

Teachers' perceptions of citizenship education in Greek secondary education¹

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Abstract

International developments and the constant transformation of intertemporal principles and values tend to undermine the social cohesion and the stability of democracy. Under these circumstances, education plays a decisive role as it becomes necessary to form a new active democratic citizen who is harmonized with current requirements. In this context, the current study investigates, through twelve semi-structured interviews, the views of Secondary Education teachers' (of the Argolida Regional Unit) understanding the implementation of citizenship in the modern educational environment. Their perceptions about the role of education and teachers in the formation of young citizens, the teaching tools and the purposes that provide the triptych of knowledge-values-attitudes were explored. The results showed highlighted significant shortcomings in active participatory culture, specialized staff, continuing professional training, practice of democracy, and the rigid pressing structure of the curriculum. These deficiencies led to ineffective teaching practices and tools that are a brake on the balanced promotion of knowledge-values-attitudes triptych.

Keywords

Citizenship, Citizenship Education, Teachers, Active Citizen, Social and Civics Education

The concept of citizenship

Citizenship is a meaningful concept, evolving and particularly controversial in Western political philosophy. It refers to the social, civil and political rights of the citizen, on how he will actively participate in the public sphere, the inclusion of social groups and individuals (Petrou, 2011), the relationship developed by the citizens with the official state, the identity and the 'belonging' to an organized society (Keating, 2014; Osler & Starkey, 2008). It is a concept that has been

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transformed: from the liberal perception in communitarian where the citizen, with extended autonomy, can redefine existing structures and democracy (Kymlicka, 2005), reaching the supranational cosmopolitan perception of a peaceful and democratic world based on equality and justice (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Cosmopolitan identity does not lead to rejection of the national but to a broader understanding of this, by linking the local to the national and global elements (Osler & Starkey, 2008). Nowadays, changes in the institutional characteristics of national states have led to the association of citizenship with post-nationality citizenship (Sassen, 2002), European governance and civil society (Scholte, 1999), while digital citizenship is a contemporary tendency linked to information and knowledge, through the use of a variety of digital media (Hargittai, 2002).

The need to create a new democratic and active citizen is emerging, while education will be the ideal means of shaping it by providing education and culture. Citizenship is achieved through a complete education that includes universal human and intertemporal values (Panjwani, 2009), while, nowadays, it has been expanding into the development of skills, values and attitudes that will activate the citizen (Torney-Purta, 2002), in order to ensure his involvement in the life of community (Varnham, Evers, Booth, & Avgoustinos, 2016), in decision-making (Lieberkind, 2014) and the information provided.

Post-truth

D. Trump's election campaign and the Brexit referendum marked the official start of the post-truth era shaping a political and social culture where political dialogue is characterized by personal feelings and the frequent repetition of fake news ignoring the objective elements (Horsthemke, 2017). According to Keyes (2004), in the post-truth era, between truth and lie, honesty and dishonesty, myth and reality the boundaries are unspecified, while the deception of others is finally becoming a habit. The truth in the political scene does not arise from the comparison of relevant facts but constructs its own events. The widespread use of social networking media facilitates the transmission in geometrical progression of medium-sized fake news, strengthening the existed prejudices, incapacity for moral thinking and the rise of extreme and conservative positions. The identification and immediate rejection of misinformation are extremely difficult, creating confusion, polarized narratives, and inability to use evidence in political debate (Landon-Murray, 2017). In the midst of the dominance of populism on the political scene, it is a conscious intention of deception, not a cognitive dearth. In the post-truth era, active communal involvement and activist action are a response to the targeting of minority groups as responsible for increasing social inequalities and challenging the independence and objectivity of scientists and researchers (Lockie, 2017). According to Harsin (2015), we are now transiting from "truth regimes" to "post-truth regimes". The real danger to democracy originates

in those who cannot distinguish the myth from reality because of the encouragement of subjective interpretation of the truth.

