

Democratic Characteristics of Classroom Discourse in Social Studies Lessons in Turkey

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Abstract

In 2005, Turkey underwent a significant educational reform, transitioning from a traditional teaching approach to a constructivist model. This reform also had an impact on the teaching of social studies. Previously, social studies primarily focused on transmitting cultural heritage and national identity, with teachers serving as the main source of knowledge. However, since 2005, the emphasis has shifted towards promoting democratic citizenship and developing active, responsible, and rights-respecting citizens. This research aims to investigate whether opportunities for democratic experiences are provided to students in the social studies classroom, using qualitative data from classroom discourse. The research methodology employed is a multiple case study design. Over a period of eight weeks, three social studies teachers were observed, and data collected from the classrooms were analyzed using content analysis. The findings of the study indicate that a teacher-centered teaching process is prevalent in all observed classes, with a focus on knowledge transmission rather than democratic values and skills. The discourses employed by the teachers are predominantly didactic and interactive/authoritarian. Additionally, there is a lack of pre-planned and organized discussion processes within the classrooms.

Key Words: Democracy, Classroom Discourse, Social Studies, Turkey.

Introduction

The foundational element of classroom instruction resides in the dynamic interplay of discourse between students and teachers. In the context of social studies classrooms, the significance of classroom discourse is paramount, as it serves the overarching objective of fostering the education of democratic citizens (Bartels et al., 2016; Hess & Avery, 2008; Osler & Starkey, 2006; Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Schuitema et al., 2011). Central to the ethos of democracy is the appreciation of diversity and the embrace of debate. The ideal of discussion underpins the intrinsic equality of all community members, suggesting that each individual is a political equal qualified to partake in deliberation and decision-making processes. As asserted by Hess (2009), the essential connection between democracy and debate underscores the inseparability of democracy from the engagement in open discourse. Moreover, beyond being a mere system of governance, democracy, as articulated by Dewey and subsequent scholars, is a way of coexisting harmoniously (Dewey, 1966; Osler & Starkey, 2006; Kahne & Westheimer, 2004). Dewey envisioned the classroom as a microcosm of democracy—a laboratory where students could be instructed on the merits of diversity, engagement with social issues, active participation, and the cultivation of a culture of debate. A fundamental catalyst for initiating classroom discussion and cultivating discourse is the art of questioning. Whether posed by the teacher or the student, questions are pivotal to the learning process. Teachers employ questions to guide students in constructing their knowledge, values, and skills. Simultaneously, students raise questions as a means of seeking understanding and knowledge acquisition, emphasizing the nature of questioning within the educational environment.

Social studies, inherently encompassing current and political issues, does not depend on topics being part of the curriculum to spark classroom discourse. Therefore, social studies courses face a heightened risk of encountering questions pertaining to areas beyond the

established curriculum. While this circumstance entails potential risks, it also presents opportunities, such as the sudden emergence of political and contentious issues serving as a catalyst for classroom discourse and the promotion of democratic behaviors. Educators widely agree that integrating controversial issues into the classroom fosters democratic values and enhances political engagement, a fundamental aspect of democracy (Journell, 2015, 2017; Engle, 1996; Hess, 2008, 2009; Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Parker, 2003). Engaging in discussions on political issues enables students to develop the capacity to recognize and tolerate diverse ideological perspectives while consciously formulating their own political opinions (Hess, 2009; Hess & Ganzler, 2007; Parker, 2003). Despite theoretical assertions, it is challenging to affirm that controversial issues in social studies classrooms are systematically addressed to develop students' democratic skills and values, with research indicating that even in advanced democracies, teachers harbour legitimate concerns when navigating contentious topics. Hess and Ganzler (2007) delineate three distinct classroom scenarios and teachers' approaches to handling controversial issues. In the first setting, ideological disparities are prominent, with the teacher deliberately addressing political issues and exposing students to diverse ideas. The second classroom exhibits ideological differences, but discussions on controversial issues are unplanned and occur only in response to student inquiries. In the third setting, characterized by lower ideological diversity, controversial issues are sporadically discussed. However, the homogeneity in ideological perspectives at this level results in learners having limited exposure to diverse viewpoints, leading them to rely on simplistic explanations and clichés when defending their views. Observational studies in history and social studies classrooms in Turkey indicate that teachers struggle to systematically introduce controversial issues for discussion. In such settings, teachers rarely incorporate different perspectives when controversial issues arise (Günel, 2016; Kuş & Öztürk, 2019; Tokdemir, 2013). For instance, a study by Kuş and Öztürk (2019) in Turkey reveals that teachers spontaneously discuss controversial issues for short durations without planning, lacking efforts to foster a democratic environment or include diverse opinions. Moreover, some teachers argue that the crowded curriculum leaves no room for addressing controversial issues in the classroom (Çopur, 2015), while others contend that limited knowledge and confidence stem from inadequate preparation and support in teacher education programs for managing such topics (Lynagh, Gilligan, & Handley, 2010). These justifications may hinder the potential educational benefits associated with addressing controversial issues in the classroom.

