

Full Length Research Paper

Children's rights in life sciences textbooks in primary education in Turkey

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Accepted 4 July, 2013

In the most general sense children's rights can be defined as benefits which are protected by legal rules so that the child can grow up in a healthy, normal way and in freedom and dignity with the aspects of physical, cognitive, sensual, social and moral. The most important document regulating children's rights is the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" accepted by United Nations. In order to teach their rights to children, all the lessons in school curriculum, for example in life sciences, social studies and Turkish classes, should include the subject of rights and responsibilities. The aim of this study is to reveal to what extent the subject of children's rights is included in primary school in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade life sciences textbooks which were published and delivered to schools to be taught during the academic year of 2011 to 2012 by the Ministry of National Education. In the study, qualitative research method was preferred and the texts in all themes of life sciences textbooks of 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade were studied with content analysis. In analysing data, frequencies and percent were used. In the study, it was found that terms related to children's rights were used in the 2nd grade life sciences textbooks at most in parallel with the lesson curriculum. It was suggested that in the gains of life sciences classes children's rights should be taken into consideration and the textbooks should be rearranged.

Key words: Life sciences, children's rights, curriculum, textbook, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals need to grow up in accordance with the principles of democracy in the family, at school and in society starting from the moment of their birth in order to lead a life in line with the principles when they become adults (Özyıldırım, 2007). The first way to realize this is we should provide some special human rights because of developmental needs as well as providing the children with the rights that all people have; in other words, we should provide them with children's rights.

The most important document which organizes children's rights is the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (CRC) accepted by United Nations. In the convention children's rights were organized under 54 items. With the Convention terms based on the understanding

of the development of children's own abilities entirely and freely, some tasks have been undertaken to all grown-up people who are responsible for children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legal text organizing the whole rights of children with a holistic approach and generally all rights related to human rights are entitled to children (Akyüz, 2000).

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights are gathered under four main titles as survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights. Survival rights are the rights providing basic needs such as living, having proper life standards, medical care, nutrition, sheltering to be met. Development rights are the rights such as education, games and

recreation, knowledge acquisition, freedom of religion, conscience and thought that are necessary for a child to realize himself preeminently. Protection rights are the rights providing the child to be protected against every kind of negligence, misuse and exploitation. These are the rights that provide children to be protected in judicial system, gunfights, child laboring, having psychical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug abuse and the issues related to special care and refugee children. Participation rights are the rights aiming at providing the child to gain an active role in the family and society. These rights are the rights that include expressing their opinions, taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them, establishing an association and gathering in peace.

Especially the 42nd item of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has formed a basis for the study to be performed about development of a curriculum related to children's rights education. With the aim of teaching the convention principles and terms to adults and children by the state of the Republic of Turkey, studies have been conducted by Prime Ministry Social Services and Child Protection Agency (SSCPA), which has been charged with as the "secretariat organization" related to the convention. Studies which were carried out concerning the application of convention by SSCPA were proclaimed to United Nations Children's Rights Committee in "The First National Report Convention on United Nations Children's Rights", which was written in 1999. United Nations Children's Rights Committee examined "The First National Report" and gave suggestions on the entire convention to be included to each level of education system and curriculum so that children's rights could become widespread in Turkey (Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2009).

In order to teach children their rights, all the classes included in curriculum such as life sciences, social studies and Turkish classes should include rights and responsibilities (Karaman-Kepenekci, 2008). Thus, Council of Europe's "Teaching and Learning Human Rights at Schools" in Recommendation Appendix in the addendum (85)7 it was proclaimed that verbal lessons included in curriculum could be benefited from in teaching some fields having abstract terms such as human rights.

With the help of education to be given on this field, students studying at all types and levels, particularly in primary schools will be conscious of their rights guaranteed with the "Convention on the Rights of the Child"; in other words, ensuring these rights to be known, used, protected and improved by all students (Karaman-Kepenekci, 2008) can be realized by giving education on this field. Primary school is the level that child's abstract thinking improves and intensifies and concept development goes on fast in this step. According to Yeşilyaprak (2013), during primary school years children are in concrete operations period, therefore, teaching concept to children should be done in concrete level. For this reason, especially within the context of lessons in primary

school level, it is useful to draw attention to the subject of children's rights with concrete examples.

In 2004 in Turkey, the new primary school curriculums were accepted and accordingly all the curriculums, notably life sciences curriculum, were changed and the new curriculum was put in effect step by step in the academic year of 2005 to 2006. The subject of human rights in primary school curriculums which was accepted in 2004 was linked to all the lessons within sub discipline "Human Rights and Citizenship Education" which was determined within the sub-discipline approach. By means of the sub-discipline field, in the education of human rights which will be implemented by associating with several lessons, life sciences lesson in the first three grades of primary school has an important place, since a great majority of subjects related to human rights are taught during life sciences lesson.