Researches show that children, adolescents, students and also adults are increasingly unable to distinguish between news and fake news, a scientific study and an advertising promotion (Horsthemke, 2017). Nowadays, the ability to recognize the truth from a lie is a skill that is cultivated through the development of critical thinking and digital literacy, while education's role is decisive as it is able to shape the future of a connected generation from an early age.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is a contemporary trend that is linked to the active citizenship and participation of the individual through information and knowledge. The digital citizen is the one who effectively uses the digital world by knowing the rights and obligations arising from this use (Hargittai, 2002). Nowadays, digital citizenship is redefined as the digital world is now the world we live in and experience every day. The individuals and groups can create new forms of communities and transform them (Choi, 2016), critically analyze the social, political, economic and environmental implications of technologies in everyday life and undertake collective actions creating new alternative and independent technological practices (Emejulu & McGregor, 2016). In a networked society, power belongs to those who control, plan and connect sovereign networks, while citizens' response depends on the ability to construct new democratic networks (Castells, as cited in Emejulu & McGregor, 2016). Twitter, e.g. was used to citizens' narration and mobilization by significantly increasing participation rates in activist actions.

Digital citizenship is one of the aspects of education technology and needs to be supported by the entire educational community. Mostly it focuses on recognizing the technological policies, the messages they convey and their consequences for the various social groups, the cooperation and the creation of alternative communicative networks so that citizens can convey their own messages, overcoming the obstacles posed by economic and state rulers (Emejulu & McGregor, 2016). Modern digital citizenship education requires a change and adding the concept of modern digital citizenship to curricula in order to be effective. Teaching must direct students to be able to take on responsibilities, to be creative members of their traditional and online communities and to use the internet as a means of challenging important social issues, critique, social interaction, exchange of ideas, source of information and asynchronous discussions (Bowell, 2017; Castro Samayoa & Nicolazzo, 2017; Choi, 2016). Teachers also need to get out of the classroom and understand the possibilities of education by providing students with advanced and higher levels of skills and knowledge for the online expression of ideas and opinions as well as the assessment of the information provided.

Education and Citizenship

Education for citizenship is a secondary actor in the process of socialization and politicization of young people after the family and therefore has a strong shaping role (Osler, 2011). It cultivates students on universal and intertemporal values at the same time developing the crisis, participatory, ability to act and caring for sustainable development (Bourn, 2016). The active training in order to ensure the involvement of young people in community life is highlighted as the main educational priority (Varnham et al., 2016), although their participation in community activities is still low in our days (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, & Burge, 2010). The causes are identified in the individual experiences and strong influence of the family which significantly weaken the influence of education on the shaping of the citizen (Isac, Maslowski, Creemers, & Van der Werf, 2014; Keating 2014). Citizenship education reflects dominant social values and patterns, leading, as many argue, in the shaping of competitive citizens and consumers as well as in the expansion and consolidation of dominant policies (Papastefanou, 2009).

In this process, the teacher plays an important role by applying the appropriate practices and creating a positive climate in order to be achieved the intake of political values by the pupils through knowledge and experiences in school or social issues (Davies, 2011). Collaborative learning, work plans, communication, research, and dialogue are considered effective teaching practices. However, the contradiction that exists between the creation of a positive environment within the classroom from the teacher and the small influence and participation of pupils in decision-making processes in the school organization works inhibitory to the achievement of goals and weakens the good practices (Lieberkind, 2014; Varnham et al., 2016). In modern times, the new professionalism of the teacher links his competence with his cognitive specialization and training. It is proposed that he be involved in social actors and action plans, seeking to improve the community, increase social justice, gain experience (Bourn, 2016) and become a model for his pupils. In most European countries, a shortage of specialized teachers without initial or continuing retraining that adversely affects the quality of the education provided and leads to inefficiency of the objectives has been observe. Under these conditions, the need for retraining, theoretical and practical training, both at the undergraduate level and on a continuous basis, is raised by the teachers, mostly focusing on the improvement of teaching and learning practices, their understanding and sensitization to values that are at the heart of the citizenship education (Eurydice, 2017; Lieberkind, 2014; Varnham et al., 2016).