Not all classroom discussions have the same impact. An open and positive classroom culture, particularly one enriched by student participation and centred on open-ended questions and in-depth argumentative discussions, can contribute significantly to the teaching process (Nucci, Creane, & Powers 2015; Schuitema et al. 2011). Teacher questions play a crucial role in both traditional, closed classrooms and more modern, open classrooms. In traditional settings, however, the primary aim is to uncover students' knowledge rather than their opinions. Closed-ended questions are used to elicit information and students respond with concise answers. Correct answers are positively reinforced, while perceived incorrect answers are corrected, reflecting a behaviourist approach rooted in a positivist understanding of education. Until 2005, this approach formed the basis of curriculum development in Turkey. After 2005, however, there was a shift towards a constructivist approach. According to this perspective, reality is not singular but multifaceted and complex. In constructivist/inquiry classrooms, students' thoughts are of great value. The teacher seeks to understand what students are thinking, rather than looking for a single correct answer. Questions are designed to engage high-level cognitive skills, encourage student participation, and foster a democratic classroom culture. It has long been emphasized that this approach enhances students' democratic behaviour. Numerous studies support this claim. international Civic Education Study conducted in 1999, concludes that deliberative classroom climate has a positive effect on students. A positive classroom culture in the social studies classroom includes the creation of an environment where the students feel comfortable, safe, and free to engage; where students are able to share their thoughts and feelings without fear

of retribution or judgment from the teacher or their peers; where mistakes are learning experiences; and trust and collaboration are valued (Kaka, 2019). When students have the freedom to talk about ideas through classroom discourse, they develop abilities to hypothesize, explain, expand, question, and probe (Schram & Rosean 1996). All these practices play a crucial role in the development of democratic citizenship.

Problem Statement

In Western contexts, particularly in ancient Greece and Rome, citizenship was developed within the framework of city-states and later nation-states, where identity and unity were either inherently unproblematic or were enforced through ideological means or the violent suppression of minorities (Green 1990). Until recent years, social studies content in Turkey predominantly focused on developing national identity (Ozan & Kuş, 2021; Doğu & Kuş, 2022). However, the concept of citizenship has evolved beyond national identity, emphasizing shared humanity, human rights, environmental awareness, and respect for differences in contemporary democratic citizenship education. Following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Turkey underwent significant reforms in citizenship curricula and textbooks, transitioning from traditional citizenship transmission to a more democratic approach aligned with EU harmonization laws. The 2005 curriculum reform marked a substantial shift, emphasizing preparation for EU membership. This reform introduced a constructivist education approach, moving away from the "social studies approach as citizenship transfer" (applied from 1968 to 2005) to the "social studies approach as reflective examination." The previous approach focused on transmitting cultural heritage for national identity construction, relying on the teacher transferring traditional knowledge and values to students. Since 2005, the aim has been to cultivate citizens who are democratic, uphold human rights, actively participate, and are aware of their responsibilities through social studies teaching (Kuş, 2020). Despite an increase in studies on democratic citizenship, observational research on social studies classrooms remains limited. The literature lacks a thorough democratic analysis of student and teacher discourses in these classrooms (Avery et al., 2013; Hand & Levinson 2012; Nucci, et al., 2015; Schuitema et al., 2018). This article employs qualitative data from classroom discourse to investigate whether students are provided opportunities for democratic experiences in the social studies teaching process. The study aims to contribute to the growing literature by observing social studies classrooms at different levels, identifying teacher and student questions, examining topics discussed, and analyzing evolving discourses. The research questions were the following:

RQ1-What is democratic characteristic of classroom in social studies lesson?