In the curriculum of life sciences lesson, the subject of human rights is seen as an inseparable part of the content. In the curriculum both acquisitions related to human rights and in sub-discipline associations of "Human Rights and Citizenship Education" were taken place. It has also been shown that life sciences textbooks prepared according to the curriculum have also included human rights in line with the acquisitions of the curriculum.

The textbook enabling not only teachers to use their power better and to teach what they want to teach in a more systematic way but also students to revise whenever, wherever and how fast they want what the teacher has told them is one of the basic means of student education especially in human rights education (Karaman-Kepenekci, 2005). Therefore, textbooks should serve both students' identity development and provide them to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms (Power and Allison, 2000).

When prepared complying with human rights, life sciences lesson textbooks inherently can become one of the most important means of human rights and therefore children's rights education. These books can include some texts and visual elements, assessment and evaluation studies and activities regarding the rights. Texts, visual elements, assessment and evaluation studies and activities chosen for the life sciences textbooks can play an important role on raising the awareness of children about their rights. Thus, life sciences curriculum and the textbooks written in accordance with the curriculum generally are expected to contribute to human rights education and particularly children's rights education.

According to life sciences curriculum which was accepted in 2004, several researches were done on to the textbooks prepared and only two of them in a research were analyzed in the context of child's rights about the acquisition of knowledge and protection of harmful publications (Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2009). Besides this, there are several researches about children's rights even if they are not in the context of life sciences. These

Table 1. Analysis units and subcategories defined in the study.

Analysis units	Subcategories
Survival right (CRC: Article 6, 7, 24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child's right for living and having proper life standards - Right for medical care - Rights for providing basic needs such as nutrition, sheltering to be met.
Development rights (CRC: Article 13, 14, 17, 18, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education right - Game and recreation right - Knowledge acquisition right - Right for freedom of religion, conscience and thought
Protection rights (CRC: Article 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40)	- Rights for providing the child to be protected against every kind of negligence, misuse and exploitation (in judicial system, Gunfights, child laboring, having psychical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug abuse and the issues related to special care of refugee children)
Participation rights (CRC: Article 12, 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rights for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them - Right for establishing an association and gathering in peace

researches emphasize children's right of participation more and they include some suggestions aimed at improving children's rights (Özyıldırım, 2007; Aslan and Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2008; Eijeh and Akinola, 2009; Ersoy, 2011; Nayır and Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2011; Merey, 2012; Merey and Parpucu, 2012; Ünal, 2012a, 2012b; Özdemir Uluç, 2013). When taken into consideration of the fact that life sciences textbooks were rewritten in 2010 by the Ministry of National Education, the problem that efficiency of primary school life sciences textbooks about the awareness of children's rights has not been studied in any researches so far.

The aim of this study is to reveal to what extent the subject of children's rights is included in primary school in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade life sciences textbooks which were published and delivered to schools to be taught during the academic year of 2011 to 2012 by the Ministry of National Education.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the study qualitative research method was preferred and the texts in all themes of life sciences 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade textbooks were examined using the content analysis method. In the context of research, primary school 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade life sciences textbooks and workbooks which were published and delivered to schools to be taught and were taught throughout the country were examined -six books were examined- during the academic year of 2011 to 2012 by the Ministry of National Education. The analysis units and the subcategories of the study were identified in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the identifications of subcategories in the Convention were taken into consideration. Analysis units and subcategories defined in the study were shown in Table 1.

In the study, sentences were chosen as the context unit and it was determined how often the subcategories take place in each sentence. While counting them, both explicit content and hidden content were taken into account. More clearly, the words

corresponding the subcategories in each sentence, statements expressing the stated subcategories or sentences giving the direct meaning were counted. The emphasizing of each subject in a sentence was assessed as one point. Forming, defining and decoding of the categories were done by the researcher himself.

To enable the reliability of the study, the subcategories in a textbook chosen by randomly (LS3) were decoded again separately by two different field experts¹. When decoded versions of the textbook by the expert and the researcher were compared, it was found that an average of 93% consensus was achieved. For the reliability of the research at least 70% consensus is needed between the encoders (Hall and Houten, 1983; Bilgin, 2006). In this study it was concluded that categories in the textbooks were measured reliably because it reached over this number.

To enable the validity of the study, no samples were taken from the books which were analyzed; all the books were examined without taking out any of the parts (apart from index, bibliography and dictionary parts). In these kinds of qualitative researches, validity means that the event investigated should be observed as it is and detachedly (Bilgin, 2006). In the analysis of data frequencies and percent were used.