Textbooks are often the subject of intense discussion concerning of their content as they reflect state education policy. According to Ververi (2017), continuous references to specific themes, such as globalization, aim at shaping specific values and attitudes. School textbooks are a tool for the teachers to promotion of the citizenship (Collado & Atxurra, 2006). They consider themselves that the

textbooks to sufficient degree provide the theoretical knowledge they need, although they are worried about their dependence on them, their age, the gaps and the issues they deal with (Kerr, 1999). Nowadays, they continue to dominate the educational process while teachers envision more discussion with students, time and new educational material (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

Educational practices for citizenship are oriented to the basic idea of democratic school, to the shaping of democratic and active future citizens. Cooperative and transformational learning, working groups, projects and school boards constitution promote active participation, reflection, critical thinking and action (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). They are the main way of exercising the citizenship and a practical and experiential experience. Students are expected to understand how they can choose to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem (Isac et al., 2014).

Citizenship education in most European countries is taught as a compulsory course, either a stand-alone or cross-curricular (Eurydice, 2012), and promotes an educational experience and experiential learning beyond the boundaries of the school or the community (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Zalewska, & Karakatsani, 2017). Either the civics model or the citizenship education model are used as two different approaches that are often involved and illustrate the way of the citizenship is transmitted through education, and the relationship between individuals and state (ibid). In the civics aspect, learning emphasizes the understanding of the principles and practices that support political institutions and political life in communities and societies. It promotes academic knowledge of the institutions, rights and obligations of citizens, historical and cultural elements that compose the communities so that young people understand how the state and democratic institutions operate (Prior, 2006). The citizenship education aspect focuses on the acquisition of citizenship knowledge through practices and experiences as well as the development of skills and attitudes so that pupils need to be encouraged to interact with the community and to participate in organizations. The objective is the development of critical thinking, understanding and practical exercise of democracy, behaviors, values and beliefs that will predispose pupils to actively participate and remain committed to their political society (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, et al., 2017; Prior, 2006).

Citizenship Education in Greece

In Greece, the curriculum of citizenship education is in accordance with the European and international declarations of citizenship in order to achieve learning through a variety of civic education activities as well as a multi-perspective understanding of the concept of citizen (Chrysochoou, 2009), while it is recommended to use all those teaching practices and tools that are considered effective for citizenship education.

Teaching Social and Civics Education (SCE) course stipulate interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches to learning based on contemporary socio-political and economic issues (Chelmis & Matsagouras, 2002). In the first four grades of primary education, it is taught through a cross-curricular approach through other courses of the curriculum and it is an compulsory course in the 3rd Grade of the secondary school (two hours per week) and in the E and F grade of primary education. A unique textbook is used to teach the lesson, which is the basic means of translating the curriculum into school practice. As it is linked to "education" and "authority", it is drawn up by the Ministry of Education and provides unique and mandatory knowledge without the possibility of multidimensional depiction.

Classroom school boards and the educational program that the parliament of adolescent implement, are a practical experience of democracy within the school while the involvement and collaboration with the community and NGOs (Non-governmental organizations), cooperative and transformative teaching methods as well as the variety of tools (video, scripts playing role, etc.) help achieve the objectives (Taylor & Johnson, 2002).

Achieving the objectives, however, is directly related to the way teachers perceive citizenship and the importance they attach to some intertemporal values. Deficiencies in their specialization and retraining are important as at the undergraduate level there is no university department teaching civil education related lessons while retraining is the responsibility of the institutions and the teachers themselves. In the Greek educational reality, it has been observed by a large percentage of non-specialized teachers who are required to teach a subject without often knowing the basic concepts of citizenship and, moreover, not receiving the required retraining. The lack of experience and specialization has a negative effect on the quality of citizenships' education and leads to limited and superficial learning rather than to improvement interventions (Ofsted, 2013).