RQ2-What questions do social studies teachers and students ask in social studies classrooms?

RQ3- How do teachers guide the classroom discussion for democratic citizenship education?

RQ4-What controversial issues are brought into the social studies classroom, and by whom?

Methods

This research adopts a case study design, a qualitative research model particularly suited to in-depth analysis of a particular situation, event, or action. Case studies are commonly employed in a variety of fields, including the evaluation process (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this study utilizes a holistic multiple case design within the case study framework. In the holistic multiple case design, multiple situations are treated holistically, allowing for individual examination before making comparisons between cases. Evidence for case studies can include documents, archival records, interviews, participant observation and physical artefacts such as technological tools or works of art (Yin, 2003). This research is specifically categorized as an

'observational case study,' which aims to explore particular aspects of a situation through careful observation.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a middle school located in the city center of a small city in Turkey. Three social studies teachers working in this school were observed. The school is academically successful in national standards. It has a total of 98 teachers and 1100 students. The school serves students from families with moderate socio-economic status. Efforts were made to choose classrooms with varying performance levels and to avoid scheduling overlaps among classes.

Table 1

Information on the Observation Process

	<i>Teacher-1</i>	<i>Teacher-2</i>	<i>Teacher-3</i>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>Woman</i>
<i>Professional Seniority</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Branch</i>	<i>Social studies</i>	<i>Social studies</i>	<i>History</i>
<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Class Size</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Observation Time</i>	<i>8 weeks (16 hours)</i>	<i>8 weeks (16 hours)</i>	<i>8 weeks (16 hours)</i>

After the 2005 education reform in Turkey, the curricula of teacher training institutions in universities were updated only in 2007. Consequently, not all of the observed teachers received training based on this new curriculum.

Procedure

Observations were conducted over a span of eight weeks, with a weekly allocation of two hours, resulting in a total of 48 hours of observation in classes at the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade levels. The standard duration of teacher training programs in Turkey is four years. Following three years of academic training, teacher candidates gain the opportunity to engage in school observations during their fourth year. Legal permissions facilitate this observation collaboration between faculties of education and public schools. The school administration and teachers provided support throughout the observation process. Cooperation was established between the school administration, the teachers, and the selected classrooms for observation in the course of this research. However, ethical concerns raised by the school administration led to the prohibition of video recording during the observations. Consequently, specialized observation forms were employed to document lesson details (e.g., topic, method, technique, materials, classroom environment, etc.), dialogues, and observer notes. To address ethical considerations, it was explicitly stated that the names and photographs of students and teachers would not be utilized in the study. Pre-service teachers received training on the observational procedures throughout the entire process. Initially, information pertaining to the research's objectives and ethical protocols was disseminated. Subsequently, the researcher actively participated in the initial observations, providing insights to the pre-service teachers on key considerations during the process. Each week, thorough discussions were conducted regarding the observation forms, and they were prompted to elaborate on the significance of their notes in the observation forms. Finally, the data collected from the observation forms were organized

chronologically and imported into Maxqda Qualitative Data Analysis software for thorough analysis. The data obtained from the classroom observations were then subjected to content analysis, a qualitative research data analysis method.

Limitations of Study

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it is constrained to three classroom observations in a specific province and a specific school, making it challenging to generalize the findings to a broader population of students or teachers. However, considering that the observed classrooms adhered to Turkish standards, comprised students from a middle socio-economic background, utilized the same textbooks and curriculum, and involved three different classrooms with varying professional experiences, the research may offer insights into the general landscape of social studies classrooms in Turkey. Secondly, the study's duration is limited to eight weeks, restricting the ability to observe long-term effects. Nevertheless, by addressing different topics, the study aimed to focus on collecting intensive and diverse data during this period. Finally, using trained student teachers as observers may introduce limitations when extrapolating the effects to a general population of students, even though the observations were conducted in a specific educational context with a focus on objectivity and independence.