RESULTS

In this section, findings related to subcategories of survival rights, development rights, protection rights and participation rights which are the analysis units of children's rights in the textbooks of life sciences 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade in primary school in Turkey were given.

Subcategories of survival rights in life sciences textbooks

The distribution of subcategories according to survival rights in life sciences textbooks was given in Table 2.

¹Two field experts working in the field of human rights and citizenship

Table 2. The frequencies distribution according to subcategories of survival rights in life sciences textbooks.

Textbooks	Subcategories						Total	
	Child's right for living and having proper life standards		Right for medical care		Rights for providing basic needs such as nutrition, sheltering to be met			
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
LS 1	3	18.75	3	42.86	10	15.15	16	17.97
LS 2	5	31.25	-	-	51	77.27	56	62.92
LS 3	8	50	4	57.14	5	7.58	17	19.11
Total	16	100	7	100	66	100	89	100

Table 3. The frequencies distribution of the subcategories of development rights in life sciences textbooks.

Textbooks	Subcategories								Total	
	Education right		Games and recreation right		Knowledge acquisition right		Right for freedom of religion, conscience and thought			
	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
LS 1	1	8.33	24	43.64	4	36.36	-	-	29	32.95
LS 2	6	50	26	47.27	6	54.55	7	70	45	51.14
LS 3	5	41.67	5	9.09	1	9.09	3	30	14	15.91
Total	12	100	55	100	11	100	10	100	88	100

As shown in Table 2, from the subcategories of survival rights the statements regarding “rights for providing basic needs such as nutrition, sheltering” (66) covered more than the other statements regarding “child’s right for living and having proper life standards” (16) and “rights for medical care” (7) in life sciences textbooks.

It was found that the statements regarding “child’s right for living and having proper life standards” (50%) and “right for medical care” (57.14%) were mostly included in LS3; the statements regarding “rights for providing basic needs such as nutrition, sheltering to be met” (77.27%) were mostly included in LS2 textbook. The statements regarding survival rights are mostly included in LS2 textbook (62.92%) among all the books; respectively LS3 (19.11%) and LS1 (17.97%) textbooks followed it.

The following sentences can be given as samples regarding the subcategories of the survival rights in life sciences textbooks (right for living and having proper life standards, medical care, providing basic needs such as nutrition, sheltering to be met):

- I am sweating. I must have a shower. (LS1, p. 28)
- I am getting through the illness because I wasn’t vaccinated in time. Be vaccinated. (LS1, p.52)
- We should have a balanced diet... We should have regular eating habits... (LS2, p.28)
- Their house protecting people from cold, hot weather and dangers are their homes. (LS2, p. 74)
- People have a right to live in a clean environment. (LS2, p. 177)

- Zeynep put an end her study by saying that our right for health and living were assured by constitution. (LS3, p. 41)

- Let’s write rights for living, education, expressing thoughts and ideas, having health care services, education of disabled friends and other similar rights by doing work distribution. (LS3, p. 57)

The subcategories of development rights in life sciences textbooks

The distribution of development rights according to their subcategories in life sciences textbooks is shown in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, from the subcategories of development rights the statements regarding “games and recreation rights” (55) covered more than the other statements regarding “education right” (12), “knowledge acquisition right” (11) and “right for freedom of religion, conscience and thought” (10) in life sciences textbooks.

It was found that the statements regarding “education right” (50%), “games and recreation right” (47.27%) and “knowledge acquisition right” (54.55%) and “right for freedom of religion, conscience and thought” (70%) were mostly included in LS2 textbook. The statements regarding development rights are mostly included in LS2 textbook (51.14%) among all the books; respectively LS1 (32.95%) and LS3 (15.91%) textbooks followed it.

The following sentences can be given as samples

Table 4. The frequencies distribution of the subcategories of protection rights in life sciences textbooks.

Textbooks	Subcategories					
	The rights providing the child to be protected against every kind of negligence, misuse and exploitation in judicial system. Gunfights, child laboring, having psychical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug abuse		The protection right to issues related to special care and refugee children		Total	
	F	%	F	%	f	%
LS 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
LS 2	1	100	-	-	1	100
LS 3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1	100	-	-	1	100

regarding the subcategories of the development rights (rights for education, games and recreation, knowledge acquisition, freedom of religion, conscience and thought) in life sciences textbooks:

- Girls gained rights to have an education with boys. (LS1, p. 50)
- What was your favorite toy while you were a child?... (LS1, p.84)
- Everybody should respect to others' thoughts. Thoughts can be explained freely. (LS2, p.21)
- We can get information, do research through computer. (LS2, p.81)
- I have right to have a good education as a child. (LS2, p.111)
- I have right to state my ideas without fear. (LS2, p.111)
- Which of the human rights and liberties did Atatürk attach importance by saying "Nobody's thought and conscience can be controlled over"? (LS3, s.91)

The subcategories of protection rights in life sciences textbooks

The distribution of protection rights according to their subcategories in life sciences textbooks is shown in Table 4.