In the Greek context, although the role of education and the teacher in shaping active citizens is decisive, there seems to be a gap between rhetoric and reality. The SCE course is on the sidelines of the curriculum and few hours of teaching are forthcoming while preparation for the national identity still exists in the socialization of pupils, resulting in assimilating the European identity from the national one (Keating, 2014). In addition, the stated purposes of the SCE course remain formality paperwork without reference to contemporary problems (drugs, violence, racism) while knowledge is not renewed.

Methodology

The purpose of the present research is to investigate, through the views of secondary education teachers, the effectiveness of the SCE in the promotion of citizenship education objectives, concerning the shaping of active citizens who are capable of responding to the modern social and political-economic environment.

Based on the stated purpose and the references review, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- How do teachers perceive the implementation of citizenship education nowadays and what are the aims of the policy regarding the three-fold of knowledge-values-attitudes and the "identity" of the citizen?
- How important is the role of the teacher, his training and participation in activities in promoting citizenship education?
- Which teaching tools and practices are used more often and how effective is the textbook?

The penetration on the teachers' views and perceptions and the in-depth study of the "reality" of the participants about what is happening within the community (Flick, 2007) led to the selection of the qualitative analysis approach as the most appropriate research method for the needs of the current investigation. The individual semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used as a data collection tool and a questionnaire of 35 questions was created in which additions and modifications were made after the conduct of two pilot interviews. The first ten questions relate to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and the others were categorized into three thematic axes corresponding to the three research questions as follows:

- *1st Thematic axis:* The role of education in promoting citizenship education
- *2st Thematic axis:* The role of the teacher in promoting citizenship education
- *3st Thematic axis:* The degree of effectiveness of citizenship education through the SCE course, teaching practices and tools

The sample consisted of twelve Secondary Education Teachers who teach the SCE course at the High School of Argolida Regional Unit in the year 2017-2018, and the deliberate sampling was used for the selection which was based on their common characteristics that convenient the research purposes (Creswell, 2011). Of the twelve teachers, eleven were women and one were male, and two were less than 45 years old, eight were between 45-55 and two were over 55 years old. All participants are graduates of tertiary education while only two teachers have postgraduate degrees. The two participants had an educational experience of 10-15 years, three of 15-20 years, and the other seven teachers over 20 years. A teacher has specialized knowledge in teaching the course while the rest of them in related subjects. The eight participants have teaching experience in this course from 2-5 years, the three about 15 years and one of them about 30 years. No one has had any retraining.

Data collection was carried out in December 2017 and all codes of conduct were followed. The interviews lasted from 30 to 50 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed while data, in order to be analyzed, was organized and processed on the basis of the three thematic axes above.

Results

The role of education in promoting citizenship education

Almost all teachers consider that the contribution of education in shaping new citizens is particularly important, because through the knowledge of citizenship, a child can be socialized and politicized, can obtain ethos and values and moreover can overturn stereotypes and prejudices. Teachers believe in the humanitarian nature of education, which is inextricably linked to the personality of the teacher who teaches the course. However, they pointed out that the structure and organization of the education system are factors that make it harder to do so. The inability of the school to bring about significant changes in already formed citizenship perceptions of the students from the family is due to the determining influence of the family today, according to the majority of the sample. However, this is a view in contradiction with their above-mentioned answer to the role of education: «... *The family is the principal axis that determines the individual's attitudes...* ». Although they do not diminish the role and the value of school, which under certain conditions it can influence students, they nevertheless consider that their role is constantly diminishing, and this is due to the strong influence of other socializing factors, such as the media and friends, as well as the supplanting and the low appreciation the society has for education and educators, nowadays. Most participants believe that intertemporal values of democracy emerge through citizenship education, which means freedom of thought and expression, as well as justice and respect: «... *we all should be equal and express ourselves...Equal rights equal obligations*» -values that are fundamental to each person's life and on how way they will ultimately act within society. The majority of teachers consider that the European identity has been promoted for adoption by students mostly through citizenship education, which means acceptance and coexistence with the different, while the students should acquire a dual identity: a national and a European. Teachers, however, have expressed their deep concerns that the European identity may instigate the alienation of the national one and, therefore, the main concern of national education should be to maintain and defend the national identity in order to preserve national characteristics: «...*that they have the European identity but the characteristics of the Greek citizen should not be altered...*». Particularly interesting is one educator's point of view that nowadays, you cannot effectively promote an identity entrenched or racially special.