Findings

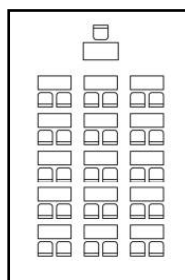
Democratic Characteristics of Classroom

Classroom Environment, Method, and Material

In all the observed classrooms, a traditional seating arrangement was employed, with students sitting in rows. Due to the traditional seating arrangement, students are unable to engage in face-to-face communication. Throughout the observation period, no changes were made to the seating arrangement.

Figure 1

Classroom Seating Arrangement



In all three observed classes, a specific teaching model (such as 5E or 7E) is not being used. Instead, the teachers employed a traditional lecture method and question-answer technique throughout the eight-week period. No other methods or techniques were utilized. The teachers divided the lessons into three parts: introduction, explanation, and evaluation. In the introduction phase, the teacher asks questions and then proceeds to present the topic, either from the textbook or through a presentation. During this process, the teacher imparts information and poses questions to the class. The explanation phase focuses on providing further elaboration and

clarification. The evaluation phase consists of brief assessment questions. The materials used in the classroom include the textbook, chalkboard, and projector. Apart from these, no other materials were used in the classroom.

In the observed classrooms, there is a comfortable atmosphere for the students. Although the teachers use traditional methods in the teaching process, they do not assume an authoritarian role. Therefore, students feel at ease asking questions and providing answers to the teacher. There is no distinction between male and female students, as teachers do not discriminate between genders when giving students the floor in class or in other activities. In all the observed classes, there are about four to five students who are more prominent and actively participate by asking and answering questions. Other students ask unrelated questions. Students tend to focus more on concepts and ask questions related to them. Teachers make an effort to answer these questions. Especially in the fifth and sixth grades, students frequently interrupt each other while speaking. These students are often reminded by the teachers to take turns and not interrupt each other.

Questions Strategies

In the observed classrooms, most of the questions are posed by the teachers. The questions are primarily asked during the introduction, explanation, and evaluation phases of the lessons. Among the three observed teachers, most of their questions fall under the "knowledge" level. However, there are also some questions that require "comprehension" and "application" levels of thinking. Due to the frequent use of the question-answer technique, the questions are mostly asked throughout the instructional process. On the other hand, fewer questions are posed during the evaluation phase of the lesson.

The teacher's questions are quickly and briefly answered by a few voluntary students. For example, as shown below, the teacher asks short and fact-based questions:

Teacher-2: *Children, what are our fundamental rights? Can you give examples?*

Student-1: *Teacher, for example, here we are exercising our right to education. In the hospital, we exercise our right to healthcare.*

Teacher-2: *Where are these rights written?*

Student-2: *They are written in the Constitution.*

Teacher-2: *Okay, what does the Constitution mean?*

Students: *Basic law, unity of laws.*

Teacher-2: *(Provides the definition of the Constitution...)*

Table 2

View of Questions Asked in the Classroom

<i>who asked</i>		<i>levels</i>		<i>parts of the lesson</i>	
<i>Teacher</i>	<i>%70</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>%65</i>	<i>Engage</i>	<i>%15</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>%30</i>	<i>Comprehension</i>	<i>%20</i>	<i>Explain</i>	<i>%75</i>
		<i>Application</i>	<i>%15</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>%10</i>

The questions asked by the students primarily revolve around concepts. During the teacher's instructional process, if there are any unclear concepts, the students tend to ask the teacher about them. Almost all the students' questions are at the "knowledge" level. The teachers encourage the students to provide answers to the questions rather than simply asking more questions.

