cognitive skills.

Grade eight textbook

Structure

There are 110 pages in the textbook, and it contains four units: I. *State, Democracy, Constitution, Citizenship, and Rights and Responsibilities*; II. *Protection of Human Rights*; III. *National Security and Elements of National Security*; IV. *Obstacles to Protection of Human Rights*.

Each unit opens with a set of preparation questions concerning the concepts introduced in each unit. Writing is descriptive and explanatory in general but there are statements suggesting who should be doing what. There are questions and extension activities between headings and sub-headings to guide student learning. Graphic elements are used to support the explanations given. Each unit finishes with a summary, and evaluation questions.

Each unit includes the following sections:

- Tasks for preparation (advance organizers)
- Main content with headings and sub-headings
- Tasks, activities and questions between texts
- Graphic elements (illustrations, charts, graphic organizers, etc)
- Texts from various genres to contextualize concepts
- Evaluation questions

The textbook begins, under the flag of Turkey, with the lyrics of the Turkish national, and it continues with Ataturk's address to the Turkish Youth, and a portrait of Ataturk.

It finishes with the following sections: *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (abridged)*, *the Declaration of the Rights of Children (abridged)*, *Answer Key*, *Glossary*, *References*

Units

The first unit of the grade eight textbook introduces the following key concepts: state, democracy, constitution, citizen, public, and civil society. After the introduction of the administrative structure of the Republic of Turkey, the unit one focuses on social, economic and political rights, responsibilities of a citizen, and solidarity. This unit constitutes about twenty-six percent of the textbook.

The next unit promotes the importance of protecting human rights. To this end, the role of local governmental and non-governmental institutions, and international organizations is presented first, and then the importance of human rights education. This unit forms about twelve percent of the textbook.

The third unit begins with national power, national security policy, and elements of national security. The rest of the unit concentrates on terrorism: internal and external threats, responsibilities of individuals, and how to fight against terrorism. This unit occupies eighteen percent of the textbook.

The last unit focuses on various obstacles that may be encountered while protecting human rights: the obstacles stemming from state of politics and economy, and those arising from lack of education, and lack of tolerance. This unit represents about thirty percent of the textbook.

Each unit ends with a reading passage about one of the themes of the unit, and unit evaluation questions that are composed of true-false, short-answer, and multiple-choice questions.

The textbook finishes with the following sections: *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (abridged), *the Declaration of the Rights of Children* (abridged), *Answer Key*, *Glossary*, and *References*.

Instructional time

Students meet for about an hour every week for 36 weeks: 34 hours of instruction and 2 hours for two exams. A total of 104 content areas are introduced in two semesters.

Table 2 Topics and instructional time

Grade 8		
	Number of topics/sub-topics	Instructional time allocated (hours)
Unit 1	24	8
Unit 2	19	6
Unit 3	46	8
Unit 4	15	12
Total	104	34

Intended Cognitive Gains

There are seventeen objectives in the cognitive domain: seven at the *knowledge* level, eight at *comprehension* level, and two at the *application* level. There is also one objective in the affective domain of the Bloom’s Taxonomy.

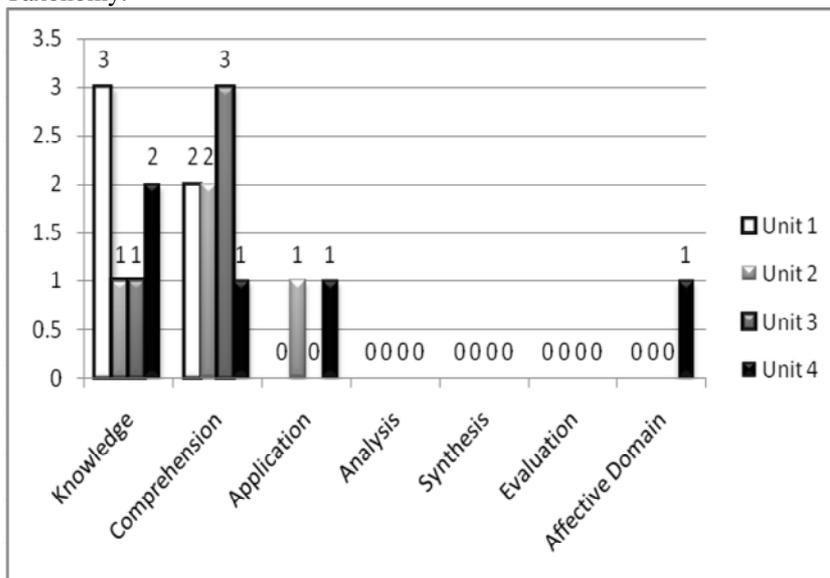


Figure 3 –Number of objectives
Range of activities/tasks

There are about forty small-scale activities and tasks included in the grade eight textbook.