The role of the teacher in promoting citizenship education

The entire sample highlights the teacher's role in creating citizen because a teacher creates characters, promotes relationships and values to his students.

Character, personality, experience, education and his skills affect the way citizenship issues are emphasized. However, modern data and the state itself degrade his role, while what is intensely emphasized is the total absence of retraining in teaching practices and tools. Retraining is an imperative need for all teachers, given that almost no participant has a corresponding undergraduate education and most of them have the least teaching experience: «...*beyond one week I was trained, with nothing specific and special..*». The teacher must participate in activities and be actively involved in social actions as he acquires knowledge, experiences he can more easily pass on to his students: «...*The teacher must be integrated in the community. There are no longer the four walls.....the isolation. There must be interaction...*». All teachers responded that they don't participate in any voluntary organization, community actions or public life, although they all encourage students to participate actively. Lack of time and desire, as well as personal perceptions, are mostly the reasons for not participating. Activities contributing to the promotion of citizenship are mostly volunteerism, participation in environmental programs and visits to organizations so that students can learn through experiential teaching about what is happening around them. Teaching practices and tools, such as theater, film projection, photos and texts promote intertemporal values. According to the majority of the participants, these activities and practices help develop students' critical thinking. However, they should be applied daily in and out of the classroom in order to be effective: «...*you can't suddenly learn to think critically....you must be led on this way from your childhood by someone...*». One of the teachers argued that the development of critical thinking does not exist, as learning through rote memory, curriculum restrictions, and family effects are considered to be limiting factors towards in this direction. Teachers handle delinquent behaviors of intertemporal values by students through dialogue, although these are not a common phenomenon.

The degree of effectiveness of citizenship education through the SCE course, teaching practices and tools

The initial evaluation of the curriculum by the teachers highlighted a balance of views at first. The participants who hardly had any experience in teaching the subject expressed positive views, while those who had a lot of experience expressed negative views. However, all the participants mentioned difficulties such as time pressure, weekly two-hour teaching and unattainable goals, evaluating the curriculum negatively, which requires, if not a radical change, at least an improvement: «...*And it is...I think is tightly the margins. It ought to be a little...more relaxed. So that, we are able to do some of what it proposes....*». The majority of teachers believe that the SCE is a particularly important course for citizenship education, although it has been classified as secondary resulting in its degradation from the entire educational community.

Achieving all of the curriculum goals is unfeasible and depends on many factors such as the teacher himself, the composition of the class and the teaching hours. The aims of interdisciplinary and experiential learning are difficult to achieve: «...I would say that there is no link between of the SCE course and other courses' objects while it should. I do not think... that both the book and the recommendations are holistically viewing the issue....». Most teachers responded that this is due to the lack of interest and free time from students. Additionally, the nature of the book itself and the tightness of the curriculum aren't favorable factors. The textbook needs improvement and inclusion of modern themes, so it can function more effectively in achieving the goals, although, it is marked as a sufficient initial guide, especially for young teachers: «...I would say it should be replaced soon. So that, there isn't this...the distance between the science and... the book....». Teachers mostly apply the learner-centered learning method. However, there is an ambiguity concerning what they really apply, because they often seem to involve modern or traditional teaching practices. In this context, projects, video, images, interactive media and worksheet are used by them, while images are considered to be the most effective tools. Few teachers apply the cooperative learning approach to their teaching. However, the uses of teaching practices and tools are not daily either because teachers are not aware of modern practices either because of objective difficulties, which render teaching ineffective.