Teacher-3: *The Ottoman Empire implemented many reforms in its final periods.*

Student: *What does "reform" mean, teacher?*

Teacher-3: *It means making improvements in specific areas.*

Student: *In which areas were the reforms implemented then?*

Teacher-3: *The reforms were mainly focused on the military field.*

Classroom Discourse

The topics discussed within the classroom are not previously planned and argument-based debates. In none of the observed classes was there an organized discussion process prearranged by the teacher. Generally, short dialogues initiated by either the teacher or the students begin with a question related to the topic of the lesson. These dialogues typically last between three to four minutes. Some dialogues are shorter, while the longest discussion or dialogue lasts around five minutes. As the topics are not extensively debated from all aspects, the focus of the subject is not lost. Both the teacher and the students ask each other knowledge-based questions.

Teacher-1: *What are the characteristics of official and civil society organizations?*

Student-1: *Official organizations are established by the state, while civil society organizations are established by voluntary individuals.*

Teacher-1: *Is the school we are currently in an official or civil society institution?*

Student-2: *It is an official institution because it is established by the state.*

Teacher-1: *What are the common characteristics of official and civil society organizations?*

Student-2: *They meet people's needs.*

In the above example, the teacher asks the students knowledge-based questions. The discussion on civil society organizations is not associated with active citizenship or democracy, and the debate is not deepened with the participation of other students.

In all classrooms, the environment is a frequently discussed topic. Issues related to water usage, environmental pollution, hydroelectric power plants, and environmental awareness are commonly brought up. Due to recent earthquakes in Turkey, natural disasters are also frequently discussed in each class. Another discussion topic in the classrooms is democracy. Aspects such as the election process, forms of governance, civil society organizations, and the impact of democracy on daily life are briefly addressed in the classes. Another commonly discussed subject is historical topics, particularly related to Ottoman history. Economy is also a topic of discussion within the class. However, during these discussions, the teachers do not intentionally focus on democratic citizenship skills/values. Students are not encouraged to make decisions in contradictory situations.

Due to the upcoming presidential election in Turkey, students ask current questions about the election process and the candidates. Some of these questions are seeking information, while others aim to uncover the teacher's opinions. The teacher does not engage in political discussions or dwell on them for a long time.

Teacher: *Children, there will be an election soon, which is an example of democracy.*

Student: *Teacher, when is the presidential election?*

Teacher: *It's coming soon, on May 14th.*

Student: *Teacher, whom will you vote for?*

Teacher: *My child, we are civil servants, it wouldn't be appropriate to discuss these matters in the classroom.*

Student: *We will vote for Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.*

Teacher: *Ok. I understand.*

As shown in the example above, teachers do not encourage discussions on political topics and generally adopt an "avoidance" role. They refrain from making political statements. Additionally, teachers are careful not to mention the names of political parties or candidates within the classroom. Detailed information about the election process is not provided. Teachers try to maintain an ideal discourse and avoid any conflicting views. The discussions mostly stay within the moderate range.

Primarily national topics are discussed, while international topics rarely come up in social studies classes. Teachers tend to end discussions after brief dialogues due to concerns about covering the curriculum, solving test questions, and students not continuing the discussion. Although different ideas may be expressed, these ideas are not presented in an organized manner or written down. Throughout the observations, no comparisons of ideas were made. Dialogues take place in a teacher-student-teacher format. Dialogues between students are not planned or organized within a framework. Furthermore, there is no student-student discussion happening at all. Only students engage in dialogues with their seatmates or nearby classmates, and these conversations often do not pertain to the topic being discussed.

Teachers' Role

Teachers play a central role in the observed classrooms, and their teaching approaches are quite similar across all three classes. Collaboration among students is not emphasized, resulting in a teacher-centered instructional process. Teachers are the primary source of knowledge in the classroom. Questions are predominantly asked by teachers, and transitions between sections are determined by them. Despite the teacher-centered nature, all teachers attempt to engage students in the lesson through questions. Teachers adopt an interactive-authoritarian role. While voluntary students are given the opportunity to speak, occasionally, non-participating students are encouraged to share their thoughts through questions like, "... *What do you think about this...?*" The observed teachers primarily concentrate on discussing topics within the curriculum, often avoiding engagement with what they perceive as political or risky subjects. This approach fosters a dynamic in which teachers openly express their own opinions on controversial issues, assuming authoritative roles. This tendency manifests at various points during discussions, whether at the beginning, middle, or end. The observation period coincided with the election period in Turkey (2023 presidential elections), leading students to introduce politically controversial topics in the classrooms. However, teachers were observed to sidestep such discussions, encountering emotional and practical challenges related to controversial issues. The observed emotional tension among teachers can create discomfort with the presence of an observer in the classroom, leading to potential emotional reactions towards students. Teachers facing professional and academic challenges may not view brief discussions as opportunities to foster democratic values and skills, failing to make efforts to sustain them. The focus tends to be on knowledge and concepts rather than democratic behaviors. Across all three observed classes, teachers often shift to a different topic before discussions have the chance to deepen. In general, teachers fall short of providing students with sufficient arguments on controversial issues, neglect to scrutinize information sources, and refrain from encouraging students to inquire further.