It was found that in life sciences textbooks there is only one statement from the subcategories of protection rights, which is "Rights for providing the child to be protected against every kind of negligence, misuse and exploitation in judicial system, gunfights, child laboring, having psychical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug abuse" and 2nd grade textbook include this statement. It was also found that the textbooks don't cover a statement related to the subcategories of "Protection rights of refugee children and the issues related to special care of".

The following statement related to the protection rights subcategories (the rights providing the child to be protected against every kind of negligence, misuse and exploitation in judicial system, gunfights, child laboring, having psychical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug abuse and issues related to special care and refugee

children) in life science textbooks is given below;

- I am a child, so I have right not to be employed. (LS2, s. 111)

The subcategories of participation rights in life sciences textbooks

The distribution of participation rights according to its subcategories in life sciences textbooks is shown in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, it was found that from the subcategories of participation rights the statements regarding "right for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them" (825) were included in the textbooks of life sciences, but the statements regarding "right for establishing an association and gathering in peace" weren't included in textbooks. The statements regarding "right for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them" (314) were mostly included in LS1 textbook; respectively, LS2 (276) and LS1 (235) textbooks followed it.

The following sentences can be given as samples regarding the subcategories of the participation rights (right for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them) in life sciences textbooks:

- Your friend Aslı, who had the plurality, was elected as class president. (LS1, p. 32)
- We will have a nice and healthy environment by greening the environment. (LS1, p. 34)
- About the decisions that will be made at Belma's home, everybody states their opinions and co-decisions are made (LS1, p.90).
- We also should do something to protect our school and its surrounding. (LS2, p. 54)
- I have right to state my opinion about the subjects concerning me. (LS2, p.98)
- At the end of the match those who lost the game celebrated their friends and said "You played well and

Table 5. The frequencies distribution of the subcategories of participation rights in life sciences textbooks.

Textbooks	Subcategories				Total	
	Right for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them		Right for establishing an association and gathering in peace			
	f	%	F	%	f	%
LS 1	314	38.07	-	-	314	38.07
LS 2	276	33.45	-	-	276	33.45
LS 3	235	28.48	-	-	235	28.48
Total	825	100	-	-	825	100

you won the game. Winning was your right.” (LS3, p. 33) - My mother and my father liked new ideas that we found to help our housework very much. (LS3, p.95)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At the end of this study which was conducted in order to reveal to what extent children's rights is included in primary school life sciences textbooks, generally evaluated it was found that the statements regarding survival rights, development rights and participation rights were included more in primary school 2nd grade life sciences textbooks (377) rather than 1st grade (359) and 3rd grade (266) life sciences textbooks. From the participation rights the statement “right for expressing their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them” is the right which was included the most in the textbooks. Students' workbooks didn't cover any activities regarding children's rights directly. These results have overlapped the research findings of Karaman-Kepenekçi (2009) and Nayır and Karaman-Kepenekçi (2011). It was found that life sciences text-books contain child's survival, development and especially protection rights contain very little place. However, life sciences curriculum didn't cover the gains about children's rights directly. It can be claimed that this is one of the most important reasons why the statements about children's rights are not included enough in textbooks. It can be said that including skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, researching, communication, problem solving, decision making, enterprising in life sciences curriculum is an important reason of why the statements regarding the rights of children's explaining their opinions and taking part in the decisions at issues concerning them cover more especially in textbooks.

Thus, in the researches related to children's participation rights similar results were obtained and it was found that these rights were included at most in the activities and textbooks which were examined (Aslan and Karaman-Kepenekçi, 2008; Ejie and Akinola, 2009; Ucuş, 2009; Ersoy, 2012; Meray, 2012; Meray and Parpucu, 2012; Ünal, 2012a, b; Özdemir Uluç, 2013).

As a result of the examination which was made, it came

up that in the gains of life sciences, children's rights should be included directly and textbooks should be rearranged. The fact that Turkey is among the countries signing the Convention of the Rights of the Child has also made this regulation mandatory. Besides, it is important that textbook writers should pay attention to the children's rights in the content of the book no matter which gains are. In the content of the textbook, children's rights should be emphasized as the occasion arises and some guidance should be made in terms of enabling students to learn, to use and to protect their rights. Activities aimed at students' gaining experience on learning, using and protecting children's rights should be arranged in workbooks. It shouldn't be forgotten that this is the only possible way of bringing up citizens who are respectful to human rights, have developed social participation skills and know rights and responsibilities.

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