Conclusions

Throughout the ages, the important role played by education lies in its effective contribution to shaping pupils as young and active citizens. Participating teachers attach particular value and dynamic to citizenship education and their perceptions identify with those of the global educational community (Osler, 2011). However, they acknowledge the degradation of the humanitarian character and the continuous reduction of its effect, which lies in the influence of the family (Davies, Gregory, & Riley, 1999), in the diversity of individual experiences and preferences of pupils (Isac et al., 2014; Keating, 2014) and other socialization factors. The reversal of the existing conditions is related to the low intensity of the conflict of values and the appropriate educational practices. The concept about democracy from the participants, the absence of references to road behavior, active participation, global problems, cosmopolitan or digital identity and the concern to preserve and retain the unique national characteristics constitute a 'conservative' perception of citizenship. Conservative characteristics of teachers lead to the understanding of citizenship by them as the knowledge of laws and rules, relating obedience to power and non-critical patriotism (Davies et al., 1999), ultimately indicating an ineffective educational occupation, as it seems, they are deprived of the necessary knowledge and tools (Bourn, 2016).

The teacher is one of the primary factors of efficacy of citizenship education which is related to his personality, practices and experiences (Bourn, 2016). Additionally, it lies in intense participatory communal activity (Kerr et al., 2010) and in continuing education and training (Varnham et al., 2016). The inadequacy of the participants in the knowledge and experiences, the absence of participatory culture and retraining lead to limited and superficial learning rather than to improvement interventions (Ofsted, 2013), while it negates their function as standards and turns them into conveyors of sterile knowledge. Mostly, experiential activities have a positive effect on students, they educate them in democracy (Davies et al., 2014), and they highlight intertemporal values and develop critical thinking so that citizenship is considered to be a profound knowledge. Although the actual exercise of democracy can be accomplished through these processes, it was highlighted that their occasional implementation, usually within the classroom, the scanty influence and involvement of pupils in the decision-making of the school community (Lieberkind, 2014), the deficiency of informative actions concerning on digital literacy, the using of the internet and control of web information provided invalidate their effectiveness. Only dialogue is traced in everyday school reality as an expression of democratic participation and action (Huddleston, 2005).

The suffocating pressure of the curriculum, the use of traditional teaching practices and tools, the degradation of the course by the entire educational community and the unattainable aims concerning interdisciplinarity and experiential learning indicate the absence of modern learning approaches and the failure to implement European Community directives (Kerr, 2012). While important tools are available to the teacher, they remain untapped (Huddleston, 2005). Mostly, the textbook satisfies the needs of young teachers due to lack of retraining and new tools, but without a holistic perception of reality as it needs modernization (Kerr, 1999). Teachers' dependence on the textbook confirms that citizenship education remains mostly a book-based experience rather than an experiential one (Mayer, Bromley, & Ramirez, 2010).

Nowadays, the effectiveness of citizenship education collides with the lack of teachers' training and education and also with the educational system itself. Although the aim is the understanding and practical training of citizenship, it seems that the transmission of knowledge by non-qualified personnel, the conservative perception of citizenship, the absence of digital literacy actions and control of internet information provided, the inactive involvement in the community, the use of traditional learning approaches and the suffocating curriculum are a brake on the balanced promotion of knowledge-values-attitudes triptych and the handling of internet manipulation mechanisms. In the knowledge society and the post-truth era, the requirement to form active subjects/citizens seems to be unable to take up education effectively. The need to adopt a new, more participative culture through realistic educational goals and actions, as well as substantial and methodical training, emerges particularly important.

Discussion

The current study gave an interpretation of the views of a small sample of secondary education teachers. However, it could trigger future research on this issue, such as a research on larger sample of teachers, through using quantitative data analysis to control results and possible generalization. A research proposal could be to conduct research in teachers' perceptions of the reasons for their abstaining from community activities and exploitation of results for the enhancement of volunteering or similar actions. Additionally, another study could be conducted on the perceptions of teachers regarding the reform of citizenship education in the post-truth era.

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