Results and Discussion

Despite variations in the seniority levels of teachers in social studies classrooms, the teaching processes observed in the three classrooms were remarkably similar. The observed teachers, who graduated before the 2005 reform and were not trained in the constructivist education approach, predominantly employed a teacher-centered teaching process, aligning with the behaviorist educational approach. Lecture methods and the question-answer technique were commonly utilized, with teachers taking the lead in directing questions. While an oppressive

environment was not present, student participation in all three classes was limited, with many students assuming a more passive role. These findings suggest a lack of substantial change in teaching approaches, indicating a prevalent adherence to the behaviorist educational approach. However, despite the dominance of interactive/authoritarian discourses in the observed classes, students felt comfortable expressing their opinions and posing questions. The teacher aimed to encourage student participation through questions, focusing primarily on directing them to discover knowledge rather than fostering discussions about their thoughts. Consequently, questions primarily targeted knowledge and comprehension levels, with fewer emphasizing analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Research indicates that the level of teacher questions is a crucial predictor of the level of student questions (Chin & Osborne, 2008; Günel et al., 2012). These outcomes underscore some limitations related to the role of teachers as primary actors in developing the democratic character of the social studies classroom, as outlined in the first and second questions of the current study. While curriculum reforms are crucial for updating the education system, this study, in conjunction with other research in Turkey (Ateş et al., 2016), reveals that such reforms alone are insufficient. It underscores the importance of incorporating additional components into the process to achieve success, emphasizing the necessity of cohesion and collaboration to enhance the education system and boost student achievement. The integration of teachers and teacher education institutions into educational reforms is deemed essential for realizing the goals outlined in the curriculum.

Another result obtained in this research is that teachers' approaches are insufficient or do not make enough effort to create interactive environments in which students' thoughts can be revealed and these thoughts can be discussed. Discussions in the classroom are usually focused on topics that are not pre-planned and not based on arguments. Usually, questions related to the subject of the lesson develop in the form of short dialogues that start with a question by the teacher or the student. These dialogues are usually of short duration and teacher activities are usually not focused on citizenship skills and democratic values. These results suggest that social studies teachers' capacities need to be developed in order to plan classroom interactions in a more in-depth and participatory way. It is important for educators to focus on encouraging discussions that emphasize students' thinking and include a variety of perspectives. Dialogue and discussion play a crucial role in theories of democratic education, as they provide a platform for learners to develop understanding by actively engaging in listening, reflection, proposing ideas, and incorporating alternative viewpoints. Prominent philosophers like Socrates, Dewey, and Habermas have emphasized the significance of dialogue in education, considering it essential for fostering democracy. Dewey, in particular, defined democracy as a "mode of social inquiry" that prioritizes open dialogue, consultation, persuasion, and debate. Dialogue in education promotes critical thinking, empathy, active citizenship, and the ability to engage with diverse perspectives, making it a transformative practice that contributes to the foundations of democracy (Dewey, 1966, p. 56).