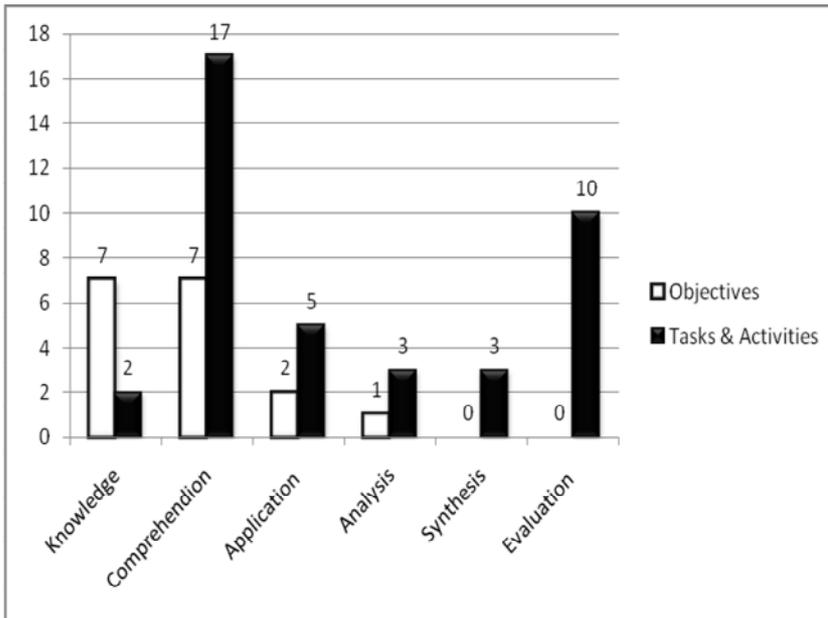


Figure 4 -Objectives and activities and tasks

There about seventeen tasks and activities at *comprehension* level. What the activities and tasks expect students to perform do not reflect the formal course objectives. Although there are no objectives formulated at synthesis and evaluation levels, there are tasks/activities expecting student to demonstrate these cognitive skills.

Objectives and Tasks and Activities

Overall, formally given objectives in grade seven and grade eight textbooks do not reflect the cognitive demands of the activities/tasks included in the textbooks.

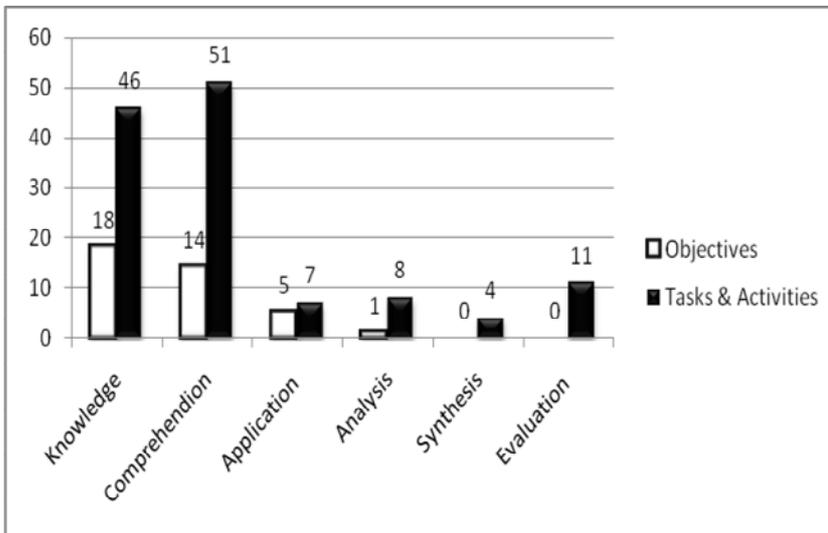


Figure 5 – Total objectives and activities and tasks in grade seven & eight textbooks

Conclusions

The main emphasis of the previous curriculum in Turkey was unfortunately on transmission of knowledge, and memorization of facts. There was also too much content to be covered at each grade level. The new curriculum, however, aims to place more emphasis on constructivist principles, encouraging learners to

construct their meaning through active involvement, use of higher-order thinking skills (i.e. analysis, synthesis and evaluation), and reflecting on experiences.

The analysis of the grade seven and eight textbooks reveals the following:

- There is still too much content but limited instructional time to internalize various key concepts. Too many terms are introduced in each unit.
- Cognitive objectives are not aligned with the philosophy of the new curriculum. The textbooks do not reflect the nature of the new constructivist curriculum.
- Majority of the formal objectives focus on the development of lower order cognitive skills. Cognitive range of objectives covered in each textbook is limited: mainly knowledge (recall), comprehension, and application. The textbooks do not intend to focus on analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills.
- There are few tasks and activities that encourage student initiation and construction of knowledge. There are many small scale tasks and activities, only some of which aim at developing higher order thinking skills, but again there is limited instructional time to understand and apply key concepts.
- Objectives, and tasks and activities are not in harmony with each other. Some activities and tasks go beyond curricular intentions in terms of cognitive skills. This is desirable but is not anywhere acknowledged.
- Tasks and activities do not provide desirable models for teachers to engage students, and help them explore concepts.

The study makes the following recommendations to address the conclusions drawn:

- Increase instructional time
- Reduce instructional content and number of concepts introduced
- Cover a broader range of cognitive skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation
- Include instructional materials introducing a variety of teaching strategies
- Include activities and tasks that reflect the broader range of cognitive skills
- Include activities and tasks that are interesting enough to attract student attention and help students personalize key concepts through authentic extension or enrichment activities

After the researcher started analyzing the textbooks, the MONE incorporated this strand into the social studies (grades 6 and 7) with some significant modifications. It is now the intention of the researcher to analyze the social studies textbooks (grades six and seven) to ascertain what changes have been made, and extent to which the conclusions drawn in this study have been addressed.

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