A study conducted in Norway identified common elements of good practice in diverse classroom contexts, highlighting the importance of creating a jointly constructed learning environment for effective discussions. Positive social relationships, appropriate social interaction norms, and skillful facilitation of discussions are identified as core elements. These findings provide guidance for educators who want to implement discussions on controversial topics and emphasize the significance of creating a positive learning environment for students' academic achievement and overall success (Sætra, 2021). A study by Kahne and Westheimer (2004) showed that empowering students to conduct research on issues of personal importance leads to positive outcomes across several dimensions of civic engagement. These outcomes include an increase in personally responsible citizenship, an increase in political interest, an increased commitment to participatory citizenship, an increased sense of vision for making a positive contribution, and an increased level of social trust among participating students. In addition, research by Hess and Posselt (2002) suggests that students can become more effective debaters when given the

opportunity to discuss meaningful issues in class. Despite the long-standing emphasis on the importance of classroom discussion going back to Dewey, numerous studies, even in so-called advanced democracies, show that classroom discussion is not prevalent in most classrooms. Many teachers also express a lack of willingness to engage their students in discussions about controversial issues. Studies by Bartels, Onstenk, and Veugelers (2016), and Molinari, Mamei, and Gnisci (2013) have found a lack of discussions in classrooms. Oulton et al. (2004) discovered that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to engage their students in discussions about controversial issues.

Hess (2004) identifies four ways teachers respond to controversial topics in their classrooms: denial, where they assert a specific position as absolute truth; privilege, where they highlight the positive aspects of controversial issues; avoidance, where they completely ignore contentious topics; and balance, where teachers aim to present issues without advocating for any particular viewpoint. The findings of this study, pertaining to the fourth research problem, indicate that teachers tend to take an avoidance stance, particularly on political issues. While important topics such as the environment, democracy, natural disasters, and the economy are discussed in classes, questions about the election process and candidates, aligned with Turkey's agenda, are common. However, teachers generally steer clear of political issues by not actively encouraging students to engage in discussions on these topics. This avoidance pattern suggests that teachers' reluctance to address political issues may impede students from developing a more profound understanding of these subjects. Given students' inclination to inquire about current and significant matters, creating a more open and interactive environment becomes crucial. Discussing political issues could potentially contribute to the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills and their understanding of social responsibility. In this context, it becomes essential for teachers to provide diverse perspectives, openly address political issues, and foster discussions rather than avoiding them. Ensuring academic freedom in the classroom is crucial as it can serve as a guarantee for teachers. Social studies teacher education programs should undergo updates to equip teachers with the skills necessary for effectively teaching controversial issues, emphasizing practical pedagogical strategies (Badri, 2015). McDevitt and Kiouisis (2004) conducted a study that examined the impact of increased opportunities to discuss political issues in the classroom on various aspects of student engagement. The findings revealed that when students were provided with more chances to engage in discussions about political topics, it significantly influenced their discussions with parents and friends. Additionally, it positively affected their willingness to disagree, actively listen to opposing viewpoints, and critically evaluate their own opinions in response. Moreover, the study found that these increased opportunities also fostered a greater willingness among students to test the opinions of others in order to persuade them. These results highlight the potential of classroom discussions on political issues to enhance students' communication skills, critical thinking, and engagement with diverse perspectives.

Conclusion

By evaluating teaching processes in social studies classrooms in Turkey, this study highlights the need for a comprehensive review of educational policies and practices in order to contribute to the development of citizenship education in line with democratic ideals. The research findings indicate a predominant adherence to behaviourist teaching methods among teachers, highlighting the urgency of revising teacher education programs and ongoing professional development towards approaches that focus on critical, participatory, and democratic teaching methods. The observed limited student participation highlights a gap between the ideals of the curriculum and the realities of the classroom, signaling the absence of a student-centred and democratic learning environment. Teachers' questions predominantly focus on knowledge discovery rather than encouraging critical thinking, suggesting the need for future

pedagogical practices to guide teachers in developing strategies that promote increased interaction and dialogue among students. In addition, the observed tendency of students to ask questions about current and political issues suggests a reluctance on the part of teachers to address these topics, which is an obstacle to the goal of social studies education of developing democratic and participatory individuals. As a result, adjustments in educational policy may be required to encourage open discussion of political issues, thereby supporting the development of critical thinking and social awareness in students. In conclusion, this research recommends a re-evaluation of teacher training practices, teaching methods and the creation of inclusive learning environments in relation to citizenship education. This reappraisal should be in line with the democratic ideals that contemporary educational reforms seek to promote.

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